

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Welcome to Cuba!



Cuba welcomes its guests with open arms and its Caribbean joie de vivre. In this document you will find the most important facts about the new regulations and some further valuable information.

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BEFORE THE TRIP

ETECSA – SIM cards for tourists

Since the summer of 2022, visitors are able to purchase a SIM card especially for tourists, so that they are not dependent on WIFI parks or hotel lobbies with WIFI, but can conveniently use mobile data. This could be applied online (<http://cubaceltur.com>) before the trip and works for a period of 30 days. You order this SIM card worth 25 USD in advance with a preloaded credit, including 6 GB of mobile data, 100 minutes and 100 SMS. However, you can purchase additional packages directly on the site (10 GB for \$20, 20 GB for \$35, 50 GB for \$70).

When applying online, please indicate where you would like to pick up the SIM card. These SIM cards can be only picked up upon presentation of the original passport (not possible with Cuban passport), e.g., directly at the airport in Havana or in another ETECSA office in Havana, depending on the information entered in the online order. Depending on your needs, the SIM can also be recharged afterwards via an online app during your stay in Cuba. Several APPS are available for this purpose, we recommend SuenáCuba, CubaCalls, LlamadaReal, Cubatel, DimeCuba or Ding.

Important technical requirements:

- The phone must be unlocked for Cuba and able to hold SIM cards
- It must be ready to receive the following sequences: 900 MHZ (3G), 2100 MHZ (3G) or 1800 MHZ (4G)

INFO: Pick-up of the SIM Card at ETECSA office, José Martí Havana Airport, only possible in Terminal 3 (INFOTUR booth, hall C, directly after leaving immigration/passport control). When specifying the pick-up location, please keep in mind whether your flight will actually arrive in Terminal 3. It may make sense to request pickup at an ETECSA office in the city center and pick up the card there the following day. If you are picking up your card at an ETECSA office in the city center, arrive as early as possible and be prepared for possible queues.

VPN-Client

We advise tourists who choose a SIM card with mobile data to download a VPN client before traveling. This is used to avoid dialing in to via the Cuban network, in which foreign sites are often blocked, but via another country. Vice versa, certain websites (especially those dealing with online payments) block all Cuban servers. You may also need a VPN application for the payment process for the SIM card recharge, otherwise some payment methods such as PayPal will not work in Cuba. Some of these VPN clients can be downloaded free of charge and are connected directly on site after activating the data.

The following free VPN clients have been tested and recommended by our team:

- Proton VPN
- Turbo VPN
- Secure VPN
- Windscribe

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ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

The following requirements must be fulfilled in order to enter the country

- **A valid passport with a minimum validity of 6 months or longer from the day of arrival**

- **A tourist card valid for the travel period**

A tourist card, supplied by your travel agent or obtained from the Cuban Embassy in your country. Most of the time it can also be bought directly at the departure gate. The tourist card can also be booked in advanced via Caribbean Tours for clients traveling from Europe as well as for American travelers with home country being USA.

The card must be filled out completely in print letters. Incomplete or incorrect forms will not be accepted and need to be re-purchased in Cuba. Upon arrival, one part of the tourist card will be kept by the authorities; the other part must be kept during your entire stay together with your passport. When departing, customs will collect this half of the card.

The visa or tourist card is valid for 90 days during your stay in Cuba, this can be extended once for another 90 days, allowing a total stay in Cuba of 180 days. The visa or tourist card, which the traveler must present when entering and leaving Cuba, is valid for a single entry into the national territory.

The Cuban government has now introduced the e-visa, which can substitute the paper tourist card. The e-visa can be obtained online and takes effect immediately via the following: <https://evisacuba.cu/en/inicio>

After completing the digital application (available in English, Spanish or French), an e-mail is automatically sent to the Cuban embassy in your home country to process your request, and you will receive the digital visa by e-mail. Payment modalities vary depending on the country.

NEW: Entry is still possible with both forms until 31.12.2025. Starting 1.1.2026, only the digital version of the visa will be permitted for entry into Cuba.

We recommend that you always apply for the visa with sufficient time before the travel period so that no inconveniences occur. You can track the progress of your visa online on the website.

- **International travel health insurance**

A valid travel insurance with medical coverage valid for the entire period of your stay in the country. Entrance to Cuba is only possible if the tourist holds a travel insurance purchased in their own country (NO US insurances). Travelers that can't prove they have a valid insurance will have to purchase a policy at the airport. The cost of this insurance is 60 CUP (pesos) / day of stay (for travelers over 60 years 180 CUP/day); paid at the current exchange rate by credit card in USD directly at the airport at a representative of ESEN (Cuban insurance agency) or the following day downtown at the office of ASISTUR (Prado No. 208 e/ Trocadero y Colon, Habana Vieja).

- **Online travel registration before departure**

All travelers must fill out in advanced a Health Declaration form ("Declaración Jurada de Salud"). This, along with other entry and customs information, is mandatory to submit online via the «D'Viajeros» site prior to entering Cuba. The form must be presented either as a PDF document with the QR code on your cell phone or as a printout upon entry. (Do not forget to charge your cell phone sufficiently if you only have the form digitally!)

If you have a digital visa, it is required to enter the code you receive in the D'Viajeros form to activate your e-visa for your stay in Cuba. The form can be completed up to 1 week before the date of travel.

- **A return flight ticket**

Info for travel from USA to Cuba

If you are a citizen or resident of the United States of America or poses an American Visa consult the travel policy of the United States State Departments Office of Consular Affairs: <https://travel.state.gov>. The same conditions apply to non-US citizens that wish to enter from the United States of American to Cuba. This means that these travelers should also comply with one of the eleven entry requirements (reasons for travelling cannot include vacations or tourism) in their travel program in Cuba. Travelers should establish a special program with a full scheduled itinerary including visits of social projects, lodging in private accommodations among others. Therefore, we currently don't recommend coming in a direct flight to Cuba from the USA. We recommend travelling through a third country such as Mexico in order to avoid these provisions. If you decide to come from the USA, you will need a slightly more expensive tourist card (pink one) which can be acquired at all American airports.

