

# CUBA

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

In 2014, 700,000 Americans visited Cuba. With the U.S. government relaxing travel bans, this number could increase to 10 million per year. Travelers will likely find that there is competition for flights, lodging, and ground transportation; Cuba's infrastructure is severely outdated, and American businesses, such as airlines, banks, and communications companies, are not yet operating in Cuba.

### Purpose of trip

- You may legally travel to Cuba if the purpose of your trip falls under one of the following 12 categories: (1) family visits; (2) official business of the U.S. government, foreign governments, and certain intergovernmental organizations; (3) journalistic activity; (4) professional research and professional meetings; (5) educational activities; (6) religious activities; (7) public performances, clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions, and exhibitions; (8) support for the Cuban people; (9) humanitarian projects; **(10) activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes**; (11) exportation, importation, or transmission of information or information materials; and (12) certain export transactions that may be considered for authorization under existing regulations and guidelines.

### Travel documents

- You do not need a license or visa for travel that falls under one of the 12 categories listed above.
- Cuba requires visitors to have non-U.S. medical insurance and sells a temporary policy to those who do not have one.

### Flights, lodging, and ground transportation

- You cannot currently fly from the U.S. to Cuba on a commercial flight. Your alternatives are to take a commercial flight through another country, such as Mexico, Panama, or Grand Cayman, or take a charter flight from Miami, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale, Los Angeles, New Orleans, or another city.
- Cuba has a shortage of high-quality hotels. You should book your hotel several months in advance if possible as hotels are quickly being filled up by new American travelers and tour operators. An alternative to hotels are "casa particulares," which are like bed and breakfasts.
- Taxis or buses designated for tourist travel are your best option for ground transportation. Three-wheeled, yellow-hooded "Co-Co" taxis are considered unsafe and should be avoided. Public buses used by Cubans, known as "guaguas," are crowded, unreliable, and havens for pickpockets. These public buses usually will not offer rides to foreign visitors. A risk in renting a car is that traffic laws differ from the U.S., and U.S. citizen drivers involved in traffic accidents that result in the death or injury of any party may be held criminally liable, regardless of fault.

### Finances

- Cuba is generally a cash-based economy. Consider bringing British pounds or euros with you; they get a better exchange rate in Cuba than the U.S. dollar. Upon entry, you must declare cash exceeding 5,000 U.S. dollars or the equivalent in another currency.
- Check with your bank to see if they have the mechanisms in place for you to use your credit or debit card in Cuba. That said, many businesses do not accept credit cards, and ATMs are scarce.

### Health, safety, and security

- While you are not required to get any vaccinations to travel to Cuba, the CDC recommends that you get typhoid and hepatitis A vaccinations. You should also take precautions to avoid travelers' diarrhea from contaminated food and dengue from mosquitoes.

- Hurricane season in Cuba runs from July to mid-November. Avoid traveling to Cuba in September and October if possible as these are usually the most active months.
- The majority of crimes in Cuba are non-violent and include pickpocketing, purse snatching, or taking of unattended or valuable items. However, you should assume that criminals are armed. You are most likely to be victimized in crowded areas, such as markets and beaches, and certain neighborhoods such as Old Town Havana and Prado.

### **Internet and phone**

- Internet access and mobile phone coverage are extremely limited in Cuba. Verizon Wireless allows users to make voice calls, send text messages and use data services through the company's pay-as-you-go International Travel option at a rate of \$2.99 per minute. The alternative is the state-owned telecommunications company Etesca, which can be expensive and involve long lines to get a phone.

### **Sources**

- [https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba\\_faqs\\_new.pdf](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba_faqs_new.pdf)
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