



PRE-TRIP TRAVEL TIPS CUBA

- **OFAC LICENSING & ITINERARY**

- **Full-Time Schedule & Participation:** itinerary will be different than other programs or tours you may have participated in previously. This program, per licensing requirements is a full-time program with lots of inclusions. There will be little to no free time on most days of this tour. You may have some down time in the evenings when dinner is not included.
- **Itinerary NOTE:** US law requires that all participants of this program adhere to the full time schedule of people-to-people activities. Deviation from this itinerary, even in part, is not permitted. Specific itinerary inclusions, visits, meetings with individuals and organizations, home visits are dependent on outside factors and it may sometimes be necessary to substitute with alternatives of equal relevance and interest.
- **FELIXIBILITY:** In Cuba, things work differently and some activities that have been scheduled far in advance sometimes become available for a number of different reasons. It is extremely important to go into this experience with a very open mind. The purpose of the trip is to have meaningful interactions with the locals. Your guide will be good at swapping out activities for others when needed, but don't be disappointed if things change, because they will! Enjoy every moment of it and try to make the most out of this once in a lifetime opportunity if visiting a country that has been off limits for Americans for so long.
- **People-to-People Interactions:** As these sort of interactions have been included in your program, on many occasions it will be up to you (the passenger) to involve yourself in conversations and interactions with the locals to gain as much knowledge as possible about the country and the people. The tour guide will facilitate many of these interactions, but it is always a good idea to ask questions and utilize the guide as best as possible in order to get the most out of the experience. Though sometimes the people you'll interact with don't speak English, you'd be surprised at how much you can gain by using body language and having the guide translate.
- **Keeping documents on file:** As part of the requirements under the license, each traveler should keep a copy of their travel itinerary and airline ticket receipt on file for 5 years, in case you are asked for it by US officials.

- **DOCUMENTS**

- All documents will be delivered to the hotel in the afternoon, prior to the briefing (day before departure flight). Please check with the front desk or bell desk. You may also call Alex, our Groups Coordinator, at 7865169926, for more information.
- If there are any missing documents, or anything is printed incorrectly, please let us know ASAP. Contact info is above. You should check that all flight information has been printed correctly on the ticket.
- **Ticket Jacket Contents**
 - **Airline Ticket** (3 copies: MIA-Cuba; Cuba-MIA; PAX receipt)



- **Asistur Stamp**- located on the back of the Charter Ticket
 - This medical insurance is included for all travelers from the US to Cuba for emergencies. Havanatur reps on the ground will assist if any medical services are needed while on tour.
 - **Visa** (to be filled out individually by each client, Miami Rep will have instructions)
 - **Authorization Letter by sponsoring organization** - may be asked for this upon returning by US immigration and customs officials
 - **Sanitary Statement for Travelers** -this one is usually picked up, and best to say no to every question to avoid problems
 - **Customs Declaration**-this form is usually not collected from Americans, but best to fill it out. A copy has been included in this packet as a guideline.
 - **Passport Copy**- good to keep these at all times on you as ID, leave original in the safe unless exchanging money.
 - **Flight Itinerary**- check-in time designated for the group will be printed on this form. Please disregard check-in times located on the ticket itself, as this is the max time required for check-in.
- **CHARTER FLIGHT**
 - **TIMES:** Charter flights are operated by CTS Charters (sister company to Cuba Travel Services). Exact Departure Time will be available no more than 30 days prior to departure and will be printed on tickets. Flights and times may not be consistent throughout the season.
 - **AIRPORT CHECK-IN:** There will be a reserved group check-in area at the airport. You will see a sign with your group name. You will be assigned a specific check-in time in advance. This time will be reflected on the flight itinerary in each ticket jacket. You may contact Alex, our Groups Coordinator, (786-516-9926) when you are on your way to the airport with the group, so that he may meet you at the bus to escort you to the check-in area. It is common for most Cuban-Americans to check-in at 4 hours in advance and you will see large lines. This will not be the same check-in area for the group.
 - **LUGGAGE:** With the charter flight to Cuba (on the outbound only), each checked luggage will be charged at \$20 per bag. In addition, each passenger is allowed up to 44 lbs of luggage (includes checked bag and larger carry-on). Anything over 44 lbs, will be charged at \$2 per pound. A small carry-on, like a purse or small backpack, will not be weighed. Any larger carry-on may be weighed and added into the 44-lb allowance per person. Payment at the airport is by cash or credit card. On the return flight, there is no charge for luggage, as long as it stays under 50 lbs per person. In Cuba, the carry-on is exempt from the weight limitations.
 - **Seating Assignments:** On your charter flight there is no pre-assigned seating. This will be assigned at the check-in counter at the airport. Please note that all attempts will be made to seat passengers together when possible. It's a short flight.