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Luggage

The free-of-charge baggage allowance per passenger accepted at the airport in Cuba depends on the conditions of your airline you are flying with.

Please note that for round trips on domestic flights, you can only check in one piece of luggage (max. 20 kg) without any additional charge. Excess luggage (including sports equipment) has to be paid for additionally. Check prices with the local airline. According to Cuban law, no baggage over 30 kg is admitted.

Tour guide service / On-site representation

If you have booked a transfer or a tour with Caribbean Tours, a representative or your tour guide will be waiting for you at the exit upon arrival (outside of the airport) to escort you to your taxi. You will recognize the representative/guide by a sign with your name, the name of the accommodation and the corresponding agency through which you booked your trip.

Transportation at the airport

Taxis that will take you to all regions of Cuba are generally available at the airport, but there is a risk that they are already pre-booked.

It should also be noted that the airports are located somewhat outside the city and unfortunately there is no reliable functioning public shuttle service connect the airport with the city center, where the hotels and accommodations are.

The counters of the various car rental companies are located directly at the exit of the arrival hall (e.g., at Havana Airport in Terminal 2 or 3).

Extending your stay (over 90 days)

If you are planning to stay more than 90 days in Cuba, please follow these instructions:

- Buy in advance so-called postal stamps (Cubans call them "sellos") worth 625 CUP of stay extension at one of the state post offices ("Oficinas de Correos"). Keep the receipt in order to show it to the immigration officer as a proof they are not fake. No credit card is accepted at the post office only cash. Please note that credit card payments are not possible at the post office only cash. We recommend to get these "sellos" in time a few days before your visit at the immigration, as they are not always in stock.
- Ask for a written confirmation of your extension from your hotel or private accommodation which you also must present to immigration.
- Acquire a travel insurance that covers you during the whole extension. You can also purchase appropriate insurance locally downtown at ASISTUR's insurance office (Prado No. 208 e/ Trocadero y Colon, Habana Vieja). Please also take out insurance well in advance of your appointment, and ask at the ASISTUR office in time for the documents you will need for these procedures.
- Take all these documents early in the morning to the local immigration office together with your passport, the tourist card that you used to enter to the country and the valid flight ticket with the new departure date to extend your visa.

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Most important addresses for some of the immigration offices (["Oficina de Inmigración"](#)) across the country are:

Viñales	Calle Salvador Cisneros entre Caferino Fernandez y Joaquín Pérez, Viñales, Tel.: +53 48 793175 (main road, in front of the main park and the church)
Havana	Calle 17, No. 1501 entre J y K, Vedado, Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Tel.: +53 78 363708
Varadero	Calle 39 entre 1a Avenida y Autopista, Varadero, Tel.: +53 45 613494 und +53 45 612011
Cienfuegos	Avenida 56 entre 59 y 61, Cienfuegos, Tel.: +53 43 519133
Trinidad	Calle Prolongación de Julio Cuevas Díaz, Trinidad, Tel.: +53 41 6650 und +53 41 6950
Sancti Spíritus	Calle Independencia No. 107 entre Frank País y Silvestre Alonso, Sancti Spíritus, Tel.: +53 41 343265
Guardalavaca/ Holguín	The immigration is located next to the police station just across the Hotel Club Amigo Guardalavaca. However, an extension of the visa has to be done personally at the police station the following address: Calle 15 entre 6 y 8, Rafael Freyre, Holguín
Santiago de Cuba	Ave Pujol, No. 10 entre Calle 10 y Anacaona, Vista Alegre, Santiago de Cuba

Departure

Reconfirmation of your flight back to Europe is not required, but you should be at the airport approximately 3 hours prior to the planned departure of your flight.

COMMUNICATION

Mobile phones

Good to know

- Cuba international code is "+53"
- The now most widespread network in major cities and tourist areas is 4G, but in some rural areas there may still only be 3G.
- You can use your GSM or TDMA phones in Cuba if your mobile is capable of roaming and your mobile service provider has an international roaming agreement with ETECSA, the Cuban state-run telecommunication company. Please contact your mobile service provider before your trip to Cuba about per-usage calling, data or text rates.
- If you have an unlocked GSM capable phone with a 1800 MHz capacity that connects to 3G or 4G networks, another option will be to buy a SIM card from the Cuban company (see details [ETECSA – SIM cards for tourists](#)) for phone calls in the country, but especially to use the local Internet via mobile data.

Regular phones

Travelers can make international calls directly from their rooms in most 4* and 5* hotels. Rates are high, so we recommend you to check the rates first with the front desk.

RECOMMENDATION: Simply make your calls through WhatsApp or a similar online provider over the Internet. Then only the much cheaper Internet costs are incurred.

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Internet

Access to Internet in Cuba is rarely free and it can be expensive. Connection is much slower than in Europe or other parts of the world.

In most hotels, depending on the hotel category, Internet is now offered either free of charge or for an additional charge in the hotel facilities. Often the internet is only available in the lobby, beach and pool areas or in the lobby of the hotel. Especially in the older hotel complexes, there is often no internet available in the rooms yet. To use the internet in the hotels, you can log in through the hotel's Wi-Fi hotspot with a password that you get at the front desk. Casas Particulares often have difficulties to get a private internet. Therefore, there is no guarantee of Internet access in private accommodations.

Some internet pages are monitored by the government and cannot be accessed in Cuba due to the US embargo. This also applies to applications such as like Paypal or the Apple App Store, which do not work due to the US sanctions on Cuba (see details [VPN-Client](#)).

