

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the weight limit for luggage on the charter flight?

Baggage Limitations

First Bag up to 44 pounds.....\$20.00 per bag
Additional pounds\$2.00 per pound
Any Checked Bag.....\$20.00 per bag
Boxes and irregular packages are.....\$2.00 per pound

How much money can I bring with me into Cuba?

There is a limit on how much you spend. The regulation states you cannot spend more than \$400 in goods to bring back to US. Of those \$400 you can spend \$100 in rum and cigars.

What type of money should I bring with me and where can I exchange my money into CUC?

You can bring cash. Euros or Canadian Dollars are recommended.

Credit Cards are not accepted at all in Cuba.

Only Convertible Cuban Peso (CUC) is accepted as payment for goods and services in Cuba. USD/Traveler Checks can be exchanged upon entry at the airport, at hotels, banks, and Exchange Offices. Hotels sometimes charge a fee for the service. Travelers Checks can be exchanged for an additional service fee of 3%.

There is no exchange fee for other currency exchanges –such as for Canadian Dollars or Euros. You may want to consider changing your US Dollars into one of these currencies before departing from the US to Cuba.

*** There is only one US credit card accepted in Cuba. It is debit MasterCard from Stonegate Bank. The card can be used in about 10,000 Cuban hotels, restaurants and other places that accept cards. Stonegate said it plans to expand the use of cards to Cuban ATMs in 2016 (not available yet). We strongly recommend to bring some cash since the card is not available at ATMs. ***

*****POSSIBLE MASTERCARD WILL START OPERATING IN CUBA SOON*****

I would like to bring donation items to the people of Cuba. How does that work?

You may bring any items that you would like to donate to the people of Cuba. Such items as toys, backpacks, crayons, colored pencils, etc. Personal items such as clothing, shoes, soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothbrushes, etc. are also appreciated.

When you get to Cuba you may donate your goods to any person/people that you would like. Someone special may touch your heart and you may choose that person. You will have many opportunities to choose while meeting and interacting with the Cuban community.

Can I give people tips in US dollars or should I convert to CUC?

Generally speaking, people expect to be tipped in CUC (the convertible Cuban Pesos). If necessary, US dollars are also appreciated.

What is the correct average amount that I should tip?

Who should I tip?

Luggage Porters at Hotels ... 1 CUC per luggage bag. Daily Guides if supplied ... +/- 4 to 5 CUC per traveler for each day

Daily Driver if supplied ... +/- 4 TO 5 CUC per traveler for each day

How much money should I plan for each meal that I will be paying for that is not included in the tour?

The number of dinners that you will be purchasing on your own will depend on the tour that you take. See your itinerary for details.

For each dinner it is recommended that you set aside ... +/- 20 to 25 CUC.

How much money should I plan for my drinks for lunch and dinner that are not included in the cost of the tour?

You are responsible for purchasing your drinks for lunch and dinner every day during the tour.

Water ... 1 to 1.5 CUC.

Mojitos, Cuba Libre and Beers ... 2 to 3CUC

If I want to buy art, more art than I have money for, is there a way to pay?

Generally the answer is no. However, there are some artists that you can send money to via Western Union. It is legal for any American to send money to Cuba for non-relatives.

Can I purchase Cigars and/or Rum?

Yes, you can purchase Cigars and Rum for your own personal use while you are visiting Cuba.

****Can I purchase Cigars and/or Rum to BRING BACK TO THE U.S.A.?****

YES. Up to \$100 value.

What can I purchase to bring back with me to the US?

Can I purchase souvenirs?

Now you can bring up to \$400 in goods from Cuba including \$100 of cigars and rum.

What are the accommodations at the hotels like?

We have selected 4 STARS hotels based on their location. Although the hotels are safe, clean, and comfortable, and provide safe boxes, the hotels standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. It's important to keep in mind that when visiting Cuba it is not about the hotel stay; it is about the opportunity and the unforgettable experience of exchanging and getting in touch with the Cuban people.

What are the rooms like in the private homes that we may stay at?

We strongly recommend staying at private homes when possible as that is the best way to support the Cuban people in need and a very people to people experience. The private rooms are like small hotels with just 2 or 3 rooms with private bathrooms. They are air conditioned, hot water and provide a safe box for your personal use.

What if I would prefer to stay in a hotel instead of the private homes?

This option is available to you. However, during a tour where the group will be staying at a private home, the cost of the hotel is not included in the package. You will be responsible for the extra cost.

What type of Electricity is available in Cuba?

In general, your electric razor, hairdryer or other small appliance may operate on Cuba's standard electrical current (110 volts). However, almost all of the newer or recently renovated hotels have converted to 220 volts and you will need a converter and a plug adaptor.

Is Internet available in Cuba?

