



CUBA

FACT SHEET

Live for today...

INTRODUCTION

Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean is rich in culture and history. It is a fascinating destination and a land of contradictions.

Cuba is in fact an archipelago of islands located in the northern Caribbean Sea, 145km south of Key West, Florida, between the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands. The archipelago lies to the east of Mexico, to the west of Haiti and to the northwest of Jamaica. The main island is named Cuba and is the 17th largest island in the world by land area, extending 1,250km in length. The highest point is Pico Turquino at 1,974m.

The capital Havana, once the most heavily fortified city in the Americas, is a vibrant city that teems with beautiful if sometimes shabby colonial buildings. The weathered buildings have a faded charm and vintage cars continue to cruise the streets. From white sand beaches, rolling hills, forests and fields of tobacco to colonial architectural treasures and the rhythmic beat of its music, Cuba captivates travellers.



USEFUL INFORMATION

Please be warned that tourism service standards in Cuba are generally inferior to those in South and Central America countries. Please be aware of this in terms of your expectations for the Cuba portion of your itinerary. Some driver/guides may only speak limited English.

ARRIVAL TRANSFERS

On arrival at Havana International Airport, you will be met and assisted with the transfer to your hotel.

Please note that the vehicles used for all transportation in Cuba (with the exception of vintage vehicles) are taxis, as this is a government requirement.

MONEY

You are strongly advised to exchange money or withdraw money from an ATM at Havana Airport on arrival. There are very few ATM's in Cuba and hotels and resorts generally give unfavourable exchange rates.

There are two currencies that circulate in Cuba. Cuban pesos (CUP), which is the official Cuban currency and Convertible pesos (CUC), which is the Cuban substitute for US dollars. 1 CUC = 25 CUP. credit card payments.



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Only exchange money at CADECAs (Casa de Cambio – Exchange Office in English) or at a bank. Do not exchange money on the street under any circumstance. All banks and CADECAs have currency exchange rates on display and they must provide a receipt to clients.

Before travelling to Cuba, you are advised to inform your bank about your trip, to avoid doubts at the first money withdrawal. Visa cards and/or prepaid cash passports are the most convenient methods of obtaining cash in Cuba. Neither should be with an American based bank.

Please note that when exchanging U.S. dollar banknotes, a 10% tax is applied plus a currency exchange fee (3%). For transactions using credit cards, the cards are charged in U.S. dollars plus an extra 3% fee. For credit cards in currencies other than U.S. dollars, the exchange rate of the day will be applied. The 10% tax is not applied to other currencies, bank transfers or credit card payments.

Always bring some cash with you. The best currencies to bring to Cuba are Euros, Canadian Dollars and Sterling Pounds. You may also bring US Dollars, but please note that the above tax will be applied. Only banknotes can be exchanged (no foreign coins) and they should be in perfect condition. No torn or damaged bills will be accepted.

ACCOMMODATION

The hotels in Cuba can be divided into two distinct groups – those run by Cuban hotel chains that are state-run and owned and those run by international chains. The star ratings assigned to Cuban-run hotels are often over generous and as a result misleading, with standards being below accepted international standards. Budget hotels tend to be poorly maintained. Hotels run by Habaguanex, found in Havana only, are generally housed in beautifully restored colonial buildings in the Old Town. The "hostales" or boutique hotels tend to be small, stylish hotels, again often in beautiful old buildings and generally offering good facilities. The international chain hotels tend to offer a higher level of service than the state-run hotels.

Please do not expect standards and service levels to be as high as you may be used to. At times, service may be slow, and the level of maintenance can be limited due to a lack of available resources. Electricity and water supplies can be irregular in Cuba, so you may also experience some issues with hot water supplies, air conditioning and lifts not working. While the hotels do their best, these services are out of their control.

HOMESTAYS & PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION

The concept of private accommodation in Cuba refers roughly to private residences converted to allow paid lodging. This is becoming a very popular option in Cuba, especially due to the limited availability of hotel accommodation. There is no definite or standard style. These private accommodation places differ from one destination to another or from the city to the beach or the countryside. There are large mansions, museum-style colonial houses and extremely simple houses. In many you will not find all the same facilities as in a hotel, especially in the simpler homes. Satellite TV, TV set within the bedroom, safety deposit box, minibar, fridge, and other facilities may be lacking. Air conditioning/fan and hot water on the other hand, are provided, but there can be disruptions in the supply of these services. Most private accommodation hosts have very basic English, but can communicate a little with clients.

Please also note beds are confirmed according to the number of guests. We cannot guarantee specific bed types such as king, queen size or twin beds. This will vary from one property to another.





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FOOD & DRINKING WATER

Tap water in Cuba is generally not safe to drink. If drinking water in restaurants or hotels, you should ensure that it has been boiled. Otherwise you should drink only bottled water. Ensure that you stock up in cities before long car journeys. There are also water purifying treatments such as Micropur, which are very effective.

Be careful if eating street food, as there is no official regulatory system ensuring acceptable hygiene standards. Electricity cuts are common and so defrosted food is often refrozen.

