

# Cuba

## Country Specific Information



[Recent USINT Havana Notices for American Citizens](#)



April 30, 2012

**COUNTRY DESCRIPTION:** Cuba is an authoritarian state which controls most aspects of Cuban life through the Communist Party, its affiliated mass organizations, and the state security apparatus. The Communist Party is constitutionally recognized as Cuba's only legal political party and the Ministry of Interior is the principal organ of state security and control. The Cuban government routinely employs repressive methods against internal dissent and monitors and responds to perceived threats to its authority. These methods include intense physical and electronic surveillance, and in some cases may involve detention and interrogation of both Cuban citizens and foreign visitors. Travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and permanent residents is restricted by U.S. law and regulations, and travelers generally must obtain a license or qualify for an existing license from the Department of Treasury. Such licenses restrict the activities and transactions in which U.S. citizens and residents may engage while in Cuba. Licensed U.S. travelers visiting Cuba should be aware that any on-island activities could be subject to surveillance, and their contacts with Cuban citizens monitored closely. The United States Government, which does not maintain full diplomatic relations with Cuba, is represented by the U.S. Interests Section (USINT) in Havana, which provides a range of consular and other services. U.S. diplomats, however, are not allowed to travel freely outside the capital and may be prevented from providing assistance to U.S. citizens outside Havana. Read the Department of State [Background Notes on Cuba](#) for additional information.

[Back to Top](#)

**SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM (STEP) / EMBASSY LOCATION:** The United States does not maintain full diplomatic relations with Cuba. Consular and other services are provided to the extent possible by the U.S. Interests Section (USINT). USINT is limited in its

capacity to provide protection or routine consular services to U.S. citizens in Cuba because the Cuban government restricts U.S. diplomatic travel to the city of Havana. Additionally, the Cuban government in most instances does not recognize the U.S. citizenship of Cuban-American nationals for consular purposes and denies U.S. officials consular access to such individuals. U.S. citizens who travel to Cuba are encouraged to contact and enroll with USINT's American Citizen Services section.

U.S. citizens who [enroll through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana may obtain updated information on travel and security within the country. There is no access to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay from within Cuba. The U.S. Embassy in Kingston, Jamaica handles consular issues for Guantanamo Bay. For further information on Guantanamo Bay, please contact the U.S. Embassy in Kingston by telephone at (876) 929-5374.

Switzerland serves as the protecting power for U.S. interests in Cuba; however, the U.S. Interests Section is not co-located with the Swiss Embassy. The U.S. Interests Section is located in Havana at Calzada between L and M Streets, Vedado; telephone numbers (537) 833-3551 through 833-3559. Hours are Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For emergency assistance after hours and on weekends, individuals should call (537) 833-2302 or (535) 280-5791 and request to speak with the duty officer. Routine information is available through the American Citizen Services office of [the U.S. Interests Section](#).

USINT staff members provide briefings on U.S.-Cuba policy to U.S. citizen individuals and groups visiting Cuba. These briefings or meetings can be arranged through USINT's Public Diplomacy Office.

**Cuban Requirements for Authorized Travelers:** The Cuban government requires a valid passport and visa for entry into Cuba. Although Cuba may issue visas upon arrival to U.S. citizens, the U.S. government strongly recommends that all travelers to Cuba, including religious workers, obtain the appropriate type of visa ahead of time and, if required, specific authorization from Cuban authorities in order to avoid any potential problems with documentation upon arrival in Cuba. Attempts to enter or exit Cuba illegally, or to aid the irregular exit of Cuban nationals or other persons, are contrary to Cuban law and may be punishable by stiff jail terms. Entering Cuban territory, territorial waters or airspace (within 12 nautical miles of the Cuban coast) without prior authorization from the Cuban government may result in arrest or other enforcement action by Cuban authorities. Immigration violators are subject to prison terms ranging from four years for illegal entry or exit to as many as 30 years for aggravated cases of alien smuggling.

The Cuban government requires individuals visiting Cuba to engage only in activities authorized under the category for which the Cuban visa is issued (e.g. religious, educational, etc.). Participating in activities that go beyond the reason for which a visa is granted may result in arrest or other enforcement action by Cuban authorities. Visa violations are subject to lengthy prison terms ranging up to 25 years or more. In recent years, the Cuban government has detained U.S. citizens suspected of visa violations for engaging in activities it perceives as counterrevolutionary or subversive to state security. In 2009, the Cuban government arrested a U.S. citizen who was in Cuba facilitating access to the internet. In 2011, he was convicted of crimes against the security of the state and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

[Back to Top](#)

**ENTRY / EXIT REQUIREMENTS, TRAVEL TRANSACTION LIMITATIONS:** The U.S. Department

of the Treasury enforces the Cuban Assets Control Regulations, which apply to all U.S. citizens and permanent residents wherever they are located, all people and organizations physically located in the United States, and branches and subsidiaries of U.S. organizations throughout the world. The regulations require that persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction be licensed in order to engage in any travel-related transactions pursuant to travel to, from, and within Cuba. Transactions related to travel for tourist activities are not licensable. This restriction also prohibits tourist travel to Cuba from or through a third country such as Mexico or Canada. U.S. law enforcement authorities enforce these regulations at U.S. airports and pre-clearance facilities in third countries. Travelers who fail to comply with Department of the Treasury regulations could face civil penalties and criminal prosecution upon return to the United States.