Internet access and services are available at increasing numbers of hotels, post offices, and cyber-net cafes. It's expensive to get connected: Hotel Habana Libre \$10/1hour

You can also use nauta cards, ETECSA, the Cuban phone company, sells WIFI access cards (Tarjeta de Navegacion) for 2 CUC/hr. You will be able to access internet at some points in Havana, Viñales and Trinidad at any of the WIFI access points.

Ask your guide in Cuba about this option.

What is the Weather like in Cuba? What kind of clothing should I pack? The weather is very similar to the weather in Florida.

Cuba is on daylight savings time summer and winter (one hour later than Eastern Standard Time). Be prepared for hot weather with a chance of brief periods of rain.

From the months of November to April the temperatures average from 75-80°, and June to August, average from 85-90°. The warmest weather is in the eastern part of the island. The rainy season is from the months of May-October.

In general, clothing should be on the informal side. Bring a light jacket or sweater for cool evenings (and sometimes very cool air conditioned Restaurants).



GETTING READY FOR CUBA

We want your journey to be safe, without complications, and culturally rewarding. Please study this orientation and preparation guide. It's based on feedback from thousands of past travelers.

MANDATORY FOR TRAVEL

Passport, must be valid for one week beyond your island stay

Airline tickets

Cuban tourist visa (supplied with your air tickets)

Cuban medical insurance supplied by Cuba Unveiled

Money (major US credits will work after in the near future)

Personal effects

LUGGAGE PREPARATION

Cuba restricts total incoming luggage weight to 30 kilos (66 pounds). If you bring more you could be subject to a 10 CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso) surcharge per extra kilograms (2.2 pounds). An additional 10 kilograms (22 pound) allowance is made for medicines and medical items.

Permitted items. You can take photo and video cameras, personal DVD, PDA, CD and game devices, cell phones, laptops, MP3 players, a hair dryers, electric shavers, binoculars, radio receivers, musical instruments, and sound recording devices for personal use. If you take more than one of the above items, Cuban customs may ask if you intend to leave them on the island. If you do, duty may be charged. If you take more than the equivalent of \$5,000 USD in cash, you must declare it. Prescription medicines should remain in their original containers with labels intact.

Prohibited items. Narcotics, explosives, pornography, anti-Cuba literature, stand-alone GPS devices, walkie-talkies, drones, and items that are considered weapons.

INTERNET IN CUBA

Internet and WiFi. You can take your laptop to Cuba without complications, but connecting it to the internet can be difficult and when successful slow. WiFi is available at the Meliá Cohiba and Hotel Nacional. If you want to access your email at the Habana Libre, you'll have to use computers at its business center. Rates per hour vary between 5.00 and 10.00 CUC (Cuban Convertible Pesos). You can have WIFI access at some points in the country using a nauta card.

PHONES IN CUBA

Cellular phones. If you want to use your cellular phone in Cuba, first check with your US carrier and ask if they provide this service in Cuba. Verizon is offering roaming service in Cuba.

Alternately you can rent a SIM card for your unlocked cell, or a cell phone and SIM card from ETECSA at the Havana upon arrival. Cost to rent a SIM card for 3 CUC per day. Rent for a phone and SIM card is 9 CUC per day. You must prepay a minimum of 10 CUC for calls. You can add more.

Landlines. The least expensive way to make international or local calls is on public ETECSA blue phones using ETECSA calling cards you must buy in Cuba. To call the US or Canada you must dial 119+1+(area code)+phone number. The cost is about \$2.50 per minute. For calls inside Cuba, you must dial 0+(area code)+phone number at a cost of about 5 cents per minute. If you plan use your hotel room phones consult with the front desk for rates – they can prove costly!

GIFTS FOR CUBANS

Cubans welcome gifts however small. Gift giving is an island custom.

Donations for schools. The most needed are pens, calculators, pencils, erasers, memory sticks, candles, flashlights, markers, note pads, stuffed animals, games, dolls, toy trucks and cars. Also appreciated is toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo and good quality used clothing and shoes. Baseball bats, balls and gloves are very popular. Do not distribute donations on the street. Your guide will suggest schools and institutions in need. Learn more at Gifts and donations.

Personal gifts. While on your tour, you'll make many new friends. Consider small gifts such as aspirin, multiple vitamins, makeup, manicure and sewing kits, perfume, chocolate, watches, wallets, keychains, purses, scarves, jewelry, pen sets and other things that you yourself would like. See What to Take to Cuba.

Hint: Please do not tip your guide, bus driver, chambermaids or restaurant staff with leftovers, national pesos or gifts in place of the Cuban Convertible Peso. See our Gratuities in Cuba page.

Bringing donations to Cuba. When arriving to Cuba, if you are asked about items you intend to leave behind as donations by Cuban customs, it is best to describe them as gifts. For example, if your luggage is searched and you are questioned as to why you're bringing 100 pencils (for example), say, "they are for friends" and leave it at that. The word donation raises concerns because, in the past, bad people have brought harmful things into Cuba as donations. In the unlikely event your gifts are confiscated rest assured they'll be distributed to Cubans most in need. Luggage inspections rarely happen unless your bags exceed weight limits, or you bring prohibited items.