- **WHAT TO BRING**

- Bug Spray
- Sunscreen and Sun Hats
- Comfortable Clothing, Walking Shoes (casual attire)
- Medications and OTC drugs, band-aids, etc
- CASH (CC and ATM machines are not yet readily available)
- Small gifts for kids and locals, depending on itinerary (for example, school supplies, small toys, candies, art supplies, band-aids, OTC drugs)
- Sunglasses
- Hand sanitizer
- Wash Cloths (not provided at most hotels)
- Tissue Paper (good to have your own at public restrooms)

- **MONEY**

- **2 Currencies:** there are two types of currencies in Cuba. The first is the Cuban Peso, used primarily by the locals for basic staples. The second is the CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso), which is the currency mostly used by tourists. It is important to make sure you are getting back the right change in the right currency when making purchases.
- **Exchange:** You can exchange USD for CUC at any airport, hotel, exchange bureau in town centers and some banks. The current fee for exchanging is 13%, i.e. for 100 USD you will get 87 CUC. The fee is the same no matter where you exchange your currency. You will need your passport to exchange money. In Cuba, they will not accept bills that are torn or written on when exchanging into CUC.
- When exchanging money into CUC, try to get small denominations to make purchases easier, as many places (little stores, bars and restaurants do not always have the possibility to break down smaller notes for you).
- **Credit Cards & Traveler's Checks:** US-issued credit cards, debit cards, and ATM cards were not previously usable in Cuba; this is changing with new regulations and more and more places will start to accept these for purchases or withdrawals. It is advisable to bring cash in order to make any purchases in Cuba or pay for most services. Most places will not take USD, so you must exchange currency upon arriving. Tips however can be given in any currency. Traveler's Checks may also be difficult to cash while in Cuba.

- **TIPS/DONATIONS/GIFTS**

- **Small gifts for kids:** it is ok to bring small items such as pens, markers, coloring books, small toys to give out to local kids. If you are asked at the customs area in Cuba, you are NOT BRINGING DONATIONS, you may have some small gifts to hand out. Donations require prior authorization and are usually given in large quantities, so this is not what you are bringing (or should be bringing).
- **Monetary gifts to speakers and community projects:** In Cuba, tipping is a way of life. Local salaries are extremely low and don't suffice to buy everyday items. Tourism touches the lives of many Cubans and they truly depend on small donations and tips to feed their families. Though it may be a small amount to us, anything you offer these individuals that work hard to make a difference in your experience while there is greatly appreciated. Refer to provided guidelines.



- **Tipping Restaurant Staff, housekeeping, guides, drivers, porters.** This can be done on an individual basis or as a group if preferred. Same applies as above.

- **CALLS AND INTERNET**

- **Cell Phones:** US cell phones do not work in Cuba, even if you have an international plan, though this may be changing soon with new regulations. As a foreigner it is possible to rent a local sim card at ETECSA offices throughout for use on your own unlocked phone. Though keep in mind that visiting these facilities are not easy to coordinate with your schedule.
- **Calling Home:** It is possible to call home from your hotel by visiting the business center or dialing direct from your room. If you wish to use the phone in your room, you will need to leave a cash-deposit at the front desk, so that they activate your line. It can be expensive to call home, sometimes more than 2.50 CUC per minute, and connection charges may also apply.
- **Internet:** Wi-Fi is not available throughout Cuba except at some hotels. Most hotels also have a business center with computer, with limited hours, where internet service is available. Charges can up to 12 CUC per hour depending on the hotel. Because of the limited technology in Cuba, it is not uncommon to have internet outages. Some hotels now offer Wifi service.
- **Communication with the US:** Though internet is the best way to communicate with family back at home, you may want to warn them of the difficulty in communications between Cuba and the US. Not only can it be costly, but sometimes business centers are not open at the hours that are convenient to your schedule, internet may be experiencing difficulties, or you may have problems getting a line to the US from Cuba, since they are often rerouted through third countries.

- **ELECTRICITY**

- **Electric Current:** 220 V at most hotels, though it is common to find both 110 and 220 throughout Cuba. Sometimes both European and American plugs can be used. It is advisable to bring a converter, if your electronics are not travel-ready (105-240 V).
- **Outages:** Though many hotels are well equipped, in Cuba it is possible to experience temporary power outages due to limited resources on the island. Though this seems to be happening less frequently in the past few years.

- **SAFETY**

- **Safety Deposit Boxes:** Hotels are equipped with safety deposit boxes and may charge a per day fee. Check with the front desk. It is advisable to leave valuables, including passports in the safe. A copy of the passport should suffice for ID purposes. You will however need your passport for exchanging of currency.
- **Pick-pockets:** though Cuba is generally a very safe place to travel (more than other parts of the world), it is always best to watch your belongings and beware of pick-pockets and purse snatchers. Leave expensive jewelry in the safe and only carry what you need for that day. You may see some kids or older adults begging on the streets, sometimes asking for soap, pens, etc. Though a nuisance, this is not considered to be dangerous.