Cuba requires visitors to have non-U.S. medical insurance and sells a temporary policy to those who do not have it. Questions about this insurance requirement should be directed to the [Cuban Interests Section](#). Some HIV/AIDS entry restrictions exist for visitors to and foreign residents of Cuba. Cuban authorities do not demand HIV tests of travelers to Cuba, with the exception of foreign students on scholarships. The Cuban authorities currently accept the results of HIV tests conducted by labs in the United States. Please verify this information with the [Cuban Interests Section](#) in Washington before traveling.

For the latest information on U.S. regulations governing travel to Cuba and to view the most accurate and updated travel restrictions information, please see [the Department of Treasury's OFAC website](#) at <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Pages/cuba.aspx>

**General licenses for Travel:** General licenses are granted to the following categories of travelers, who are permitted to spend money to travel to Cuba and to engage in other transactions directly incident to the purpose of their travel, without the need to obtain a specific license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury's [Office of Foreign Assets Control \(OFAC\)](#) :

- Persons visiting a close relative (any individual related to a person by blood, marriage, or adoption who is no more than three generations removed from that person or from a common ancestor with that person) who is a national of Cuba, and persons traveling with them who share a common dwelling as a family with them. There is no limit on the duration or frequency of such travel. (According to the Cuban Assets Control Regulations, third country nationals who reside in Cuba are considered Cuban nationals.)
- Journalists and supporting broadcasting or technical personnel (regularly employed in that capacity by a news reporting organization and traveling for journalistic activities).
- Official government travelers on official business.
- Members of international organizations of which the United States is also a member (traveling on official business).
- Religious organizations, including members and staff, traveling for the purpose of participating and engaging in religious activities. Organizations may open accounts at Cuban financial institutions for the purpose of accessing funds in Cuba for transactions related to such activities.
- Students and all members of faculty and staff of accredited U.S. graduate and undergraduate degree granting institutions can participate in academic activities in Cuba through any sponsoring U.S. academic institution, not only through the accredited U.S. academic institution at which the student is pursuing a degree, if the traveler's study in Cuba will be accepted for credit toward the student's degree.
- Persons teaching at a Cuban academic institution if regularly employed in a teaching capacity at the sponsoring U.S. academic institution and provided the teaching activities are related to an

academic program at the Cuban institution and the duration of the teaching will be no shorter than 10 weeks.

- Full-time professionals, whose travel transactions are directly related to research in their professional areas, provided that their research: 1) is of a noncommercial, academic nature; 2) comprises a full work schedule in Cuba; and 3) has a substantial likelihood of public dissemination.
- Full-time professionals whose travel transactions are directly related to attendance at professional meetings or conferences in Cuba that are organized by an international professional organization, institution, or association that regularly sponsors such meetings or conferences in other countries. An organization, institution, or association headquartered in the United States may not sponsor such a meeting or conference unless it has been specifically licensed to sponsor it. The purpose of the meeting or conference cannot be the promotion of tourism in Cuba or other commercial activities involving Cuba, or to foster production of any bio-technological products.
- Employees of a U.S. telecommunications services provider or an entity duly appointed to represent such a provider traveling incident to: 1) the commercial marketing, sales negotiation, accompanied delivery, or servicing of authorized telecommunications-related items; or 2) participation in certain telecommunications-related professional meetings for the commercial marketing of, sales negotiation for, or performance under contracts for the provision of telecommunications services, or the establishment of facilities to provide telecommunications services.
- Individuals regularly employed by a producer or distributor of agricultural commodities, medicine, or medical devices or an entity duly appointed to represent such a producer or distributor traveling incident to the commercial marketing, sales negotiation, accompanied delivery, or servicing in Cuba of such items.

#### **Specific Licenses to Visit Close Relatives in Cuba who are non-Cuban nationals:**

Travelers wishing to visit a close relative in Cuba who is authorized to be in Cuba, but is not a national of Cuba or a third country national residing in Cuba, may apply for a specific license from OFAC.

