



(edited: 26.01.2022)

DESTINATION GUIDE: CUBA

Important information to help you prepare for your upcoming trip.

We have put this guide together to provide you with some useful info and insights we've picked up over the 20+ years of running tours on the island. We hope this will assist you when making your preparations before travelling to Cuba.

Please make sure that you also read your joining Instructions and the Trip Notes for your holiday.

cubaniatravel.com



QUÉ BOLÁ!

This is the Cuban way of saying “What’s up?” and if you arrive in Havana saying this, any Cuban will be very impressed! All of our local staff are looking forward to welcoming you to Cuba – we know that you’re about to embark on a really special adventure in a very unusual country. We’re sure that one of the reasons you chose Cuba was precisely because it’s been doing things differently for the past half century, and we’re sure you will be enchanted by the Cuban way of life from the moment you arrive.

Obviously we’re biased but I think it’s safe to say that Havana is one of the most beautiful cities in the world! It’s an incredibly vibrant and buzzing capital city with lots of street life to look at! Expect to see all of iconic Cuba: beautifully maintained vintage American cars cruising past, dapper old men (and women!) smoking cigars, neat and clean school kids on their way to school.

If you were expecting to see dreary Socialist fashion and architecture then get ready to be surprised. Cuba is definitely changing and while the country is eager to catch up with the rest of the world, the charm of the old Cuba is still very much in evidence and in no danger of disappearing.

We hope you have a comfortable journey over to Cuba, and we look forward to giving you a big warm welcome to the island.

Saludos y hasta pronto!

Lucy, Carla, Betty, Jose, Liset & Anibal.

Cubania Operations, Havana



FACT BOX CUBA

Currency	Cuban Peso (CUP)
Language	Spanish
Capital City	Havana
Population	11,200,000+
Dialing Code	+53
Time Zone	GMT/UTC -05:00hr

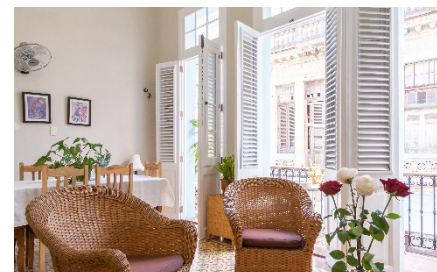
HOTELS & FACILITIES

ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION

Most of the hotels we use in Cuba are of a 3 star standard, with ensuite bathrooms and air conditioning. However, it's fair to say that Cuba is not a luxury destination and anyone travelling to the island should be prepared to rough it a bit at times! It's a poor country so décor tends to be a little dated and you may find that your water pressure isn't all it could be. Fortunately, it's warm enough most days that the lack of hot water is not a major problem! Expect a mix of accommodation, from relatively modern international style hotels to traditional colonial hotels, and even some Soviet-style hotels built at the height of the revolution. When we can, we stay in the centre of towns, but Cuban hotels are sometimes located a little further out. We use private accommodation on our tours and most people love the opportunity this gives to stay in a relatively normal Cuban home and see how Cubans live.

"As you prepare for your trip, the best advice we can give you is to imagine you've travelled back in time to a world where American Vintage cars are the norm, where life moves more gently and where modern communications such as the internet are hard to access. There's something truly liberating about travelling to a country where internet is so uncommon that the office won't be able to track you down! Any trip to Cuba is also an opportunity to slow down and get back to enjoying

If you're travelling to Viñales, Trinidad, Cienfuegos or Playa Larga then it is likely that you'll spend at least one night in a Casa Particular. These homes are simple compared to our own but the welcome is warm and rooms clean, and you'll be spoilt at breakfast in the mornings.



SWIMMING POOLS

Some hotels will have pools for you to use. Usually the pools are closed at night and when there is no life guard on duty.

LAUNDRY, TOWELS & HAIRDRYERS

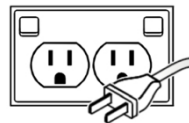
The owners of the Casas are usually happy to help with laundry for a small fee. Towels will be provided at every hotel, and some of the bigger hotels will also provide hair dryers. Most Casas will not have hair dryers.

DRINKING WATER

We don't recommend drinking the tap water in Cuba without first boiling or purifying it. You'll be able to find safe bottled water available to purchase throughout the country. In order to reduce plastic consumption, we encourage all travellers to only buy larger bottles and then recycle by leaving on the bus with your tour guide (we have distribution points where plastic bottles are upcycled for domestic uses). Water is available on the coach during our activity tours, but we encourage you to bring your own refillable bottle with built-in water filter. We sell 'Water-to-Go' bottles in the UK via our [website](#).