- **TAXIS AND TRANSPORTATION**

- Transportation has been provided while on tour for all included activities. Taxis are available throughout the city and are quite safe. Payment will be in CUC. There are different types of taxis and your local guide in Cuba can explain the difference.

- **FOOD & MEALS**

- **Selection:** Restaurants don't always have as much selection as in the US, menu choices can be limited, but always another option for vegetarians or those that cannot eat what has been set up on the menu (guide will arrange in advance). Most restaurants do offer at least two choices for the main course, which the guide may communicate and take orders for in advance. Ordering in advance can speed up the service for larger groups.
- **Beverages:** Most included restaurants on this tour will provide you with one welcome drink (usually a cocktail, such as a mojito, Cuba Libre, etc) and an additional national drink during your meal (examples can be beer, soft drink, water or juice). Coffee may not always be included after the meal, as some restaurants are not equipped to serve coffee to large parties. Check with the local guide to figure out what options you have for each meal, as not all restaurants are the same.
- For tea drinkers it is usually difficult to find tea bags at every restaurant, you may wish to bring your own tea bags just in case.

- **WATER**

- It is best to drink bottled water while in Cuba. You will find that both still and sparkling water are available. Water is purified in the hotels and restaurants, and it is ok to drink beverages with ice wherever we take you on the tour. It is also not necessary to use bottled water to brush your teeth, as the tap water has also been purified. Salads and fruits are also acceptable to eat at all included or recommended restaurants.

- **WEATHER**

- The rainy season in Cuba typically runs from May to November and the dry season is between December and April. Keep in mind that it may however rain at any time, so it is wise to always have rain gear when traveling to Cuba. The temperatures in Cuba can range from the 60's in the winter (though not very common) to the 90's in the summer months. Wear comfortable, cool clothing. It is common to have AC in restaurants, hotels, and other indoor facilities, so layering can also be wise. Do keep in mind that not all places have AC in Cuba, so sometimes it can also be quite hot.
- Bring insect repellent as the tropical weather also means a lot of mosquitos at dusk and at dawn.

- **US CUSTOMS/RETURN TRIP**

- Per US regulations, you are allowed to bring back \$400 worth of goods for personal use, of which \$100 of that can be brought back in tobacco and alcohol products.
- Upon returning to the US, you will have to go through immigration and customs. Often travelers returning from Cuba are asked additional questions. You may need to provide a copy of the authorization letter you are traveling on (located in your ticket jacket). You may also be asked to undergo additional screening in the customs area, mostly for agricultural products.



- **Cuban Departure Tax:** Remember that 25 CUC must be put aside when you arrive to Cuba. This is the departure tax that has not been included in your ticket and must be paid for in order to return to the US. This is paid for at the airport, after you check in for your return flight in Cienfuegos. Starting on April 1, this tax WILL be added to the cost of the ticket, which means this will no longer be paid upon your return.

- **HOTELS**
 - **Standards:** please note that the star system in Cuba is quite different than that in the US. Expect slightly lower standards at the properties with less amenities. Remember that Cuba has had limited resources for a very long time and they do what they can to try to update their facilities as needed.

 - **Outages/AC/Plumbing Issues:** Again because resource in Cuba can be limited, it is not uncommon to have temporary power outages, problems with AC (either being too cold or not working properly), and problems flushing toilets due to lack of pressure, etc. Sometimes water pressure varies as well. Expect the unexpected and you may be pleasantly surprised, as things have been getting better and better in Cuba.

 - **Breakfast and Other Meals at Hotel:** breakfast buffets are included and offer lots of variety, sometimes with limited products and different than you may be used to.

 - **Porterage:** This service will be provided for groups automatically to facilitate luggage delivery. It is customary to tip for these services, and this has not been included in your tour cost.

- **TOILETS**
 - **Public:** be prepared with toilet paper and small coins when using public facilities. Avoid throwing away paper into the toilet due to flushing problems. It is advisable to use the waste basket placed next to the toilets.

 - **Bus WC:** Most larger buses have small water closets (toilets) on board but these should be used in case of emergency only. It is often not possible to empty the contents on board every day of the trip.

- **TOUR**
 - Be on time and be courteous to fellow travelers

 - Be flexible, and go into it with no expectations (pleasantly surprised)

 - Cuban National Guide will be there to assist with any and all matter, including emergencies, additional information required and recommendations, and any problems or concerns while on tour.

 - Remember that you are traveling to Cuba under a People-to-People License, which is not a standard tour and involves more educational and interactive experiences.

 - Please take into account that, despite the political differences and regulations that Americans must follow when travelling to Cuba, Cuba is a very special destination where the people welcome American tourists respectfully and always try to show you their most authentic traditions and ways of life in a very friendly and courteous manner.