**Specific Licenses for People to People Transactions:** Specific licenses may be issued by OFAC to travelers involved in educational activities under the auspices of an organization that sponsors and organizes such programs to promote people-to-people contact but are not involved in academic study pursuant to a degree program.

#### **Specific Licenses for Educational Institutions:**

Specific licenses may be issued by OFAC to authorize travel transactions incident to an individual's educational activities of certain types. Once an academic institution has applied for and received such a specific license, travelers affiliated with that academic institution are authorized to engage in the following activities without seeking further authorization from OFAC.

- Academic institutions may sponsor or co-sponsor academic seminars, conferences, and workshops related to Cuba or global issues involving Cuba and faculty, staff, and students may attend these events.
- U.S. academic institutions may open accounts at Cuban financial institutions for the purpose of accessing funds in Cuba for transactions related to such events.

#### **Specific Licenses for Religious Organizations:**

Specific licenses may be issued by OFAC to religious organizations for travel related transactions

incident to religious activities that are not authorized by the new general license. Licenses authorizing transactions for multiple trips over an extended period of time are available to applicants with plans to engage in a full-time program of religious activities in Cuba.

Religious travelers to Cuba should be aware that Cuban officials require specific authorization to travel to Cuba for religious purposes. Religious travelers to Cuba should contact the Cuban Interests Section regarding proper authorization to travel to Cuba for religious purposes and should wait for their response before traveling.

**Other Specific Licenses:**

Specific licenses may be issued by OFAC, on a case-by-case basis, authorizing travel transactions by the following categories of persons in connection with the following activities:

- Humanitarian Projects and Support for the Cuban People – 1) Persons traveling in connection with activities that are intended to provide support for the Cuban people, such as activities of recognized human rights organizations; and 2) persons whose travel transactions are directly related to certain humanitarian projects in or related to Cuba that are designed to directly benefit the Cuban people. Licenses authorizing transactions for multiple trips over an extended period of time are available.
- Free-Lance Journalism – Persons with a suitable record of publication who are traveling to Cuba to do research for free-lance journalistic projects. Licenses authorizing transactions for multiple trips over an extended period of time are available for applicants demonstrating a significant record of journalism.
- Professional Research and Professional Meetings – Persons traveling to Cuba to do professional research or to attend a professional meeting that does not meet the requirements of the relevant general license (described above). Licenses authorizing transactions for multiple trips over an extended period of time are available.
- Public Performances, Athletic or Other Competitions, and Exhibitions – Persons traveling to participate in a public performance, athletic or other competition or exhibition. The event must be open for attendance, and in relevant situations, participation by the Cuban public, and all profits from the event after costs must be donated to an independent nongovernmental organization in Cuba or a U.S.-based charity with the objective, to the extent possible, of benefiting the Cuban people.
- Amateur or semi-professional athletes or teams traveling to participate in an athletic competition. The athletes must have been selected for the competition by the relevant U.S. sports federation, and the competition must be one that is open for attendance, and in relevant situations, participation by the Cuban people.
- Clinic or Workshop Participants – Persons traveling to Cuba for the purpose of participating in a clinic or workshop that is being organized and run, at least in part, by the licensee.
- Activities of Private Foundations or Research or Educational Institutions – Persons traveling to Cuba on behalf of private foundations or research or educational institutes that have an established interest in international relations to collect information related to Cuba for noncommercial purposes. Licenses authorizing transactions for multiple trips over an extended period of time are available.
- Exportation, Importation, or Transmission of Information or Informational Materials – Persons traveling to engage in activities directly related to the exportation, importation, or transmission of information or informational materials.
- Licensed Exportation – Persons traveling to Cuba incident to marketing, sales negotiation, accompanied delivery, or servicing in Cuba of exports that appear consistent with the export or

re-export policy of the Department of Commerce and are not authorized by the general licenses described above.

**Applying for a Specific License:**

Persons wishing to travel to Cuba under a specific license should send a letter specifying the details of the proposed travel, including any accompanying documentation, to the Licensing Division, Office of Foreign Assets Control, U.S. Department of the Treasury, 1500 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20220. Academic institutions wishing to obtain one of the two-year specific licenses described above should send a letter to the same address requesting such a license and establishing that the institution is accredited by an appropriate national or regional accrediting association. Religious organizations wishing to obtain one of the specific licenses described above should send a letter to the same address requesting such a license and setting forth examples of religious activities to be undertaken in Cuba.

The United States maintains a broad embargo against trading with Cuba, and most commercial imports from Cuba are prohibited by law. Sales of items in certain sectors, including medicine, medical devices and supplies, and agricultural commodities, have been approved for export by specific legislation. The Department of the Treasury may issue licenses on a case-by-case basis authorizing Cuba travel-related transactions directly incident to marketing, sales negotiation, accompanied delivery, and servicing of exports and re-exports that appear consistent with the licensing policy of the Department of Commerce.

Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

Licensing Division  
Office of Foreign Assets Control  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Treasury Annex  
Washington, DC 20220  
Telephone (202) 622-2480; 1-800-540-6322  
Fax (202) 622-1657

Internet users can also log onto [the Department of Treasury's OFAC website](#).

**Civilian Aircraft Travel:** The Cuban Air Force shot down two U.S.-registered civilian aircraft in international airspace in 1996. As a result of this action, the President of the United States and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued an "Emergency Cease and Desist Order and Statement of Policy," which allows for vigorous enforcement action against U.S.-registered aircraft that violate Cuban airspace. For additional information on restrictions on aircraft flying between the United States and Cuba, see [the FAA's web site](#).

For current information on Cuban entry and customs requirements, travelers should contact:

Cuban Interests Section (an office of the Cuban government)  
2630 16th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Telephone (202) 797-8518/8520  
Fax (202) 797-8521  
Consular Section (part of the Cuban Interests Section)  
2639 16th Street NW

Washington, DC 20009

Telephone (202) 797-8609/8610/8615

Fax (202) 986-7283}

### **Temporary Sojourn License:**

Exports of aircraft or vessels on temporary sojourn to Cuba will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Temporary sojourn licenses are not available for pleasure boaters. Additional information is available at [the Bureau of Industry and Security website](#). Vessels of the United States, as defined in 33 CFR §107.200, may not enter Cuban territorial waters without advance permission from the U.S. Coast Guard. The U.S. Coast Guard provides permission information at (305) 415-6920.

[Back to Top](#)

**THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY:** The security environment in Cuba is relatively stable and characterized by a strong military and police presence throughout the country. Demonstrations against the United States are more infrequent and smaller than in past years, are usually approved and monitored by the Cuban Government, and are generally peaceful in nature. The same cannot be said about state-organized demonstrations against domestic opposition groups, which can be violent. U.S. citizens should avoid all demonstrations. Cuba tightly restricts the departure of its citizens, although illegal departures are not uncommon. Hijackings of vessels to depart Cuba are much less common. The United States Government has publicly and repeatedly announced that any person who hijacks (or attempts to hijack) an aircraft or vessel (whether common carrier or other) will face the maximum penalties pursuant to U.S. law, regardless of that person's nationality.

In recent years, the Cuban government has detained U.S. citizens it suspects of engaging in activities perceived to undermine state security. In 2011, it convicted a U.S. citizen of crimes against the security of the state and sentenced the individual to 15 years in prison after being detained for 14 months without charge. U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba should be aware that the Cuban Government can detain anyone at anytime for any purpose and should not expect that justice will be carried out according to international norms and practice.

Cuban territorial waters are extremely dangerous and difficult to navigate, even for experienced mariners. The potential for running aground is very high and the bottom type is unforgiving. Search and rescue capability in Cuba is limited and running aground will often lead to the complete destruction and loss of the vessel. U.S. boaters who enter Cuban waters (legitimately or illegitimately) have encountered problems that required repairs and/or salvage; costs for both are significantly higher than comparable services in the United States or elsewhere in the Caribbean. In addition, the Government of Cuba does not allow the use of the U.S. dollar for transactions and U.S. credit cards are not accepted in Cuba. Cuban authorities typically hold boats as collateral payment. U.S.-registered/flagged vessels belonging to U.S. citizens have been permanently seized by Cuban authorities. Due to the lack of resources, the quality of repairs in Cuba is inconsistent. Repairs take significantly longer in Cuba than they would in the United States due to lack of the most basic materials and to bureaucratic impediments. Boaters are often confined to their boats while repairs are made. Boaters can be detained while Cuban authorities investigate the circumstances of their entry to Cuba, especially if their travel documents are not in order or they are suspected of illegal activities. Mariners and their passengers should not navigate close to Cuban territorial waters without possessing a valid passport, unless seeking a safe port due to

emergencies. The ability of the U.S. Interests Section to assist mariners in distress is extremely limited due to current limitations on travel by U.S. personnel outside of Havana. Notifying the U.S. Interests Section, regardless of legitimately or illegitimately entering Cuban territorial seas is the most reliable way to obtain assistance.

The transfer of funds from the United States to Cuba to pay for boat repair and salvage is subject to restrictions codified in U.S. law relating to commercial transactions with the Government of Cuba. A Department of the Treasury license is required for such payments and applicants should be prepared to provide documentary evidence demonstrating the emergency nature of the repairs. U.S. credit or debit cards, personal checks, and travelers' checks cannot be used in Cuba so boaters should be prepared to pay for all transactions in cash. It is difficult to transfer money to Cuba and travelers have frequently been required to spend several hundred dollars for transportation to Havana to receive transferred funds.