PLUG

American flat pin plugs are the most common type used, and the normal voltage supply is either 220v or 110v.



It is possible for you to plug into an electricity supply nearly every day. The main difference from Europe is that the voltage powers vary, either 220 or 110 volts, which is much lower than in the UK. The result is that things such as mobile phones and MP3 players will probably take a little longer to charge.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cuba is one of the last countries on Earth to join the mobile internet so be prepared for a digital detox! 3G Wifi was only introduced in December 2018, followed by 4G in 2019, and is only accessible through buying and Etecsa Prepaid Internet Card. The cards come in 1 hour and 5-hour denominations and cost CUP25/hour (so that's CUP25 for 1-hour card and CUP125 for a 5-hour card) and are sold at ETECSA offices and hotels across the country. Each ETECSA card has a unique Username (*Usuario*) and Password (*Contraseña*), which you need to log into the ETECSA internet service. You can use the cards on your laptop and your phone. These same internet cards are also sold at hotels and by private vendors but for higher prices. Make sure you check roaming costs with your service provider before travelling to Cuba. It can be very expensive to connect via roaming.

YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Cubania has made responsible travel part of everything we do since we first started organizing trips to Cuba; from the local ground staff we employ to the family-run restaurants and B&Bs we use, **we aim to ensure that your money stays in Cuba and supports local businesses.**

We're now going one step further by making a commitment to further reducing our carbon footprint by **measuring the CO2 emissions on each and every trip we offer.**

We teamed up with [ecollective](#), a carbon consultancy specialising in the travel industry to accurately measure the footprint of our trips and our business operations. To do this we looked into the carbon footprint of our entire supply chain from hotels, activities, guide accommodation, included meals and we even included the footprint of our website to name a few. It not only enables our clients to see the carbon footprint of every tour that we run, but it will also show us what we can change in order to further reduce trip based emissions year on year.

Read more about our commitment to sustainability on our website; cubaniatravel.com/sustainability

MONEY & COSTS

SPENDING MONEY

Moneda Nacional (aka Cuban Pesos,
24 CUP = 1 USD).

In early 2021 Cuba phased out its complicated dual currency system as part of an ongoing period of economic reform. CUP is now the sole domestic currency.

You will need to purchase some CUP on arrival, as this is the local currency that you will use to buy meals, drinks and souvenirs etc.

It's very easy to exchange money in Cuba as long as you have cash – it is not a destination where cards or ATMs are used frequently. Sterling, Euros or Canadian dollars are all fine.

Cuban Pesos have no value outside of Cuba and, in fact, many places will actively prefer you to buy goods and services in EUR (for example, in some restaurants and casas particulares) We therefore recommend you bring EUR in cash and in small denominations so that you can make payments easily.

The US dollar cannot be used in cash or exchanged for other currencies within Cuba (*update as of June 2021). Do not bring Scottish, Northern Irish or Isle of Man notes as these are not recognized by Cuban banks and will not be exchangeable.

If the queues aren't too long, you can change some money at the airport, otherwise you can exchange your cash once you get to the hotel or in Havana at one of the state run CADECA exchange offices. In any case, only exchange a little money into CUP and seek advice from your guide or your Cubania rep.

It is prohibited to enter or leave Cuba carrying Cuban Pesos. Please make sure you have spent or exchanged any remaining CUP prior to passing through immigrations when you leave Cuba. We recommend that you change back

any surplus currency before reaching the airport as queues can be long and maximum exchange amounts (very low) are now being enforced when exchanging CUP back into another currency.

Any drinks, snacks, duty free and souvenirs within the airport will now need to be paid using a foreign credit card or cash (GBP, CAD, AUD, USD, EUR etc.).

ATMS & USING CARDS

Don't count on ATMs! There are a few in Havana and Santiago, as well as a few other large towns, but you'll spend some time walking around looking for them, or finding one that actually works.

It is also worth checking with your bank whether or not you can use your card to withdraw directly from ATMs in Cuba or not. The use of cards connected to US backed banks is still not permitted by the US government (although they are in the process of relaxing this restriction). In general, you shouldn't rely on ATM availability as it is not uncommon for there to be either long queues or no cash left to dispense, so bringing cash to change is definitely recommended.

SHOPPING

Havana has a huge souvenir market which operates daily at the *Almacenes de San Juan*, which is great for local artists showcasing their work. Calle Obispo in the centre of Old Havana is another great place to pick up some nice souvenirs. Trinidad is really well known for embroidery (think beautiful embroidered table cloths), basketware and pottery.

