



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA EDUCATION FUND

SISTERS ACROSS THE STRAITS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is it so complicated to travel to Cuba?

The U.S. government has placed a number of restrictions on travel to Cuba, and there are NO diplomatic relations between the two countries. Cuba is on the U.S. Department of State's list of terrorist states. At this time, all travel to Cuba must be approved by the U.S. Dept. of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and the League is one of a few groups that has a license to travel under the people-to-people education exchange program.

Am I required to follow the group itinerary? Can I go out on my own instead?

Unfortunately, in order to adhere to the U.S. government's requirements for travel to Cuba, this trip—unlike other League trips--will not allow for flexibility in your itinerary; *as a guest you will be required to participate in our full-time schedule of people-to-people education exchange activities* and cannot engage in independent tourism outside of the group agenda.

Is the pre-trip conference call necessary?

Yes, the League's pre-trip conference call is required. It ensures that SATS participants fully understand the nature and purpose of the trip, as well as what to expect while on the island.

What are the physical requirements of the trip?

Cuba is a developing nation, and few buildings are ADA compliant. In order to successfully travel with the delegation, participants must be in good physical condition such that they can easily navigate stairs and different types of terrain (grass, sand, cobblestone streets, etc.). Also, this trip includes a good amount of walking, so participants should be prepared for that.

What should I read before going to Cuba?

Julia E. Sweig's *CUBA: What Everyone Needs to Know* is easy to read and might dispel some myths often perpetuated by our domestic media.

What currency is used in Cuba?

There is a dual currency in Cuba. We (visitors) convert our USD into CUC (convertible pesos) at the airport in Cuba or our hotel. The exchange rate is not favorable to the U.S. dollar: \$1.00 = 0.87 CUC. Cubans get paid in "moneda nacional" or national pesos, but we do NOT operate with this currency.

How much spending money should I bring?

We suggest that you bring at least \$100 per day in cash. You get 87 CUC for 100 USD. Do not complicate matters with American Express Travelers Cheques. If you want, you may take

Canadian Dollars or Euros and exchange them for CUC once you get into Cuba. There are no ATMs in Cuba where you can use your debit or credit cards.

What expenses will I have in Cuba?

Your hotel accommodations and breakfasts are covered as part of your travel, as well as ground transportation and 5 meals. Still, you will have some meals on your own, and you will need money for tips for waiters, bellhops, etc. Also, you will need 25 CUC to pay the exit tax at the airport when leaving Cuba.

How much do meals in Cuba cost?

The meals not included as part of our trip can range from relatively cheap (10 CUC or less for a light sandwich lunch) to somewhat pricey (20 CUC or more for a full dinner with wine or beer). While a la carte menu options are available, many restaurants offer full-course menus at set, per person rates.

What is the protocol for tipping?

Tips for the tour guide and bus driver, as well as wait staff at group meals, is included in your trip fee. You are responsible for tipping bellhops at the hotel – if you elect to have them carry your bags – and wait staff at restaurants where you eat on your own.

What about shopping?

While there are some opportunities to shop, that is not a major part of our itinerary. We will visit some art studios, and there are multiple places in which fabric work and small souvenirs might be purchased. U.S. Customs will not allow you to bring back rum or cigars from Cuba. Make sure to familiarize yourself with the guidelines on the U.S.-Cuba embargo (on SATS webpage) in order to avoid being fined upon return to the States.

Can I take pictures? Are photographs covered by the embargo?

Yes, you may take pictures while in Cuba. There are no restrictions on this.

What about the water? Is it safe to drink?

While it is safe to shower and brush your teeth using the tap water in Cuba, we recommend that you stick with bottled drinking water when possible. We will provide bottled water on the bus, and most restaurants will have it available as well, allowing you to stay hydrated and minimize your chance of acquiring a travelers' illness while in Cuba.

What type of clothing should I bring?

Pack comfortable travel clothes: capri pants, shorts, t-shirts, hats, pants, skirts, etc. While you might want to pack one or two nice outfits for dinner, this is a tropical and relaxed environment. There's no need for a suit and tie, nor will there be opportunities for activities requiring a special wardrobe such as tennis, golf or snorkeling. In terms of shoes, make sure to pack comfortable walking shoes that protect your toes. We will do a lot of walking on uneven surfaces such as cobblestone streets, etc.

Besides clothes and personal items, are there any other things that I should remember to pack?

Given the unpredictability of the weather, we recommend that you bring rain gear or an umbrella, as well as sunscreen and insect repellent. Also, for your own personal hygiene, baby wipes and

hand sanitizer are a great idea. (Please note that Cuban bathrooms are NOT up to American standards in most cases!) Finally, make sure to pack any medicines that you'll need while in Cuba. There are stores in Havana, but it's easier to bring what you might need than search for a place to shop.

Will I need an adapter for my electronics?

No, in most cases the electrical connections are the same as in the U.S., although you might want to bring a lower wattage hair dryer. We have had some travelers whose high watt dryers did not work in Cuba.

Should I plan to check my baggage, or carry it on?

Checking your luggage will be \$20 per bag (to be paid in cash at the Miami airport during your check-in). Remember that checked luggage weighing in at more than 44 lbs will be assessed an overage fee. We recommend checking your bag for convenience purposes so that you do not have to carry it down the steps and across the tarmac once we land in Cuba, however, if your bag is small enough to carry on you may choose to do that.

Should I bring gifts or donations for the people that we'll meet in Cuba?

If you are planning to bring "gifts" or make any donations, remember that most Cubans are proud and would tell you, "no thanks, we do not need anything." However, when you look around, you will realize that yes, there are a lot of things they do not have, so this is a touchy situation. Use your judgment; we are building a relationship with women's groups on the island and this is a slow process. We will be visiting a sewing workshop and they need little white buttons, zippers, elastic bands and measuring tape. Also, children's items (coloring books, crayons, etc.), as well as medicines are always appreciated.

Will there be a chance to exercise?

Those who enjoy swimming might be able to take quick dip in the hotel pool, and there are plenty of opportunities to walk or jog in the mornings.

Will I be able to phone home?

Yes, but it can be difficult to place calls to the United States. Sometimes (but not always!) the hotel operator can connect you, but beware the price. Calls cost approx. 5 CUC per minute, so be brief!

What about the Internet?

There is NO wi-fi in any of the hotels that we'll be staying in. In some cases, there might be a business center with a very slow connection to Internet for which you will be required to pay a per minute rate.

Will we have some free time to spend on our own?

Yes, there are some spaces built into the itinerary for individual sightseeing, shopping and/or dining. During these periods, you are welcome to take in a show, tour a museum or visit a local paladar. Please find some of our dining recommendations on the SATS webpage.

What about travel insurance? Should I purchase it?

The League does not provide travel insurance; it is optional, but strongly recommended. If you choose to purchase travel insurance, we recommend that you do so through Travel Guard. The League's Office Manager will distribute more information about travel insurance to all trip

participants prior to departure.

Do I need to attend the orientation dinner in Miami?

Yes, the orientation dinner is essential for learning about the *Sisters Across the Straits* program and meeting your fellow participants. Additionally, during the dinner you will learn more about what to expect while in Cuba and be given your travel paperwork / gate information for the next morning's flight.

What if my trip is canceled/interrupted due to a hurricane?

If your trip is canceled due to an impending hurricane, your trip fee will be applied towards a future trip. Should your trip be interrupted due to extreme weather while you are in Cuba, the League will work with our travel agency to re-structure the group's itinerary to ensure the best possible experience.