You can access Internet on your mobile phone (see [Mobile phones](#)) but you can also do it at a Wi-Fi hotspot around the country. However, to use the Internet in public places, you first need to buy a pre-paid Nauta (Wi-Fi) card at one of ETECSA commercial stores, Cuban only telecommunication company.

Please follow these steps:

- Once you obtained the card, scratch the surface off carefully to reveal the hidden code below.
- On a Wi-Fi Hotspot (usually at parks where you see many Cubans actively connected), turn on your Wi-Fi in your mobile phone or laptop and look for the WIFI-ETECSA network. In the hotels, these Internet cards are no longer valid.
- Type your User Name (written on the card) and your password (section scratched off).
- To log out simply turn off your Wi-Fi or click "cerrar sesión" under the NAUTA timer at the main NAUTA window.

PAYMENT OPTIONS AND MONEY EXCHANGE

Currency union

Since January 1, 2021, as part of a major financial reform, the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) has been eliminated and the Cuban Peso (CUP) remains as the sole national currency.

In Cuba there is currently a massive inflation of the peso in the country, since most everyday products have to be bought in so-called MLC shops* (USD shops) with card payment in USD, but the Cuban state itself does not issue any foreign currency to its citizens to top up their MLC* account. As a result, the peso is traded at a significantly higher value on the black market (official state exchange rate, e.g., 120 CUP=1 USD; also applies to credit card payments, especially in many state hotels and other state services, or when withdrawing cash with a credit card from an ATM). The private service providers, in turn, have to deposit EUR or USD in cash into their MLC* bank account in order to buy all the important products for their business. This simply has the effect that the private service providers (such as private restaurants, taxis, casas particulares) prefer offering their services in EUR (or USD) in cash at a relatively favorable price-performance ratio (comparable to European prices).

* MLC= **M**onedas **L**ibremente **C**onvertible = Free Convertible / Foreign currencies (USD, EUR, CHF, CAD, GBP, MXN)

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Currency exchange of cash

In the meantime, not only the EUR, but also the USD will be accepted in cash in the banks and money exchange offices. Foreign currencies can be exchanged at a new rate (1 USD=120 Peso/CUP) officially at the bank.

Furthermore, banknotes in the following currencies are accepted in all official banks and exchange offices (CADECAS):

- Euro
- US-Dollar
- Canadian Dollar
- British Pound
- Swiss Franc

Our recommendation - Payment in Cuba / Money exchange

- **Bring enough EUR in small notes with you.**
It is best not to change any money at all into pesos (CUP) or only a very small amount (e.g., 50 EUR/person), as you can now basically pay almost everywhere in Cuba in EUR (or USD) in cash at much more favorable conditions than in CUP due to the inflation of the national currency.
- Most private service providers like private cafes and restaurants and many others such as taxi drivers, lessors of accommodation etc. prefer cash payment in EUR (or USD) at attractive exchange rates. Just always ask before paying! Usually, you will get your change back in pesos.
- You basically only need the local currency CUP (Peso) for tips or for state restaurants, entrance fees, as well as purchases at local markets.
- **When leaving the country, it is not possible to exchange pesos back to home currency!**
Change only small amounts in CUP for your vacation, because at the moment it is not possible to change pesos back to your home currency (EUR/USD/etc.) when leaving the country.
- **We strongly advise against changing money on the black market. This is a criminal act and can be punished accordingly by the state! We as an agency and our tour guides are only allowed to operate at the official exchange rate of the banks.**

Cash withdrawal by credit card

Only if you didn't bring enough cash in EUR with you!

You can also withdraw money directly from many ATMs with your credit card (VISA/Mastercard). Banks generally do not accept "Giro-/Maestrocard" or credit cards from American banks. In the background, many credit card institutions work together with American companies. Therefore, check in advance with your bank whether your credit card will work in Cuba.

Be prepared for somewhat longer queues at the banks. Some ATMs currently do not accept foreign credit cards at all, not even European VISA/Mastercards. Then please directly go to the bank counter. There you can also pick up the cash (=Pesos/CUP) directly with your credit card by showing your passport. Both at the ATM and at the bank counter, the current exchange rate of approx. 1:120 (USD:CUP) applies for cash withdrawals.

A cash payout in foreign currencies (USD or EUR) via the bank is generally not possible anywhere in Cuba! You will only get cash in CUP (=peso/national currency), no matter whether via the ATM or the bank counter.

Unfortunately, the hotels in most of the cases no longer offer a currency exchange service, not even for in-house guests!

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Credit Card Payment / MLC-Payment / MLC - Shops*

Some tourist services and products in Cuba can only be paid by credit card (VISA/ MasterCard), which is charged in USD. This applies, for example, to all hotel services (gastronomy or shopping, as well as some state-run services, such as day trips, nightlife or shows booked in hotels) and payment in the so-called MLC-stores*, where you can get, among other things, food, perfumes, hygiene products or electrical goods.

The menu in the hotels is often priced only in CUP/peso, but payment is always made by credit card in USD at the government-mandated exchange rate of approx. 1:120.

Therefore, we recommend all travelers to have a credit card during their vacation in Cuba

* MLC= **M**onedas **L**ibremente **C**onvertible = Free Convertible / Foreign currencies (USD, EUR, CHF, CAD, GBP, MXN)

Tipping in Cuba

Often tourists find they are always being asked for an additional tip. Living in cities frequented by tourists is much more expensive than in the countryside. Although Cuba is a third world country, the cost of living is expensive especially for those working on businesses managed by the government. Tourism is an appreciated field because workers get tips that help support the economy of a whole family. Cubans usually share their earnings with some of their close relatives or even send money to other countries where family members reside. They also often get financial help ("remesas") from their families living in the US or other countries. Nevertheless, this does not excuse the often brash methods used by hustlers to obtain money from tourists or the bad service attitude of some employees when a customer does not tip. You should only reward good service.