For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State [Bureau of Consular Affairs' website](#), which posts current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#), and lists [Worldwide Cautions](#).

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada, or for other callers, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The Department of State urges U.S. citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's pamphlet [A Safe Trip Abroad](#).

[Back to Top](#)

**CRIME:** Official crime statistics are not published by the Cuban government, but reporting by U.S. citizens and other foreign travelers indicates that the majority of incidents are non-violent and theft-related – i.e., pick-pocketing, purse snatching, or the taking of unattended / valuable items. Sources claim, however, that violent crime has increased in Cuba and is generally associated with assaults committed during a burglary or robbery. The U.S. Government cannot confirm this information, but rates the threat of crime in Cuba as medium. In the event of a confrontation, travelers should not resist as perpetrators may be armed. Thefts generally occur in crowded areas such as markets, beaches, and other gathering points, including Old Town Havana and the Prado neighborhood. Travelers should exercise basic situational awareness at all times and are advised not to leave belongings unattended, nor to carry purses and bags loosely over one shoulder.

Visitors should avoid wearing flashy jewelry or displaying large amounts of cash. When possible, visitors should carry a copy of their passport with them and leave the original at a secure location. U.S. visitors should also beware of Cuban "jineteros" (hustlers) who specialize in swindling tourists. While most jineteros speak English and go out of their way to appear friendly, e.g., by offering to serve as tour guides or to facilitate the purchase of cheap cigars, many are in fact professional criminals who may resort to violence in their efforts to acquire tourists' money and other valuables. When exchanging currency, use state-run offices to convert dollars and avoid independent/street vendors as we have seen a slight increase in the number of persons trying to pass counterfeit bills at the Interests Section.



All travelers should ensure that valuables remain under their personal control at all times and are never put into checked baggage.

[Back to Top](#)

**VICTIMS OF CRIME:** The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. If you are the victim of a crime while in Cuba, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the U.S. Interests Section for assistance. The Interests Section staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends and explain how funds may be transferred. However, U.S. diplomats' travel is restricted to inside Havana and may be prevented from providing some assistance to U.S. citizens outside the capital. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in Cuba is: 106 for police and 105 for Fire.

See our information on [Victims of Crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

[Back to Top](#)

**CRIMINAL PENALTIES:** While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Cuba's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Cuba are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Those accused of drug-related and other crimes face long legal proceedings and delayed due process. In one 2009 drug conviction, a U.S. citizen was sentenced to 18 years in prison. Another U.S. citizen was arrested for drugs in 2011 but because he is a dual national, the Cuban Government has refused to grant USINT access to visit.

Criminal penalties are also harsh for foreigners or dual nationals suspected of assisting Cuban migrants who attempt to leave Cuba illegally. Average jail sentences for individuals charged with migrant smuggling range from 10 to 20 years. In a 2007 case, a U.S. citizen was arrested for attempting to facilitate the illegal departure of his Cuban family members via raft. He was charged with migrant smuggling and received a jail sentence of 16 years. A U.S.-Cuba dual national arrested in 2010 was sentenced to 7 years in prison for alien smuggling. The Cuban government considers him Cuban and has denied USINT access to visit him due to his Cuban citizenship.

For more information, please contact the U.S. Interests Section's American Citizens Services Unit at:

U.S. Interests Section

American Citizen Services Unit

Calzada, entre L y M

Vedado, Havana, Cuba

Phone: 53-7-833-3551 (through 3559)

Fax: 53-7-833-1653

Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, prosecutable in the United States. Please see our information on [Criminal Penalties](#).

[Back to Top](#)

**MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION:** Medical care in Cuba does not meet U.S. standards. While medical professionals are generally competent, many health facilities face shortages of medical supplies and bed space. Many medications are unavailable, so travelers to Cuba should bring with them any prescribed medicine in its original container and in amounts commensurate with personal use. Travelers may also wish to consider bringing additional amounts of prescribed medicines and over-the-counter remedies in the event that a return to the United States is delayed for unforeseen reasons. A copy of the prescription and a letter from the prescribing physician explaining the need for prescription drugs may facilitate their entry into the country.

Travelers to the Havana area should be aware that U.S. and other foreign visitors are generally limited to using only the "tourist" Cira Garcia Hospital located in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana. Treatment at Cira Garcia and any other medical consultation requires payment in cash (see section on Medical Insurance below).

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or via the [CDC's website](#). For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult [the World Health Organization's \(WHO\) website](#). Further health information for travelers is available at [the WHO's international travel and health web page](#).