Trinidad has amazing art studios with most having resident artists working in all types of mediums. Cuban fine art training is free to students and the quality and skills of local artists really impresses. Amazing one-off pieces can be purchased for a fraction of the price elsewhere in the world but make sure the art studio provides you with a certificate consisting of three copies (blue, yellow and white carbon copies) for export.

Typical Cuban souvenirs include rum, lace, wooden carvings, jewellery and cigars. Cigars can be bought throughout Cuba and the official advice is that you buy from the Government shops if you want a guarantee of quality and freshness. You can also sometimes purchase cigars directly from the cigar plantations you visit, and they can be a lot cheaper than the packaged ones sold in shops.

APPROXIMATE COSTS

Lunch (light lunch)	250–375 CUP
Dinner (more for lobster)	500–650 CUP
Beer (330ml can)	50–75 CUP
Cocktails	50–150 CUP
T-shirt	300–500 CUP
Cigars (each for top end ones)	150–400 CUP
Bottle of rum	100–300 CUP

Remember to take extra money to cover staff tips and optional trips (prices listed in the Trip Notes).

“If you are flying out to Cuba via a European hub such as Madrid or Paris, then be aware that there is usually a security check and it's possible for people's duty free goods, or any liquids over 100ml, to get confiscated by the over-zealous security staff (even if they are unopened and you have the receipt of purchase). Therefore, I would play it safe by purchasing duty free items en route instead, or just wait until the return journey. If you're bringing Cuban rum back to the UK and you're not on a direct flight, then you should pack it in your hold luggage or it could be confiscated in Madrid or Paris.”

SIGHTS & EXCURSIONS

Make time to do an escorted tour of Old Havana on foot or by bike with Cubania if it isn't already included in your trip. If you are there a day or two earlier, ask to have a walking tour of the city to immerse yourself in over 500 years of history from pirates, colonialism and more recent revolutionary history. Cycling tours last around 3 hours and cost around £35–50 per person for a minimum 2 person group. Walking tours last around an hour and a half and are approximately GBP £15 per person.

The best place to experience traditional music is in Trinidad, and the guide can usually arrange a visit after dinner to the *Casa de la Trova* or the *Casa de la Música*. Both places are popular with locals and tourists offering traditional Cuban music to dance the night away.

In Havana there is also the opportunity to book an excursion to either the Tropicana Nightclub or the Parisian Nightclub. Please note that some of the excursions are subject to minimum numbers.

"Buzzing and vibrant it is, but Havana is a tropical city and the languid climate forces you to slow down and take your time. Women stop to chat in the street as they sweep their homes, bici-taxi drivers congregate on street corners to look for custom and discuss baseball scores. You'll see young men graciously helping an elderly neighbour across the road and women returning from the market in flip flops and hair rollers, and a swing of the hips that is pure catwalk. You'll hear the clatter of dominoes being slapped onto the table as old timers pass the day companionably and you'll hear the backdrop of syncopated latino rhythms on every street corner. Music is as essential to Cubans as the air they breathe and it's everywhere. By the time you leave the island you'll have learned, at least, the basic salsa steps..."

STAFF TIP

FOOD & DRINK



It's fair to say that Cuba doesn't have the same variety of international cuisine we might be used to (and vegetarians will have to get used to eating plenty of rice and black beans) but lots of privately run *paladars* have opened over the past few years. These are privately run restaurants where the food is better quality than the government run establishments. Prices are reasonable and it's a great place to people watch the locals, rather than only seeing tourists in the government run establishments. Think soul food – rice, black beans, slow roast pork and chicken, fresh fish, lobster and plenty of tropical fruit. In Havana expect to find world class cocktail bars and restaurants offering exciting market led food.

"Havana has a great bar called El Floridita, which was a regular drinking spot for author Ernest Hemingway. We recommend trying a strawberry daiquiri or two! Another excellent bar is the Casa de la Música for a salsa show in Trinidad. The live music and local dancing will conjure up images of the Buena Vista Social Club, with its lively and fast-paced jazz, rumba and salsa. Be prepared to dance!"

STAFF TIP



It can be difficult to find a decent sandwich in Cuba so please don't give your guide a hard time if he/she recommends a proper sit-down meal for lunch! Cubans generally eat two full meals a day and don't have many places that cater for snack lunches yet, so the sandwiches tend to be pretty basic. It's a good idea to bring along some snacks like chocolate and biscuits from home, if you like those, as they can be hard to find, even in Havana.