Since hygiene articles and also clothing is often difficult to obtain and relatively expensive in Cuba, every Cuban, whether hotel employee, musician or the cleaning lady are grateful for things left behind such as shampoo, soap, toothpaste, clothing (even used).

RECOMMENDATION: For individual restaurant visits, a tip of approx. 10-15 % can be calculated, depending on the satisfaction with the service provided on site. For the round trip, depending on personal rating, service quality and duration of the trip, we recommend a tip of 1.50 EUR/USD per day for the driver and 3.00 EUR/USD per day for the guide. Meanwhile, some private restaurants automatically add "10% Service" or "10% Local Tax" to the bill, which does not always mean that this money is actually paid to the service staff as a tip. In the end, it is a matter of personal assessment whether one wants to give something extra for a particularly good service, which then really benefits the employee.

ATTENTION: Please never give money to begging children! Please pay attention to your valuables because of pickpockets.

All-inclusive Hotels

Most of the employees have a quite unattractive salary in Cuban pesos, so tips are usually very welcome and encourage good service.

Special events

During events for groups, such as gala dinners with musicians and/or dancers, a tip is expected additionally for the staff and performers. This should be about 5 EUR/USD per participant (e.g., waiter, musician, dancer and/or cook).

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HEALTH

Cuba is known worldwide for its good health care system, which is free of charge for all its citizens, and furthermore very competent doctors. Even so, tourists will need a [travel insurance](#) to enter the country and receive medical assistance. We recommend you to bring your prescription medicines as well as any necessary medical equipment for your personal health. In case of a small accident or health situation during your stay in Cuba requiring a doctor, you will realize that appropriate medications are hard to find on the island. Please find below a useful list of items we recommend bringing:

Useful items to carry on your luggage for your health benefit

1. Hand sanitizer (at least 70% alcohol)
2. Disposable face masks (mandatory when visiting a doctor)
3. Diarrheal medicine (e.g., Imodium or Pepto Bismol)
4. Antacid
5. Medicine for pain or fever (e.g., Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen)
6. Antihistamine
7. Mild sedative or other sleep aid
8. Cough suppression or expectorant.
9. Insect repellent (specially for mosquitos) and anti-itch gel
10. Sunscreen that blocks UVA and UVB (sufficient amount for the holiday as it is expensive in Cuba and sometimes difficult to find)
11. After sun lotion against sunburn
12. Bandages/plaster
13. Motion sickness medicine (against nausea)
14. Spare glasses or lenses (in case yours are damaged)
15. Condoms
16. Female hygiene products such as tampons and panty liners
17. Handkerchiefs/tissues

General precautionary measures to have a pleasant holiday

- To avoid mosquito bites, it is recommended to use an appropriate repellent and wear long-sleeved shirts and pants. Mosquitos are responsible for some diseases on the island like Dengue fever and Zika among others.
- Drink bottled water. Do not drink tap water as the quality does not match that of European or Canadian standards. Tap water can be used for brushing teeth.
- Eat at restaurants with good hygiene reputation. Avoid street food, especially those where food is not prepared right away.
- Take into account that juices might be prepared with tap water. In private restaurants and accommodations, the juice is usually prepared with filtered water or boiled water. Always ask before drinking them.
- Be aware that restaurants cook usually with deep frozen meat, fish or seafood which might lead to stomach problems. Try to eat sea specialties at restaurants close to the sea where supplies usually come fresh from local fishermen.

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International hospitals

If you need a doctor during your stay in Cuba, contact the in-house doctor at your hotel complex or one of the international clinics.

Some of the most important international hospitals in Cuba:

Havana	Clínica Central Cira García, Calle 20 No. 4101 esq. 41, Playa, La Habana, Tel.: +53 7 2042811	In case of an
Varadero	Clínica Internacional Varadero, Calle 60 y Ave. 1ra, Varadero, Tel.: +53 45 667710	
Cienfuegos	Clínica Internacional Cienfuegos, Calle 37 No. 202 entre 2 y 4, Punta Gorda, Cienfuegos, Tel.: +53 43 551622	
Trinidad	Clínica Internacional Trinidad, Calle Lino Pérez No. 103 esq. a Anastasio Cárdenas, Trinidad, Tel.: +53 41 996492 / +53 41 996240	
Santiago de Cuba	Clínica Internacional Santiago de Cuba, Ave. Raúl Puyol esq. a Calle 10 s/n, Parque Ferreiro, Santiago de Cuba, Tel.: +53 22 714019	

emergency always take your passport and your credit cards with you. All medical services in Cuba must be paid by credit card. Cash payments are normally not possible. If a larger sum has to be paid, such as for a hospital stay or an operation, the clinic will consult directly your insurance company if necessary.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotels

The hotels in Cuba are state-owned and either entirely under state management, or proportionately managed (not owned) by internationally recognized hotel chains such as Kempinski, Melia International, NH, Iberostar or Blue Diamond. Therefore, we always recommend to choose hotels with foreign participation, as they have a certain influence on the service and quality on site. But even in these cases, the standard of the hotels varies compared to the hotels managed by those companies in Europe or Asia. Cuban hotels have a high-star rating that often do not match their equivalents worldwide.

The most famous beach areas and the "Cayos" (keys) are completely in state hands. In these locations it is not allowed to build a private accommodation, so that you can only find state hotels here. "Small charming hotels" are rather an exception in the beach paradises of Cuba and are rarely available. Nevertheless, there is a pretty good selection of recommendable beach hotels.

Hotels (outside of Havana, or partly in some lovely smaller, less touristy beach areas, called "Cayos" off the Cuban coast) are generally basic and ideal for overnight stops during a tour. In some colonial cities like Havana, Sancti Spíritus or Trinidad, old buildings have been converted into hotels resulting in some cases in rooms with small or no windows. As hotels do not differentiate those rooms from the rest, Caribbean tours cannot guarantee that customers won't receive one.