[Back to Top](#)

**MEDICAL INSURANCE:** As of May 1, 2010, tourists, foreigners with temporary residence in Cuba, and Cubans living abroad who visit Cuba have to purchase medical insurance. The insurance is sold by foreign companies approved by the Cuban government or by Cuban firms at the ports of entry in Cuba according to Cuba's Official Gazette. Diplomats and representatives of accredited international organizations do not have to be insured.

Questions about this requirement should be directed to [the Cuban Interests Section](#). For more information, travelers may also wish to visit the website for [Cuba's Travel Insurance Agency, Asistur S.A.](#)

No medical facility in Cuba will accept U.S. issued insurance cards, credit cards, or checks and medical services must be paid for in cash. The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Please see our information on [medical insurance overseas](#).

[Back to Top](#)

**TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS:** While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Cuba is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road; speed limits are sometimes posted and generally respected in urban areas. Passengers in automobiles are generally required to wear seatbelts, and all motorcyclists are required to wear helmets.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that accidents involving motor vehicles are now the leading cause of accidental death in Cuba. Many accidents involve motorists striking pedestrians or bicyclists. Drivers found responsible for accidents resulting in serious injury or death are subject to prison terms of up to 10 years, and Cuban authorities may prohibit drivers of rental cars who are involved in accidents from leaving the country until all claims associated with an accident are settled. Witnesses to vehicular accidents may not be permitted to leave Cuba until an investigation into the accident has been completed.

Taxis are available in busy commercial and tourist areas; radio-dispatched taxis are generally clean and reliable. Travelers should be cautious in sharing information with taxi drivers or other strangers. In addition, travelers should not accept rides in unlicensed taxis as they may be used by thieves to rob passengers. Buses designated for tourist travel, both between and within cities, generally meet international standards for both cleanliness and safety. Public buses used by Cubans, known as "guaguas," are crowded and unreliable and are havens for pickpockets. These public buses usually will not offer rides to foreign visitors.

Although popular with tourists, the three-wheeled, yellow-hooded "Co-Co" taxis are highly unsafe and should be avoided. "Co-Co" taxis are modified motorcycles that reach speeds of up to 40 mph, but have no seat belts or other safety features.

Drivers should exercise extreme care. Although the main arteries of Havana are generally well-maintained, secondary streets often are not. Many roads and city streets are unlit, making night driving dangerous, especially as some cars and most bicycles lack running lights or reflectors. Street signage tends to be insufficient and confusing. Many Cuban cars are old, in poor condition and lack turn signals and other standard safety equipment.

The principal Cuban east-west highway is in good condition, but it lacks lights and extends only two-thirds of the way from Havana to the eastern tip of the island. The principal highway to the east is in poor condition in many areas, with washed out sections and deep potholes. Road signage on highways is minimal. Night driving should be strictly avoided outside urban areas. Secondary rural roads are narrow, and some are in such bad condition as to be impassable by cars. Due to the rarity of cars on rural roads, pedestrians, bicycles, horse-drawn carts, and farm equipment operators wander onto the roads without any regard to possible automobile traffic. Unfenced livestock constitute another serious road hazard.

Rental car agencies provide roadside assistance to their clients as a condition of the rental contract. Cuban authorities may prohibit drivers of rental cars who are involved in accidents from leaving the country, even if they are injured and require medical evacuation, until all claims associated with an accident are settled.

Travelers should not permit unauthorized persons to drive the rental vehicle. Automobile renters are provided telephone numbers to call in Havana or in other places where they might be motoring; agencies generally respond as needed with tow trucks and/or mechanics. A similar service is available to foreign residents of Cuba who insure cars with the National Insurance Company.

Please refer to our [Road Safety](#) page for more information.

[Back to Top](#)

**AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT:** As there is no direct commercial air service to the United States by carriers registered in Cuba, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed Cuba's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards. For more information, travelers may visit [the FAA's website](#).

The U.S. Interests Section has instructed its employees and official visitors to avoid domestic or international travel on Cuban air carriers, including the Cuban flag carrier Cubana de Aviación, whenever possible due to serious concerns regarding Cuba's ability to meet international safety oversight standards. U.S. citizens considering travel on any Cuban airline may wish to defer their travel or pursue an alternative means of transportation.

[Back to Top](#)

**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** Photographing military or police installations or personnel, or harbor, rail, and airport facilities is forbidden.

### **Dual Nationality**

The Government of Cuba does not recognize the U.S. nationality of U.S. citizens who are born in Cuba and may not recognize the U.S. nationality of those born in the U.S. to Cuban parents.