You can't go to Cuba without trying the famous Mojito or Cuba Libre, but beware that they don't use measuring glasses, so they might be stronger than the ones you have tried at home!

TRANSPORT

If you're taking a tourist bus anywhere around Cuba before or after the trip, *Viazul* is the company to use. The bus station in Havana is situated near to Revolution Square, a short taxi journey from most accommodation that we use. (*ViaAzul*, Estación Central de Ómnibus Nacionales, Avenida Independencia #101 esq. 19 de Mayo, municipio Plaza de la Revolución).

LANGUAGE

Cubans are pretty eager to speak and interact with foreign visitors. You can have some insightful and interesting conversations with them if you speak some Spanish. Some Cubans speak English, especially those with contact to tourism, and will happily switch languages if you find yourself exhausting your Spanish skills. Here are some phrases you can use:

Hello	Hola
Thank you	Gracias
Please	Por favor
Yes	Si
Good day/ afternoon/ night	Buenos días/ tardes/ noches
Men (address as)	Señor
Women (address as)	Señora
How much does it cost	Cuánto cuesta?
Would you like to dance?	Quieres bailar?
Left	Izquierda
Right	Derecha
Hot water	Agua caliente
Coffee with milk	Café con leche
A bottle of mineral water	Una botella de agua sin gas
One mojito and two beers please!	Un mojito y dos cervezas por favor!
Can I take a photograph of you?	Puedo tomar una foto de usted(es)?
Where is the toilet?	Donde está el baño?
Excuse me	Disculpe (use 'permiso' when asking to pass someone)

CYCLING

Cuba is known for a noticeable, but cooling, ocean headwind particularly when cycling southwards. This is naturally repaid in full, with a tail-wind blowing you all the way back to Havana. There are relatively few cars in Cuba, leaving the roads open to cyclists who hate traffic!

We will usually buy delicious fruit from roadside vendors along the way and have these as snacks during the pit stops on the rides.

TERRAIN

Before each ride, the leader will give you an overview of what to expect in terms of distances and inclines etc. Please take precautions when cycling in potentially hazardous situations i.e. where there is traffic and when there are fast downhill sections. The roads are in good condition generally but you should always keep an eye out for potholes. In some places, they also have quite large and wide drainage systems which slope downwards away from either side of the road – you're advised to give these a bit of a wide berth in order to avoid slipping in.

The group is encouraged not to spread out too much but at the same time you should allow sufficient space between riders so that you can brake and manoeuvre out of trouble in the event of someone suddenly stopping or swerving. The support vehicle follows behind the group and occasionally overtakes in order to set up refreshments. The group can then congregate and have a short rest before continuing. If someone wants to take a rest and sit in the bus for a leg of the cycling then this is possible at any time – just ask the driver or leader at a pit stop or wait for the bus and give the driver a wave! They will lift your bike up on board and drop you off again whenever you are ready.

EQUIPMENT

We have a fleet of fully-serviced hybrid Trek bicycles which are kept in prime working order by our team of mechanics. Make sure you have

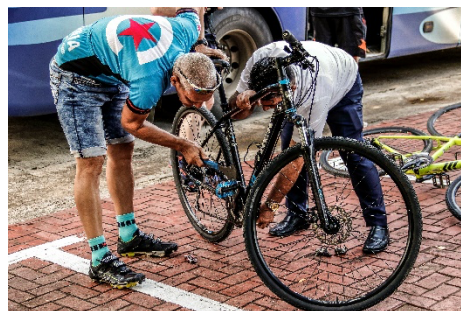
provided your height at the time of booking so that we allocate the correct sized bike frame for you upon arrival.

If you have any problems or queries during the bike fitting prior to the first ride then our staff will be on hand to provide expert assistance.

If you want to bring your toe clips then we recommend that you bring your actual pedals rather than just the toe clips, in order to be certain that they will be compatible. If you are using the old style strap toe clips then they are usually specific to pedal size and only transferable if the pedals happen to have the same dimensions. Pedal fittings are always the same and our mechanics in Cuba will be able to fit them onto the bikes for you at the start of your holiday.

All bikes have one bottle holder – bring your own refillable bottle, and preferably an additional bottle with built-in water filter. You can fill up with water regularly during the cycling pit stops. Keeping hydrated is very important, especially in the months of July and August when humidity is high and the sun is hot!