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Casas Particulares

A great alternative to hotel accommodations are "Casas Particulares". These are private accommodations owned and run by hospitable Cubans or foreigners living on the island which offer the wonderful opportunity to gain an insight into everyday Cuban life. Each "Casa" has its own charm and conveys the typical Cuban flair.

In terms of room and service, these accommodations are in no way inferior to standard Cuban hotels. Service is often even better than in state-run hotels, as the owners are personally committed as private entrepreneurs to make the customers' stay as pleasant as possible and thus show Cuba from its best side. The owners will be happy to inform their guests about the most important sights in each place or organize attractive excursions in the surrounding area.

Each room offered by Caribbean Tours has its own private bathroom and air conditioning and casas are selected based on quality of their services, price and commitment of their owners to make your holidays memorable.

ATTENTION: At many places you will find so-called "Jineteros" (hustlers) who try to stop cars at various locations or they wait for people at the exit of bus stations and offer to help you find the Casa Particular you have already booked. They often also pass themselves off as a family member of the Casa to inform you that your Casa is supposedly overbooked or has some other problem and that they have booked another Casa for you. Please do not listen to them and look for your confirmed address yourselves, preferably alone (without this alleged contact person) to check the actual situation in the booked casa on site.

RESTAURANTS

Paladares (Privately-owned restaurants)

These restaurants are scattered all around the country in big cities, remote locations, beaches and major roads. They can go from very simple structures with a few tables offering good Cuban traditional food to fancy restaurants frequented by Hollywood stars and royalty. Different cuisines from around the world has done a successful debut in Havana, improving dramatically the food scene during the last decade. Please review in advance our updated list of recommended Paladares based on unbiased opinions. Some of them need a previous table reservation which our team at Caribbean Tours will be delighted to do for you.

IMPORTANT: Since the private restaurant owners are dependent on the local market situation and availability of products, often not all dishes on the menu are available. Payment is usually made in cash, preferably in EUR (or USD), but also be paid in CUP*. Credit card payment is still not possible in a private restaurant.

* If you wish to pay in local currency in CUP, the restaurant owner will approximate a price in CUP adjusted to the current "informal black market exchange rate", which is significantly higher than the official bank exchange rate of 1:120 and fluctuates daily.

State-own restaurants

Restaurants managed by local governments or large state chains offer usually rather boring menus and not too much choice of food and drinks. However, in some localities they are the only option available. Service at those locations could be slow due to employee's lack of motivation to work.

In some places, however, these are sometimes the only available option, often located in amazingly beautiful colonial buildings and the price-performance ratio is usually much more favorable than in the private locations. Restaurants at hotels usually offer better quality food but often run out of dishes displayed on the menu.

Payment in the state restaurants in the cities is made in cash in CUP, in the restaurants belonging to a hotel exclusively by credit card in USD. Cash payment is not possible in the hotels.

IMPORTANT: Some restaurants offer commissions. Frequently, people on the street (hustlers) or your taxi driver will try to take you to those restaurants no matter if you have not asked for recommendations. They will tell you "Hey my friend!", "Amigo!", "English?" or they will ask you what time it is. The best strategy is to ignore them; be friendly but non-compliant, do not engage in a conversation. If you have selected a restaurant or a paladar, insist on going to the place you have chosen. Some restaurants, paladares, bars, discos or cabarets will not show you a menu in advance (even though in reality they have one, with regulated prices) and will charge you a higher price for drinks and food. Therefore, please always ask for a menu and if they refuse, please check the price before ordering. Always check the bill as it can be incorrect.

Special food

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Vegetarian food is not very common in Cuba. In state-run restaurants meat is often replaced with egg dishes (e.g., omelets). Also, the salad selection is usually rather poor. Since fruits and vegetables on the island are always seasonal, vegetarian dishes in hotels often consist not only of fresh vegetables, but also canned products. If you are a vegetarian, please look in advance for restaurants with vegetarian options.

The good thing is that in Cuba, especially in the private restaurants and in the countryside, meals are prepared almost exclusively with fresh "pesticide-free" organic products such as fruits and vegetables from the nearby fincas and with uncontaminated meat products, because the farmers operate still very traditionally their agriculture and basically have no access to chemical products. Also, hardly any vegetables or fruits are imported, so that one normally only get served the "seasonally" available goods.

Kosher food is not available in Cuba. Only a few private accommodations in Havana can provide kosher food upon request for groups staying at the establishment for special occasions.

Gluten free or lactose free products are difficult to find in Cuba due to a lack of local providers. If you suffer from specific allergy complaints, please always ask the waiter or waitress what exactly your meal contains.

TRANSPORT

Six decades of little investment in public transportation, the absence of an internal car market and the influence of Russian vehicles have all shaped the Cuban streets. As drawbacks, moving around by public transportation on your own as a "non-native" is difficult. Buses usually are delayed and there are no publicly posted schedules or route network info for travelers to follow. Therefore, for tourists, transportation in taxis is recommended as well in the city centers as for excursions. When traveling overland to other provinces, private cab services are also the most flexible, fastest and uncomplicated way of getting around, even though they are somewhat more expensive compared to collective transfers.

As an advantage, Cuban streets look like a running museum displaying old American cars from the 40s and the 50s in perfect shape. Do not miss the chance to ride one!!! It is not possible as a foreigner to drive one of these Oldtimers yourself. You are always with a local driver.

Hop-on / Hop-off Busses

In many touristic areas like Havana, Viñales, Varadero or on the Cayos, you can find these busses with a fixed itinerary. Prices range depending on the location. You simply buy a ticket valid for the day and can get on and off as you wish. Payment has to be made exclusively by credit card on the bus. Depending on the route and the region, the prices vary between 5 and 10 MLC (=USD). Cash payment is not possible.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Viazul - Collective buses

The most economical way to travel large distances in Cuba is VIAZUL, a local bus company generally used by tourists. Please find out if your destination is included on their routes at <https://viazul.wetransp.com/>. Tickets can be bought in advance.