These individuals are treated as Cuban citizens and may be subject to a range of restrictions and obligations, including military service. The Cuban government may require U.S.-Cuban dual citizens ("dual nationals") to enter and depart Cuba using a Cuban passport. Using a Cuban passport for this purpose does not jeopardize one's U.S. citizenship; however, such persons must use their U.S. passport to enter and depart the United States. In some instances, dual nationals may be required to obtain exit permission from the Cuban government in order to return to the United States. There have been cases of dual nationals being forced by the Cuban government to surrender their U.S. passports. Despite these restrictions, dual nationals who fall ill may only be treated at hospitals for foreigners (except in emergencies). See the Consular Access paragraph below for information on Cuba's denial of consular services to dual nationals who have been arrested, as well as the Children's Issues paragraph below for information on how [dual nationality](#) may affect welfare inquiries and custody disputes.

Dual nationals should be especially wary of any attempt by Cuban authorities to compel them to sign "repatriation" documents. The Government of Cuba views a declaration of repatriation as a legal statement on the part of the dual national that she/he intends to resettle permanently in Cuba.

In several instances, the Government of Cuba has seized the U.S. passports of dual nationals signing declarations of repatriation and has denied these individuals permission to return to the United States.

### **Consular Access**

U.S. citizens are encouraged to carry a copy of their U.S. passport with them at all times so that, if questioned by local officials, proof of identity and U.S. citizenship is readily available. The original should be kept in a secure location, preferably in a safe or locked suitcase.

Cuba does not recognize the right of the U.S. Government to protect Cuban-born U.S. citizens, whom the Cuban government views as Cuban citizens only. Cuban authorities consistently fail to

notify the U.S. Interests Section of the arrest of dual nationals and may deny U.S. consular officers access to them. They also withhold information concerning the welfare and treatment of dual nationals.

### **Currency Regulations**

Since November 2004, the U.S. dollar has not been accepted for commercial transactions. U.S. issued debit and credit cards also are not accepted in Cuba. The Cuban government requires the use of convertible Cuban pesos or non-convertible Cuban pesos (“moneda nacional”) for all transactions. The official exchange rate for convertible Cuban pesos (CUC) is 1 USD = 1 CUC, however the Cuban government charges a 10 percent fee for exchanging U.S. dollars and assesses other transaction fees (approximately 3 percent), making the effective exchange rate at hotels, the airport, and currency exchange houses 1 USD = 0.87 CUC. The current exchange rate for CUC to non-convertible Cuban pesos (CUP) is 1 CUC = 24 CUP.

### **Cuba-Related Travel Transactions**

Only persons whose travel falls into the categories mentioned above (under “Entry Requirements/Travel Transaction Limitations”) may be authorized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury to spend money related to travel to, from, or within Cuba. Persons licensed to engage in travel-related transactions in Cuba may spend up to the State Department Travel Per Diem Allowance for Havana, Cuba, for purchases directly related to travel in Cuba, such as hotel accommodations, meals, local transportation, and goods personally used by the traveler in Cuba (travelers can find the current per diem rate at [the State Department's website](#) ). Most licensed travelers may also spend additional money for transactions directly related to the activities for which they received their license. For example, journalists traveling in Cuba under the journalism general license (described above) may spend money over and above the current per diem for extensive local transportation and other costs that are directly related to covering a story in Cuba. Purchases of services unrelated to travel or a licensed activity, such as non-emergency medical services, are prohibited. The purchase of publications and other information materials is not restricted.

### **General licenses for Remittances**

U.S. persons aged 18 or older may send remittances to a close relative in Cuba or to a Cuban national in a third country, provided that no member of the household is a prohibited official of the Government of Cuba or a prohibited member of the Cuban Communist Party. (The term “prohibited official of the Government of Cuba” means: Ministers and Vice-Ministers, members of the Council of State, and the Council of Ministers; members and employees of the National Assembly of People’s Power; members of any provincial assembly; local sector chiefs of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution; sub-Directors General, Directors General and higher officials of all Cuban ministries and state agencies; employees of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT); employees of the Ministry of Defense (MINFAR); secretaries and first secretaries of the Confederation of Labor of Cuba (CTC) and its component unions; chief editors, editors, and deputy editors of Cuban state-run media organizations and programs, including newspapers, television, and radio; and members and employees of the Supreme Court (Tribuno Supremo Nacional). The term “prohibited members of the Cuban Communist Party” means: members of the Politburo, the Central Committee, Department Heads of the Central Committee; employees of the Central Committee; and secretaries and first secretaries of the provincial Party central committees.) There is no limit on the amount of such remittances or the frequency with which they may be sent. Authorized family travelers may carry up to \$3000 of their own family remittances to Cuba. Carrying remittances on behalf of others is prohibited.

