

This is Cuba

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ACJOURNEYS

YOUR GATEWAY TO AUTHENTIC AND LUXURY CUBA

THE HISTORY



Cuba, country of the West Indies, the largest single island of the archipelago, and one of the more-influential states of the Caribbean region. The domain of the Arawakan-speaking Taino, who had displaced even earlier inhabitants, Cuba was claimed by Christopher Columbus for Spain in 1492. It became the Spanish empire's most-important source of raw sugar in the 18th century and later earned the sobriquet "Pearl of the Antilles." Though Spain had to fight several difficult and costly campaigns against independence movements, it retained rule of Cuba until 1898, when it was defeated by the United States and Cuban forces in the Spanish-American War. Cuba soon gained formal independence, though it remained overshadowed by the nearby United States. On New Year's Day, 1959, revolutionary forces led by Fidel Castro overthrew the government of dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Two years later Castro proclaimed the Marxist-Leninist nature of the revolution. Cuba became economically isolated from its northern neighbor as it developed close links to the Soviet Union. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s isolated Cuba still further, bringing on what Cubans euphemistically call the *período especial* ("special period"), a time of widespread shortages and financial uncertainty. By the early 21st century, Cuba had loosened some of its more-restrictive economic and social policies, but the United States continued its decades-long economic embargo against the Castro regime, though the December 2014 announcement of the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries held promise of the embargo's removal. Life in contemporary Cuba is thus challenging, given the limited access to food, transportation, electrical power,

and other necessities. Even so, many Cubans show a fierce pride in their revolutionary society, the only one of its kind in Latin America. Cuba is a multicultural, largely urban nation, although it has only one major city: Havana (La Habana), the capital and commercial hub of the country, on the northwestern coast. Handsome if rather run-down, Havana has a scenic waterfront and is surrounded by fine beaches, an attraction for increasing numbers of visitors from abroad. Cuba's other cities—including Santiago, Camagüey, Holguín, and, especially, Trinidad—offer a rich legacy of colonial Spanish architecture to complement contemporary buildings.

GEOGRAPHY



Cuba is the largest country by land area in the Caribbean, and the main island is the sixteenth largest island in the world by land area. A handful of archipelagos (that include hound reds of island and cay's) ring its coastline north and south. Isla de la Juventud, or “Isle of Youth” is the second-largest Cuban island and the seventh-largest island in the West Indies. Overall Cuba's land is relatively flat, flowing gradually into hills, including a few hills of limestone shown to the right. Cuba's coastal areas are the most mountainous. In the Sierra de los Organos of the far-northwest the landscape is hilly with a few lower mountains. In the southwest the Sierra Maestra is a mountain range that rises sharply from the coast. Located there, Pico Turquino at 6,650 ft (1,999 m), is the highest point in Cuba. Other mountain ranges of note are the Sierra Cristal (south-east), the Escambray Mountains (central) and the Sierra del Rosario in the northwest. Considering its overall size Cuba has little inland water areas. Those of note include Laguna de Leche at 67.2 sq km (25.9 sq mi), and the man-made Zaza Reservoir, at 113.5 sq km (43.8 sq mi). Cuba has nearly 200 small rivers as well as many narrow streams that run dry in summer. The country's longest river is the Cauto; it flows for 230 mi (370 km) from its source in the Sierra Maestra.

CURRENCY

You can only exchange money in Cuba. I always recommend you do it at a hotel. In Cuba, there is no difference in the exchange rates at different locations (hotels, airports, banks, exchange booths in the street). It is the same rate everywhere. The hotel is just safer. If you are not staying at a hotel for the first stay (part) of the trip, our representative in Havana as well as our guides are advised to take you to a hotel so you can exchange money. However, you might want to mention it to them, just to make sure they keep remembering. In terms of what currency to bring, I recommend you bring USD, Euros or CAD. Know that Cuba just initiated (January 2021) a process of economic restructuring and the eliminated the CUC. The only national currency in use moving forward is the CUP (Cuban Peso). The official exchange rate is USD\$1.00 = CUP\$24.00. You can use both USD and CUP everywhere. Cubans are eager to get hold of USD, so they might offer you a higher rate at restaurants and businesses that cater to visitors.