- Tickets cannot be booked in advance of a trip through a local agency, as the tickets must be bought in person, either online via the website or in person at the Viazul bus terminal counter. Payment only possible with Visa or Mastercard in USD and confirmation via banking app.
- It is necessary to be at the Viazul bus terminal 2 hours before the bus departs, otherwise you risk the annulation of your ticket.
- Travel times of these collective buses are significantly longer than those of private transfers, as they do not travel on the direct route to the destination, but stop several times along the way and have to comply strict break times for the driver, so that, depending on the destination, you often lose an entire vacation day with this service.
- There are fixed departure times from bus terminal to bus terminal, which are often located outside the town center, so that you have to take a private taxi to get to the booked accommodation.

NOTE: Air conditioning inside these buses is set at extremely low temperatures. Always bring a jacket or a light blanket with you.

Local transportation

Public transport buses

We do not recommend to use the local busses as they are usually overcrowded, ill-maintained and delayed. Furthermore, there are no route or timetables for passengers posted at bus stops.

There is no local bus or train service between the airport and the city. A newly introduced shuttle bus from the airport in Havana to the city centre runs only irregularly and does not offer a reliable service.

Long-distance intercity trains

The train connections in Cuba are exclusively planned for the local population and are anything but reliable. Tickets are not sold through tourism providers, but have to be bought personally on site in often hours-long queues, sometimes several days in advance. Regular delays or complete cancellations of departures are common and the trains themselves are poorly maintained.

Other local transportation

For all other means of local transport e.g., Bici-Taxis, Coco-Taxis (Havana's tuk tuks), horse-drawn carriages, moto taxis, etc. prices should be negotiated before the journey.

Taxis

Taxis are usually the most appropriate transportation for tourists. Small yellow Cuban taxis (Lada or Korean cars) are usually cheaper than the modern yellow taxis with white roofs. Bigger cars (e.g., Mercedes, Audi or Geely) are more expensive, especially when they are parked in front of 4- or 5-star hotels and very few available in the country at all. Usually, the taxis do not use the taxi meter, please always arrange the price before you get in. Payment is made exclusively in cash, preferably in EUR or USD.*

* If you wish to pay in local currency in CUP, the restaurant owner will approximate a price in CUP adjusted to the current "informal black market exchange rate", which is significantly higher than the official bank exchange rate of 1:120 and fluctuates daily.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Private transfer services – taxis

Please note that private transfers are always transfers from A to B (without intermediate stops along the way on the shortest route to the destination).

The service "transfer with the possibility for sightseeing stops along the way" accompanied by a driver only is not recommended, as the drivers usually only speak Spanish and can't really help clients with questions about places along their way that would be interesting to stop at, as they have no guide training specific local knowledge.

Recommendation for travelers who do not want to take the direct route to the destination, is to book a privately guided tour or parts of the tour with a guide and driver. It is also possible, in the case of 2 guests, to provide tours with a rental car and a driver guide who will act both as driver and tour guide (if a rental car is available). Alternative option: a rental car tour completely on your own, also depending on the availability of the rental car.

Standard taxi trunks have capacity for only 2 suitcases. The remaining luggage must be distributed on the back seat.

Vehicles for tours



Our roundtrips are done with air-conditioned vehicles of local standard quality with professional drivers and guides. Therefore, we use the following relation between the type of vehicle and the number of client's vehicles:

Up to 2 people: Standard-Taxi (Cubataxi)

Please note that that there is only room for one piece of luggage per person in the trunk as the driver and, if necessary, the tour guide are located in the same vehicle during a round trip and also carry luggage according to the duration of the trip.

03 - 05 people: Minivan/Microbus (up to 10 seats Cubataxi/Transtur/Transtur)

06 - 12 people: Minibus (up to 16 seats Transtur/Transtur)

13 - 18 people: Bus (24 seats Transtur/Transtur)

19 - 30 people: Bus (34 seats Transtur/Transtur)

31 - 42 people: Bus (44 seats Transtur/Transtur)

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Car Rental

Exploring Cuba by car is a good and popular idea. Unfortunately, the streets are not always in the best condition and unexpected potholes may appear. Driving at night should be avoided.

All car rental companies in Cuba are state-owned. Caribbean Tours is only an intermediary, the rental contract is signed directly with the car rental company. The car insurance is mandatory and already included in the rental car fee you pay in advance.

It is rare to find street signs in Cuba especially off the main roads. You should have a good map (not available in Cuba!). People are generally very friendly and helpful, so you can also ask for directions. If you have a smartphone, we highly recommend you to download an offline map or navigator-app before you travel (as the internet connection in Cuba is very slow and limited), e.g., MAPS.ME or MapFactor Navigator. (Don't forget to also download the map of Cuba in the App.)

Rental Car Conditions

- **Minimum rental period**
3-5 days (depending on the season and the provider)
- **Insurance / first tank of fuel / other additional costs**
The mandatory Cuban rental car insurance is now mandatory and included in advance in the rental car price. In addition, when booking the rental car, the first tank of gasoline must be also paid in advance, as well as the additional fee for picking up the car at an international airport, if applicable.

Payment mode of the fees / extras at the local car rental offices

You have to pay for any applicable extras to be paid on site **using a credit card (Visa or Master Card) in USD only. Cash payment is NOT possible** for all rental car payments! (Exception: Daiquiri Tours, which accept only cash payment and no credit card payment.)