You also need to bring your own cycling helmet as wearing one is compulsory for all of our cycling tours. There will be a couple of spare helmets in the vehicle but these are strictly back-ups and shouldn't be relied upon for hire/ use. Padded cycling shorts or saddle covers are recommended for added comfort, especially on a 2 week itinerary. Lycra shorts are a must and factor 50+ sun protection is essential.



"It can get hot and sweaty here, so lightweight cotton (or quick-drying fabrics) is best as a starting point! Long sleeved shirts and trousers will help prevent mosquito bites, especially in the evenings when they could be buzzing around. You should also take a jacket and/or sweater for evenings, as it will cool down. Essential kit includes some sunglasses and a sunhat, along with good sunscreen. A lightweight waterproof jacket or rain poncho is optional, as you can get some tropical rain here in the summer months."

STAFF TIP

TREKKING

TERRAIN

The mountains in Cuba may not be very high but they are steep and can be slippery in places, so some people can find the walking more challenging than expected. The steepest paths do have wooden steps built in, but these can be high at times and somewhat uncomfortable to walk on so, to protect your knees and help you to keep balance, a set of walking poles are highly recommended. Remember to pack them in your checked in luggage when flying.

FOOD ON TREK

You will be provided with food and snacks on trek but some supplies from home would also be a good idea. Food will usually consist of a full, typical Cuban meal (fresh fruits, rice with beans, meat, cabbage and tomato salad and some sweets), although there may be instances where the bunkhouse can only offer a very simple meal such as crackers, pasta with sauce and fruit. The leader will always provide you with plenty of bottled water while walking, although we encourage you to bring your own refillable bottle, preferably with built-in water filter. You just need to be prepared to carry your daily supply between accommodations (max 2 litres to carry).

CLOTHING

Make sure you wear light, comfortable clothing as it's generally quite hot and humid. Most trekkers should also consider a hat to protect their head and face from tropical strength sunshine! Make sure you've packed some good repellent for bugs and mosquitoes, and a rain poncho to protect you from tropical showers. You can charge your phone overnight to use during the day treks as long as there is a signal.

TIPS & ADVICE

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY...

Old fashioned manners are still prevalent in Cuba. Small gestures along with courteous greetings when you enter a building are part of everyday life. Music and dance are part of the fabric of Cuba and the locals' dancefloor skills can be a little intimidating for beginners wanting to join in. However, Cubans are completely non-judgemental about their dancing skills; they care that people are enjoying themselves, so don't be concerned about looking silly!

- Learn a few Spanish words and phrases before travelling in order to get the most of your experience and to connect with locals. Every word that you can learn in advance will be valuable.
- Cuba lacks manufactured goods and there is little access to them no matter how hard people work. Small gifts such as toiletries, stationery, second hand clothes etc. are all welcome, particularly in the poorer communities. Please discuss the distribution of gifts with your Tour Leader.
- Many Cubans enjoy discussing politics but it's best to let them bring it up and don't impose your views too critically. Respect revolutionary figures Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara to avoid offence.
- Selecting locally made goods is an excellent and easy way to support the local economy. If haggling is necessary then please don't haggle

too hard as it will be at the expense of a local not a big company.

- Keep to paths to reduce damage to plants and disturbances to wildlife. When swimming, don't touch or get too close to animals, coral reef or fish.
- Ask your subject before you capture them on camera, including children.
- Purchase souvenirs but don't buy shells (including tortoise and snail), black coral, bone, skin, animal parts (teeth etc.) or whole butterflies. A good idea is to purchase locally made crafts, instruments or artwork.

"In terms of gifts for local people, anything like pens, crayons and colouring books are always appreciated by families. They also quite like any toiletries you don't want at the end of a trip, as these are quite hard to come by there, so shower gels, toothpaste, make up etc. It sounds odd, but it is really appreciated."

You could have someone just tap you on the shoulder in the middle of a city tour and ask for shampoo or toothpaste! It is mainly older and young people, and always very friendly. If you have anything like this that you would like to give out, just discuss with your leader about the best way to distribute it."

STAFF TIP





Don't be shy

We're here to help you get the most out of your trip and expose you to a unique way of life by sharing the real Cuban experience.

We're happy to chat, just send us an email and one of our experts will get back to you in the next 24 hours! So don't be shy and ask away!

If you require assistance during office hours (10am–6pm GMT Mon–Fri), please contact the Cubania UK office staff:

Telephone: +44 (0)208 355 7608

Email: sales@cubaniatravel.com

CONTACT ONE OF OUR EXPERTS



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