

# **CUBA TRAVEL TIPS**

*Please read carefully*

## **DOCUMENTS**

**Airline Ticket** Make sure to check on flight and check-in times before your travel day.

**Cuban Visa** For all non-Cubans: Pay \$50 at the ticket counter where you are departing directly to Cuba.

**Authorization Letter with copy of Travel Affidavit-** may be asked for this upon returning by US immigration and customs officials though rarely asked for.

**Health Statement for Travelers -This is for Cubans Customs Declaration-** Don't bother to fill it out unless you are a Cuban citizen.

## **FLIGHTS**

**Times:** Exact Departure Time will be printed on tickets. Flights may be delayed.

**Airport Check-in:** There will be a reserved check-in area at the airport with the airline. Please allow adequate time to check in all luggage. We recommend arriving 3 hours in advance, as documents also need to be checked thoroughly. If you are concerned, most airport terminals have wrap stations for your luggage

**Luggage:** With the flight to Cuba (on the outbound only), each airline have their own rules. You will be informed beforehand of those rules.

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. Please refer to the airline website for the most up to date luggage policy, as this is subject to change without notice.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

*Some of these items are more difficult to purchase in Havana:* Bug spray, sunscreen, swim suits, hand sanitizer, sunglasses and sun hats

Comfortable clothing, walking shoes and something nice yet casual for dinner. Any 'special size' clothing. Especially XXL is almost impossible to find. I know!

Medications and OTC drugs, Band-aids, etc. (always take med's in carry on)

CASH (Credit Cards and ATM's don't work) in dollars (\$200 per day/per person or Euros (but don't buy Euros if you don't already have them.)

**PLEASE REFER TO CUBAN CUSTOMS POLICIES** for allowances, restrictions and limitations: <http://www.aduana.gob.cu/index.php/que-puedoexportar-2>

## **MONEY**

**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 - taxi's, stores, bars and restaurants do not always have the possibility to break down smaller notes.

**Credit Cards & Traveler's Checks:** US-issued credit cards, debit cards, and ATM cards do not work in Cuba. It may be changing soon. Only credit cards issued in other countries may be issued (other than US). Few places will take any credit card no matter what the country of origin. You must have cash in order to make any purchases in Cuba or pay for any services. Most places will not take USD, so you must exchange currency upon arriving. Tips however can be given in any currency. Foreign Traveler's Checks will be difficult to cash while in Cuba.

**Tips** – tipping is a way of life in Cuba. It is common to tip people 10% in all walks of life if they do something special for you. In addition, as in all destinations, restaurant staff, guides, housekeepers, porters, taxi drivers, concierge, and others in the hospitality industry.

## **CALLS AND INTERNET**

**Cell Phones:** US cell phones do work in Cuba, you should call them ahead of time to ensure service). Verizon, T- Mobile and ATT work, but at a high cost. You can purchase a Cubacel SIM card at the airport if you like. Mostly for local calls in Cuba but can work worldwide. We can arrange for a prepaid Cuban phone for you if requested in advance.

**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. You can also purchase local calling cards to use at pay phones or landlines. Ed will have a Cuban phone for anybody to use if necessary.

**Internet:** The Hotel allows you unlimited free access to their internet in your room and all public spaces at the hotel. If you have multiple devices such as a laptop, cell phone, iPad etc. they will give you Internet access separately for each device at no additional . Generally, Wi-Fi is difficult to use in 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. Interesting is many public parts have internet hot spots. If you purchase an internet card, you should be able to connect along with locals. Often you can purchase a card on the spot from a local for 2 CUC's.

**Communication with the US and beyond:** 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:** 220V 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:** 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. They can last a few minutes to possibly a few hours at most.

## **SAFETY**

**Safety Deposit Boxes:** Hotels are equipped with safety deposit boxes and may charge a per day fee. 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**

Taxis are available throughout and are quite safe. Buses are also available in Havana and to get between cities and towns but are sometimes a bit more challenging to figure out. When in doubt ask a local! Most Cuban cars act as taxis. If you want to flag down an old American car, they will often be glad to drive you. Always negotiate the price before you get in.

## **FOOD & MEALS**

**Selection:** Restaurants don't always have as much selection as in the US; menu choices can be limited, though this is also changing. Most restaurants do offer a varied menu, though vegetarian and vegan food is limited but available. Please ask in advance about any special diet as in low salt, vegetarian and gluten free (most difficult!) Print out the restaurants from our Links section 'Restaurants by neighborhood' It will save you a lot of time and assure you of a pleasant meal and atmosphere.

**State and Private:** there are two types of restaurants in Cuba, those that are state-run and privately-owned ones known as Paladars. Both are widely available throughout Cuba and more and more private restaurants are springing up on every corner. Selections are usually more varied at Paladar, but some state-run restaurants are also quite good.

## **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 you are on our tour. It is also not necessary to use bottled water to brush your teeth, as the tap water in the hotel has also been purified.

## **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.

## US CUSTOMS/RETURN TRIP

Per US regulations, you are allowed to bring back unrestricted and untaxed art (such as paintings, films, music, ceramics, handicrafts) or informational/educational items (such as books, music, or printed materials).

Rum, cigars and other souvenirs ARE ALLOWED but as follows: \$400 total in Cuban products. But only \$100 combined of rum and cigars. The cigars are expensive, so this is not a large allowance. Although US Customs have been most forgiving, be prepared to lose some cigars if you buy too many.

Please check the US Customs website for up to date information: [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov).

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 license you are traveling on or a copy of your travel affidavit. You may also be asked to undergo additional screening in the customs area. Prepare for slightly longer process when returning from Cuba. This is a rare occurrence these days.

## 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 fewer 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 in Cuba.

**Public Toilets:** 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 wastebasket placed next to the toilets.

**Breakfast and Other Meals at Hotel:** breakfast buffets offer lots of variety, sometimes with limited products and different than you may be used to. But perhaps some of your favorite breakfast foods may be missing. But ask and you may receive.

## MISC

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

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 (and truly love) Americans and will always try to show you their most authentic traditions and ways of life in a very friendly and courteous manner.

**Lastly, when in doubt, ask... Ed. +53 5666 0791 Cubacell - anytime.**