Those extras include for example:

- Deposit for the car rental (the deposit will be blocked on the credit card)
- Fee for the second driver (if not paid in advance already)*
- Drop off fee for different drop off car station than pick up

* When you rent the car, you have to deposit a warranty which has to be done by credit card. This amount will be refunded at the end of the rental period (please make sure that you don't lose your receipt of the credit card payment to be able to get the refund at the end). The warranty deposit varies depending on the company. Currently, no deposit is required.

We strongly discourage the use of American credit cards, although it is currently sometimes possible to use them at rental stations.

Luggage in the rented car

Please bear in mind luggage quantities for rental cars depending on car model indicated in manuals. Especially in smaller models, the trunk has capacity for 2 suitcases max. The remaining luggage must be distributed on the back seat. In the case of 4 travelers, a large car must be booked, so that 4 hard-shell suitcases can fit in the trunk or clients have to travel with flexible travel bags. The only model available for 5 people with luggage is a Minivan which seldom is available.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Refueling / Fuel situation

The situation of fuel availability in the country varies from day to day and is not always stable. Please always refuel in advance. On some days with gasoline shortage, especially in the provinces, only a fixed minimum amount of gasoline per car is issued and you cannot always fill up the complete tank.

Our rental car assistance can give you the information about the current situation in the country when you pick up your rental car. In general, always refuel in advance.

From February 1, 2024, only cashless payment will be possible for fueling throughout the country. Petrol prices have been increased nationwide. For tourists, the price of fuel is USD 1.30 per liter (Gasolina Especial B95).

Separate petrol stations have been set up throughout the island especially for rental car customers, where fuel can only be paid for by credit card (Visa/Mastercard) in USD. Rental car customers cannot fill up at any other petrol stations. An exact list of all these petrol stations (CUPETS) will be given to our customers by our rental car assistant when they pick up their rental car.

Now NEW: Products of DAIQUIRI TOURS



Special conditions of the attractive DAIQUIRI TOURS vehicles, which differ from the usual car rental conditions in Cuba. (See separate manual)

Rental cars can basically be booked **only "on request"** and unfortunately there are not enough rental cars available in Cuba. Please note that the service **"rental car and/or transfers" in principle is not bookable as a "single product"**, but always has to be booked as one of several tourist services.

Minimum requirement: with the booking of at least 3-night accommodation in any province, unless you have agreed on a different exception in your contract with us).

All DAIQUIRI services can only be combined with a minimum booking of 3 nights in 3 different provinces / locations in Cuba.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Domestic Flights

For domestic flights most connections are now available again. A few connections are still missing.

Caribbean Tours as DMS on site can book only a few routes at the moment:

- Cayo Santa Maria (Airport Cayo las Brujas)
- Cayo Coco
- Cayo Largo

Info about flights to Cayo Largo:

The only way to get to Cayo Largo is by domestic flight. The island is not connected by boat or land for tourists.

Flights to the east of the island (e.g., from Havana to Holguín / Santiago de Cuba) and back:

Unfortunately, this service in Cuba is anything but reliable despite confirmed flights. The flights often have long delays, so customers often have to wait a long time at the airport for their departure. Sometimes there's another flight 2 or 3 days later, or the flight is canceled on short notice. Besides, flight information is provided, if at all, on very short notice. This is not only annoying, but can be quite expensive for customers if they have to spend more nights than planned in one place or even lose their international flight. In the event of a flight cancellation, the domestic airline usually offers a transfer in a national collective bus that takes a long time until final destination. Transfer time from Santiago de Cuba to Havana, for example, is about 18 hours, as the driver also has to take longer breaks.

TIP: In case that clients have only 2 weeks of vacation in Cuba, but also want to visit the east, we recommend that they either book a round flight/open jaw flight (e.g., arrival Havana and departure in Holguin), or travel on a smaller part of the island e.g., the western part of the island.

For guests planning a domestic flight shortly before an international flight, we recommend flying back to the city of their departure back home at least 1, better 2 days, before the international flight and rather spend one more night there in order not to risk losing the international flight.

SHOPPING IN CUBA

Shopping in Cuba has never been so challenging as today. Cuba is by no means a shopping destination comparable to other Latin American countries and your expectations, when buying souvenirs, must remain low. Cuba's devastated economy and the phasing out of the CUC (one of the local currencies) have led the government to split stores in two main categories:

MLC stores (see [MLC](#))*

These stores have most of the needed products from groceries, to drugstore items as well as electrical goods. You can only pay there with your [credit card](#) in USD (=MLC)*. No cash is accepted. Expect to wait long hours lining up, at least in the MLC stores, where at the time of purchase interesting goods are offered for the Cubans. The range of goods is more of a gamble. It depends on what the state allocates to the stores.

"Tiendas en peso cubano" (Cuban Peso stores)

At the moment you can find only basic products at these grocery stores. Cubans who do not have access to MLC stores line up for many hours to find out at the end that the product was sold out. In Some hardware stores also a limited amount of merchandises can be purchased in Cuban Peso (CUP), you can also pay in cash here.

* MLC= **M**onedas **L**ibremente **C**onvertible = Free Convertible / Foreign currencies (USD, EUR, CHF, CAD, GBP, MXN)

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Souvenirs

The most beloved souvenirs for tourists to bring back to their country are rum and cigars. You can export cigars out of Cuba taking into account the rules mentioned below, however this does not mean you are able to bring them to your home country. Please check in advance the customs rules to import tobacco in your home destination.

Cuban exporting rules for tobacco per person:

- Up to 20 loose cigars without proof of purchase.
- Up to 50 cigars sealed on their original boxes (no fakes, original seals and holograms are compulsory and must be visible).
- More than 50 cigars sealed on their original boxes (no fakes, original seals and holograms are compulsory and must be visible) together with the official receipt from a credited store showing the total amount of units (only possible in case that your home country allows the import of more than 50 cigars).