LAUNDRY IN CUBA

There are no public laundry facilities in Cuba. If you need laundry services, ask your chambermaid or hotel front desk. They'll give you costs and instructions for this service. Generally the cost is between 6 and 8 CUC for a shopping bag of clothes.

ELECTRICITY IN CUBA

Electricity in most Cuban hotels is 110 volts, 60Hz (same as the US and Canada), however some hotels and resorts also have 220 volt service and outlets. An electrical adapter is rarely needed. Check the hotels listed on your tour page for electrical specifications.

TIME IN CUBA

Eastern Time is observed across Cuba, as in Toronto, New York and Miami.

UPON ARRIVAL

You are ushered through immigrations, assisted in locating your luggage, and led through Cuban customs. Your guide will help you with currency exchange at the airport, ensure your luggage is put onto our bus, then take you to your hotel and assist with check-in.

BE KIND, BE ON TIME

Cuba doesn't operate on "Latin time." If you are late for tour activities the whole group is held up. Cubans who have worked hard preparing your activities feel very bad. And the whole schedule gets messed up.

Don't get angry if you miss the bus. We've instructed our guide and chauffeur to leave ten minutes after the agreed upon bus departure time. Your guide announces the bus schedule a day prior. Your hotels have wake-up call services.

However, if you have to miss an activity, that's ok. Just tell your guide in advance so they will not worry or lose time looking for you.

MONEY MATTERS

Travelers should carefully evaluate daily spending needs prior to departure. A minimum of \$75 per day is recommended. It is better to plan to take more money than to get caught short of funds.

IMPORTANT: Change your money into CUC at a bank, your hotel, or at a CADECA (Casas de Cambio SA – exchange bureau). Never exchange your money on the street or with an individual Cuban.

TIPPING CUBANS

Feel good about tipping. When you give a tip to a Cuban the whole island benefits. Cuban tourist staff share tips with their co-workers and family who don't have access to them, and they all donate a portion of their tips to the national health and education systems.

SAFETY IN CUBA

Cuba is considered among the safest countries in the world with a very low crime rate. However precautions with personal belongings are necessary – do not leave things unattended. Don't wear expensive jewelry – it attracts pickpockets, which are a growing problem. Keep cameras and handbags secure to your person at all times. Participants should use a lockbox at hotels for valuables, travel documents, air tickets, passport and cash. A reasonably informative and objective traveler's website for Cuba is published by the Government of Canada.

Always carry some cash in small amounts each day, we suggest between 40 and 60 CUC. The rest of your money remains in your hotel lockbox, along with your travel documents, valuables and passport.

HEALTH CONCERNS

While most foreign guests and Cubans have no problems with the water, we recommend you drink bottled water at all times for peace of mind. A doctor or nurse is available to participants throughout the tour either at your hotel, nearby clinic or en route to destinations. No vaccinations are required.

TRANSPORTATION

Take official taxis. Private cabs aren't worth the hassle, nor are they necessarily roadworthy or cheaper.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Everything is very different: language, climate, customs and demeanor. Cubans are ultra courteous, effusive, candid and have a great sense of humor. All of the small material conveniences and services we take for granted are absent at every level on the island (except at your hotel). While Cubans are punctual delays are common because of transportation and communications problems. Yet the latter is not typical for our programs. Extreme shortages of everything require great innovation. Cubans have risen to the task. Practical problem solving skills are an asset especially when combined with patience and understanding. We advise going with the flow with eyes wide open until you get a lay of the land.

Words from wise travelers. If you go to Cuba looking for problems you will be all consumed, as they exist in abundance. On the other hand, if you go in the spirit of learning about a wonderful people and unique culture, and are prepared to fully engage and contribute, your rewards will



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be unequalled. The Cubans are as happy to have you as their guests as you are about getting to know them.

BRINGING THINGS HOME

While there is no limit on the amount of money you can spend in Cuba, travelers can only return to the US with up to \$400 of Cuban goods for personal use, including up to \$100 of alcohol or tobacco products. Cuban artwork and informational materials are exempt from this limit.

Exempt Cuban artwork and informational materials include books, films, posters, photographs, CDs, and works of art. Souvenirs and touristy handicrafts are not considered works of art. Original works of contemporary art require an export seal or export permission letter to exit the country. This documentation is provided by the artist or gallery.

PARTING WORDS

When visiting Cuba you are seen as a representative of your people reflecting their attitudes and culture. Cubans live with many hardships. Material conditions on the island are far below those of the United States. Don't be quick to judge. Many problems Cubans face follow from more than 50 years of a harsh economic blockade still enforced by the US government.

SHARE YOUR MEMORIES

We'd totally appreciate you sharing a story about your Cuba experience with us upon your return. We'd love post your contribution on our website for your family, friends and colleagues to enjoy. New Cuba travelers too will benefit from your candid observations and reflections on what you witnessed.