U.S. persons are also authorized to send two one-time \$1,000 emigration related remittances per payee to enable the payee to emigrate from Cuba to the United States. The U.S. person can send a maximum of \$1,000 prior to payee receiving a valid visa issued by the State Department or other approved U.S. immigration documents and a maximum of \$1,000 after payee has received a valid visa issued by the State Department or other approved U.S. immigration documents. A remitter must be able to provide the visa recipient's full name, date of birth, visa number, and visa date of issuance at the time this remittance is sent.

U.S. persons can remit up to \$500 in any consecutive three-month period to any Cuban national, except prohibited officials of the Government of Cuba or prohibited members of the Cuban Communist Party, to support the development of private businesses, among other purposes.

U.S. persons can send unlimited remittances to religious organizations in Cuba in support of religious activities.

A U.S. person sending remittances to close relatives who are students in Cuba, pursuant to an educational license, for the purpose of funding transactions is authorized to do so per the license under which the student is traveling.

**Specific licenses for Remittances** Specific licenses may be issued by OFAC, on a case-by-case basis, authorizing the following activities:

A U.S. person sending remittances to a person in Cuba, directly or indirectly, for transactions to facilitate non-immigrant travel by an individual in Cuba to the United States under circumstances where humanitarian need is demonstrated, including but not limited to illness or other medical emergency.

A U.S. person sending remittances to independent nongovernmental entities in Cuba including but not limited to prodemocracy groups and civil society groups, and to members of such groups or organizations, or to individuals or independent non-governmental entities to support the development of private businesses, including small farms.

Remittances may be made from a depository institution or licensed Remittance Forwarder. They may not be couriered by third parties.

U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens are prohibited from using credit cards in Cuba. U.S. credit card companies do not accept vouchers from Cuba, and Cuban shops, hotels and other places of business do not accept U.S. credit cards. Neither personal checks nor travelers' checks drawn on U.S. banks are accepted in Cuba. Please see our information on [Customs Information](#).

### **Exportation of Accompanied Baggage**

As of September 3, 2009, there is no longer a weight limit on the accompanied baggage per traveler.

### **What Can Be Brought Back**

If U.S. travelers return from Cuba with goods of Cuban origin, such goods, with the exception of informational materials, may be seized at Customs' discretion [Section 515.204 of the Regulations]. Cuban cigars and rum are routinely confiscated at U.S. ports of entry. Purchasing Cuban cigars and rum in a "duty-free" shop at the Havana Airport does not exempt them from seizure by U.S. Customs. There are no limits on the import or export of informational materials [Section 515.206 of the Regulations]. Information and informational materials such as books, films, artworks, posters, photographs, tapes, CDs and certain artwork are statutorily exempt from

regulation under the embargo and may be transported freely; however, blank tapes and CDs are not considered informational materials and may be seized. To be considered informational material, artworks must be classified under Chapter subheading 9701, 9702, or 9703 of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States (for example, original paintings, drawings, pastels, engravings, prints, and sculptures are all exempt.)

### **Fair Business Practices**

Anyone authorized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury to provide Cuban travel services or services in connection with sending money to Cuba is prohibited from participating in the discriminatory practices of the Cuban government against individuals or particular classes of travelers. The assessment of consular fees by the Cuban government, which are applicable worldwide, is not considered to be a discriminatory practice; however, requiring the purchase of services not desired by the traveler is prohibited. Information provided to the U.S. Department of the Treasury regarding arbitrary fees, payments for unauthorized purposes, or other possible violations will be handled confidentially. Please see our [Customs Information](#).

[Back to Top](#)

**CHILDREN'S ISSUES:** Cuba does not allow adoption of children by U.S. citizens. Additionally, the Government of Cuba does not recognize dual citizenship. It considers children who maintain both Cuban and American citizenship to be Cuban citizens. Consequently, it is often difficult for U.S. consular officers to ascertain the welfare and whereabouts of U.S.-Cuba dual citizen children living with their Cuban parents or relatives. In the event of a custody dispute, the U.S. citizen parent may need to pursue a legal hearing in Cuba with the assistance of a Cuban attorney. The U.S. Interests Section can provide to interested parties a list of attorneys practicing in the Havana area. For more information, see our Office of Children's Issues web pages on [intercountry adoption](#) and [international parental child abduction](#).

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for the child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry/departure.

Information about [dual nationality](#) or the prevention of [international child abduction](#) can be found on our web site. For further information about customs regulations, please read our [Customs Information](#) sheet. For further information about [dual nationality](#) and Cuba, please see below ("Special Circumstances").

[Back to Top](#)

\* \* \*

This replaces the Country Specific Information for Cuba dated April 29, 2010 to update the sections on Country Description, Exit/Entry Requirements and Travel Transactions, Safety and Security, Crime, Information for Victims of Crime, Medical Insurance, Special Circumstances, Criminal Penalties and Children's Issues.

[Back to Top](#)