INTERNET & WIFI

Internet is becoming more widely available in Cuba and costs are much lower than they used to be, but Internet connection is restricted and it is still much more difficult to access the Internet in Cuba than in most other countries. Speeds are much slower than in other countries and it is not uncommon for connections to be interrupted without warning.

There is a charge to use the Internet in Cuba and you need to purchase an Internet card. Some hotels have their own Internet cards and although you do not need to be a guest at that hotel to purchase a card, the card can only be used at that particular hotel. Alternatively ETECSA Internet cards (also referred to as public cards) can be purchased in every ETECSA office or sales stand for use at Wi-Fi hot spots. Cards cost either 1 CUC (valid for 1 hour) or 5 CUC (valid for 5 hours). Some private hotels or other providers may sell the same cards at a higher price. To connect to the Internet, you need to scratch the grey panel on the back of the card to access the User Code and Password. Select the ETECSA Wi-Fi on your mobile (this may have your hotel name linked to it) to access the ETECSA webpage. Enter your User Code and Password. You should leave the ETECSA webpage open so that you can disconnect at the end of your session.

You should consult with your telephone provider before leaving your home country to travel to Cuba. If your telephone provider does not have a contract with Cuba, then you will not be able to use your phone here. As you travel away from the cities, the service becomes poorer until you get to dead zones where you will not be able to use your mobile phone at all.

ELECTRICAL SUPPLY

Although the power supply in Cuba is mainly 110V, most of the modern hotels have dual voltage with all the sockets in the rooms being 220V. The standard frequency is 60Hz. The sockets in most hotel rooms are designed so that they will take the North American flat two-pin and the European rounded two-pin plugs. All UK and Australian appliances will work in Cuba with the use of an outlet adapter.

Bathrooms in hotels generally have 110V sockets that are suitable for shavers and charging batteries.

HAZARDS, DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Cuba is a fairly safe country, but crime against tourists is on the increase, especially in Havana. Be careful of pickpocketing and bag snatching, particularly in Habana Vieja. Keep cameras and other valuables concealed wherever possible, wear your bag in front of you in crowded places, only carry the minimum amount of cash and never leave your bags unattended. Theft is also common on beaches, so be vigilant.

At hotels, ensure that any valuables are placed in the hotel security box, if available. Laptops, I-pads and phones are highly sought after and so targets for theft.

Begging is becoming more widespread and touts (juniteros/ juniteras) can be a nuisance.

You should always carry a photocopy of your passport, as the police sometimes ask to see identification.



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Never change money on the street, as you may end up with counterfeit notes, or a confusing mix of national and convertible pesos, or the 'moneychanger' may just take your money and run.

If taking a taxi, ensure you use only registered or tourist taxis and not private or unofficial taxis, especially to/from the airport when you are carrying all of your luggage. It is also advisable to take a taxi at night in Havana as there has been the occasional mugging.

Cuba is a one-party state with a high level of social control and a strong police presence. There are widespread restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly for Cuban nationals and so you should avoid any demonstrations or large public gatherings.

HEALTH CARE & MEDICAL INSURANCE

Cuba has made it obligatory for all foreign visitors to have medical insurance. Random checks are made at the airport, so please ensure that you carry with you a printed copy of your insurance policy.

There are specific hospitals for foreign patients as well as a network of clinics, pharmacies and other health services targeted specifically at tourists, run by Health Services International (Servimed).

Pharmacies in Cuba are generally extremely short on supplies, so you are advised to bring adequate quantities of all medications (prescription and over the counter) to cover your stay in Cuba. A fully stocked medical kit is also recommended.



SHOPPING

The quality and choice of consumer products is still extremely limited throughout Cuba, although the range is slowly starting to increase. Cigars, rum, music, arts and crafts are the main worthwhile purchases. Many shops carry virtually no stock of any description. Some national-peso shops do not allow the entry of foreign customers, giving priority to Cubans.

CLIMATE

Cuba's climate is mainly tropical, with most of the island lying south of the Tropic of Cancer. Northeasterly trade winds blow all year and the Caribbean current brings in warm water from the equator.

November to April tend to be the drier months, with the rainy season running from May to October, the hottest months of the year. Most of the rain occurs in the afternoon, usually only for short periods.

Cuba's average temperature throughout the year is between 20 and 35°C, sometimes dropping to as low as 10°C in the short winter. The eastern side is generally warmer than the west. Temperatures are a little cooler in the mountains, so if you are visiting places such as Topes de Collantes, we recommend that you pack a light sweater or fleece jacket.

Cuba lies in the path of hurricanes and is subject to these destructive storms on the east coast from August to November, but they are most common in September and October. In general Cuba averages one hurricane every other year.

A strong sun block and a hat are a must, especially between May and October. No matter what time of year you travel to Cuba, it is advisable to carry a rain jacket with you and wear cotton clothes for comfort.



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	Av. Max Temp (°C)	Av. Min Temp (°C)	Av. Rainfall (mm)
January	26	18	64
February	26	18	54
March	28	19	44
April	29	20	59
May	30	22	118
June	31	23	177
July	32	23	124
August	32	23	133
September	31	23	166
October	30	22	175
November	28	20	76
December	26	18	54

Enjoy your journey!

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us!

The Team at Chimu Adventures