THE CLIMATE OF CUBA



Except in the mountains, the climate of Cuba is semitropical or temperate. The average minimum temperature is 21° C (70° F), the average maximum 27° C (81° F). The mean temperature at Havana is about 25° C (77° F). The trade winds and sea breezes make coastal areas more habitable than temperature alone would indicate. Cuba has a rainy season from May to October. The mountain areas have an average precipitation of more than 180cm (70in); most of the lowland area has from 90 to 140cm (35–55in) annually; and the area around Guantánamo Bay has less than 65cm (26in). Droughts are common. Cuba's eastern coast is often hit by hurricanes from August to October, resulting in great economic loss.

SAFETY

Your safety is assured. Cuba is still one of the safest destinations in Latin America and has a low Caribbean crime rate compared to other countries in the area. The majority of tourists will never encounter any problems, but it's always wise to take some precautions because of the minor criminality that exists. (pickpocketing, false money exchange and theft of handbags). Please, always use common sense.

CLOTHING



When in Cuba our advice would be to dress in a casual, low key fashion and leave your expensive jewelry at home. In this sub-tropical climate lightweight natural fabrics such as linen and cotton work well. Jeans and t-shirts also work (except in hot and humid August). The island is cooled by the trade winds, so pack a light sweater or wrap for the cooler evenings. You may find that some restaurants don't allow you to wear shorts. Always pack plenty of sunscreen (we love the Riemann P20 range for 10-hour protection) and insect/mosquito repellent, toiletries, feminine products and make-up - as these can all be difficult and very expensive to buy on the island.

TIPPING AND GIFTS



Restaurants - 10%-20% of the check. But, please, first make sure that it is not included. If your meal is included as part of our program quote, know that your tips are not. You can either leave it at the table or you can give it to the guide who will be paying for your meal. In this scenario, the customary tip is USD\$4/per person, which accounts to 10% of what we are paying for your meal. Guides - USD\$10/per person per day - Drivers - USD\$8/per person per day - Taxis - no need to tip, you need to arrange price first. - Hotel maids/service - USD\$5/per room per day.

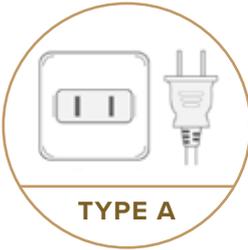
WATER



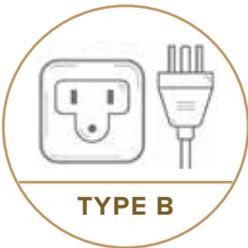
You should only drink bottled water as consuming water is concerned. It is about the same price as in the US. Cuban water is totally safe, probably safer than in many cities in the US, as it highly chlorinated. BUT, it is the water from a different country and different minerals in it. It will not make you sick, like Montezuma's Revenge in Mexico, but it could potentially upset your stomach. Now, regarding ice in drinks, I believe it is totally safe. Plus, the alcohol in the drink (they are loaded) is to surely kill anything it might have. Eating salads washed with tap water is fine, too.

VOLTAGE

110 V AC 60Hz



TYPE A



TYPE B

The Cuban power outlets are suited for use with the US American flat pin type electrical plugs. In general, the voltage in Havana is 110V AC 60Hz, but some new hotels have 220V AC 60 Hz too. Travelers from Europe need a plug adaptor to use their electrical equipment. It is recommended to use a surge protector for electronic apparatus, laptops, portable video player etc. Cubans use surge protectors on every electrical equipment of value, TV set, video, fridge to protect them against the frequent electrical surges and spikes. Electricity on the Island - The complete power grid in the country is an aging and deteriorated structure. The Cubans are facing repeated black outs and power outages, the so called APAGONES that can last several hours and sometimes even days, it's a part of the life in Cuba. Each family that can afford it, has a fluorescent battery powered lantern in the house, the less affluent citizens use candles in case of a power outage. Repairs to the electrical power grid have been made, but the energy problems are of such a magnitude that it will take billions of dollars to make all repairs and replacements.