IMPORTANT: Don't buy cigars from street sellers, as most are counterfeit or fake. To gain your confidence, illegal sellers will tell you that a member of the family is working at the cigar factory. And even if the offered cigars might look well rolled with a nice shiny cape adorned with an embossed ring that looks exactly like an original Cohiba for instance, mostly are made with poor quality tobacco.

Regarding rum, you can take as many bottles as you want if they are permitted in your home country.

Another interesting thing to bring back home is Cuban art. Some Cuban art pieces are considered National Heritage so you will need a special certification to take them out of the country. If you are buying a piece of art at an official gallery, ask the seller about any certification (in Cuba so called "sello"=stamps) that may be required. In case you buy a cheap painting from a local artisan please ask the artist for the required stamps ("sello"). In places where lots of artists sell their artworks (e.g., the handicraft market Almacenes de San José, address: Avenida del Puerto y San Ignacio, Habana Vieja), you can usually find a place devoted to certify the artwork.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Climate

You can travel to Cuba all year round. The dry season is from November to April. The rainy season is from May to October (usually only short heavy rain during the afternoon and lots of sun with many rain-free days). From June to November there could be a possibility of hurricanes. The average temperature is 25 degrees; during summer the maximum temperature is 30-34 degrees together with high humidity (average of 80%). In the east of the island (Santiago de Cuba, Baracoa, Holguín) it is usually about 3-5 degrees warmer year-round. In the region of Havana/Varadero and Western Cuba (Pinar del Río) temperatures can drop to 15 degrees at night in the winter (December to February) and it can be cold and humid. The daytime temperature is usually over 20 degrees. On the Caribbean side (e.g., Trinidad/Cienfuegos) it is usually warmer than on the Atlantic side (Cayo Coco, Cayo Santa Maria).

Clothing

We recommend light cotton or linen clothing. Men should wear long trousers, shoes (not sandals) as well as a shirt in hotels, restaurants, banks, immigration, police and other government offices. Jackets and ties are not necessary. The dress code should be taken seriously in good restaurants as well as at evening shows (Tropicana show and other Cabarets) as men with shorts will not be allowed inside. Beach sandals ("flip-flops") are also not allowed here. Also keep in mind that "topless" sunbathing at the beach and swimming pools is generally forbidden. However, there are two areas in Cuba, one in Cayo Largo and one in Cayo Santa Maria away from the normal beaches where the practice of naturism has been widely accepted for many years.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

Electricity

The electrical current in Cuba is 110 V, in many tourist hotels and resorts but also in some Casas Particulares (private accommodations) 220 V is partly available. You will need an adapter (American norm). We recommend you bring an adapter from your home country, as they are usually not available in Cuba.

Security

Violent crimes against tourists are rare. Even at night you can usually walk around without a problem, but you will often be approached, especially at places where there are lots of tourists. The goal of this approach is to sell you different services like restaurant recommendations, cigars, rum or sex. Pickpockets are often found in Old Havana, the "Malecón" and very crowded places (e.g., in buses or discos). You should always keep an eye on your wallet, mobile phone, watch and camera. Also, more and more children steal as they are very good at diversionary tactics. In general, in Cuba, as well as in other Latin-American or Caribbean countries, you should not wear valuable objects, such as jewelry.

En route

We recommend you always take some napkins with you. Toilet paper is scarce in Cuba and usually not available at public restrooms. Furthermore, toilets are usually not very clean and toilet seats are often not available. Toilet brushes are usually not even present. Please remember that most Cuban plumbing systems, especially in older resorts, simply cannot cope with toilet paper. If there is a bin provided, please use it.

Taking pictures / videos

Usually, Cubans do not mind having a picture taken; they sometimes even like to pose for you. Nevertheless, please always ask permission before taking pictures of someone. Depending on the situation you should also give them a small gift or tip as a "thank you". In the city center of Havana, there are many people in "costumes" that have a state license to pose for pictures with tourists. These people expect a tip after each picture. In museums and at events (e.g., Tropicana show) there can be an additional charge to take pictures or videos. It is forbidden to take pictures of military people and facilities as well as police officers. You should buy memory cards, films and batteries in Europe, as they are very expensive in Cuba and often not available.

It is officially forbidden to bring a drone into Cuba without prior government permission, which is difficult to obtain, regardless of whether you want to use it for private or business filming. If you show up at the airport unannounced with a drone, be prepared to have it taken away from you for the duration of your stay and to pay a high penalty fee. Furthermore, be prepared to be treated anything but friendly by the airport staff.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

HYGIENE SEAL T+HS - YOUR LOCAL SAFETY



With the aim to regain the trust of the travelers and to provide security during their trip in Cuba, most service providers in the tourism sector throughout the country (state-owned as well as private) have been certified with a seal. Only accommodations that have been inspected by the state for compliance with these guidelines and subsequently awarded the seal are allowed to accept guests.

This program, consisting of guidelines for a "Healthier and Safer Tourism (T+HS)", was developed by the Ministry of Tourism in coordination with the Ministry of Health and serves to ensure compliance with the hygiene protocols of the local health authority, as well as the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Almost 95% of Cubans are now immunized with their own vaccines developed in the country. The mandatory wearing of a mask (called "nasobuco" in Cuba) has now been abolished. Only when visiting a doctor, or when showing symptoms of illness. All tourism personnel (guides, cab drivers, service personnel in hotels and all other tourist areas in the country) are already vaccinated and "boostered" several times.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact our Customer Experience Team.

We are looking forward to your inquiry!

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CUBA

CONTACT



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Available during office hours: Mon - Fri 9 am - 5 pm
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Your Customer Experience Team (for customers on site)

For your concerns on site and for urgent matters outside office hours



24-hours emergency number +53 52 79 98 40
You can also send us a WhatsApp message!

Email during the trip

customer.experience@caribbeantours.ch

Email after the trip

claims.cu@caribbeantours.ch

We wish you a wonderful and relaxing stay in Cuba!

Your Caribbean Tours Team