



CUBA TRAVEL TIPS

We are delighted that you have decided to travel with Ayelet Tours and Cuba Travel Services to Cuba! This trip will be precious to you for the rest of your life. The memories and the understanding that you will gain from this will be second to none.

Below you will find Ayelet Tours' "Cuba Travel Tips". These have been compiled to help make certain that you have a pleasant and worry free experience. Please read it carefully and then begin to pack your suitcase.

Please remember, this is Cuba! Expect delays... You will journey back in time... and nothing happens quickly here.

All of us at Ayelet Tours wish you a safe and happy journey as you travel through Cuba.

• OFAC LICENSING & ITINERARY

- **Full-Time Schedule & Participation:** Your Cuba experience will be different than other programs or tours on which you may have previously participated. This program, per licensing requirements, is a full-time educational program with lots of inclusions. In order to fully experience the destination through its people, there will be little free time on most days of this tour. You will have some down time in the evenings on days when dinner is not included.
- **Itinerary NOTE:** US law requires that all participants of this program adhere to the full time schedule of people-to-people activities. Deviation from this itinerary, even in part, is not permitted. Specific itinerary inclusions, visits, meetings with individuals and organizations, and home visits are dependent on outside factors and it may sometimes be necessary to substitute with alternatives of equal relevance and interest.
- **Flexibility:** In Cuba, things work differently and some activities that have been scheduled far in advance sometimes become unavailable for a number of different reasons. It is extremely important to go into this experience with a very open mind. The purpose of the trip is to have meaningful interactions with the locals. Your guide will be good at swapping out activities for others when needed, but don't be disappointed if things change, because they will! Enjoy every moment of it and try to make the most out of this once in a lifetime opportunity to visit a country that has been off limits for Americans for so long.
- **People-to-People Interactions:** As these sort of interactions are a key component of your program, on many occasions it will be up to you (the passenger) to involve yourself in conversations and interactions with the locals to gain as much knowledge as possible about the country and the people. The tour guide will facilitate many of these interactions, but it is always a good idea to ask questions and utilize the guide as best as possible in order to get the most out of the experience. Though sometimes the people with whom you'll interact may not speak English, you'd be surprised at how much you can communicate by using body language or having the guide translate.



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- **Keeping documents on file:** As part of the requirements under the license, each traveler should keep a copy of their travel itinerary and airline ticket receipt on file for 5 years, in case it is requested by US officials.
- **Asistur Stamp:** This medical insurance is included for all travelers from the US to Cuba for emergencies. Havanatur, our representative on the ground in Cuba, will assist if any medical services are needed while on tour.
- **Authorization Letter by sponsoring organization:** You may be asked for this upon returning by US immigration and customs officials. A copy of this letter is included with your documents packet.
- **Passport Copy -** Good to keep these at all times with you as ID, but leave original in the hotel safe, unless exchanging money. Make sure to leave a copy at home with a relative.
- **FLIGHTS TO CUBA**
 - **Luggage:** Baggage allowances differ based on the airline on which you are flying. Please check with your tour operator for the most current baggage restrictions for your group. Final baggage allowances will be advised in your travel documents packets, which are sent approximately 2-4 weeks prior to departure.
 - **Check-In:** A specific check-in time and location will be assigned to the group, and will be provided in your travel documents packets. You must go directly to the group check-in area where one of our group coordinators will assist you and will hand out the Cuban visa / customs paperwork. It is very important to be on time for this meeting!
- **DO NOT FORGET TO PACK:**
 - Sunscreen and Sun Hats
 - Comfortable Clothing and walking shoes (casual attire)
 - Medications and OTC drugs (Band-Aids, pain relievers, stomach/travel sickness medications etc)
 - **CASH** (Credit cards are not accepted and ATM machines are not available for US cards)
 - Sunglasses
 - Hand sanitizer (many public restrooms do not have hand soap available)
 - Wash Cloths (not provided at most hotels)
 - Tissues/Toilet Paper (good to have your own at public restrooms, as many facilities do not have it. A bathroom assistant may charge for paper so having small coins on hand is useful. Also, please be aware that many public restrooms in Cuba do not have toilet seats, so please be prepared)
 - Bug Spray





- **MONEY**

- **2 Currencies:** there are two types of currencies in Cuba. The first is the Cuban Peso, used primarily by the locals for basic staples. The second is the CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso), which is the currency mostly used by tourists. It is important to make sure you are getting back the right change in the right currency when making purchases.
- **Exchange:** You can exchange USD for CUC at the airport, the hotels, exchange bureaus in town centers and some banks. The current fee for exchanging is 13%, i.e. for \$100 USD you will get 87 CUC. The fee is the same no matter where you exchange your currency. You will need your passport to exchange money. In Cuba, they will not accept money that is torn or written on when exchanging into CUC. When exchanging money into CUC, try to get small denominations to make purchases easier, as many places (little stores, bars, and restaurants) do not always have the possibility to change larger denominations for you. **NOTE:** If bringing/changing US dollars into CUCs, you will be subject to significant additional tax/commission on USD. As an alternative, the best currencies to bring are Euros, Canadian Dollars, or Sterling, since these are the most common and the exchange rates are generally quite reasonable. Bear in mind that the CUC is pegged to the US Dollar (at 1:1 before the tax) so a stronger US Dollar means a stronger CUC (and hence fewer CUCs for your Euros/Sterling etc.).
- **Credit Cards & Traveler's Checks:** US-issued credit cards, debit cards, and ATM cards are mostly **NOT** accepted in Cuba; although this is changing with new regulations. As of now, Mastercard is working to allow credit purchases within Cuba and more and more companies/places may soon start to accept credit cards for purchases or withdrawals, **but not quite yet!** It is necessary to bring cash in order to make purchases in Cuba or to pay for most services. Most places will not take USD, so you must exchange currency upon arriving. Tips however can be given in any currency. Traveler's Checks may also be difficult to cash while in Cuba, and are not recommended.
- **How much to bring:** Though most of the activities and a majority of meals have been included in your program, you should plan to bring additional cash to spend on additional drinks, after-program entertainment, non-included dinners, as well as for any gifts you wish to purchase to take back home or for any extras that may arise. As a general rule, whatever amount you are thinking of bringing, bring a little more (if you think you might need \$500, bring \$700 instead), as you will not be able to rely on credit cards should you find you did not bring enough.
- **GIFTS / AID TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Because this is a Humanitarian Mission, it is customary for each participant/couple to bring personal gifts and/or aid to distribute to the locals along the way. Below are some suggestions for items most in need by the Cuban people. Please understand that the needs to the people change as time goes by and if a particular person or group cannot use what you have brought at that time, they barter between the communities for what they do need. So each and every item received is very much appreciated.

 - **Small gifts for children:** It is ok to bring small items such as pens, markers, coloring books, small toys to give out to local kids, or hard to find items such as art supplies. The Patranato in Havana especially is in need for their Sunday school children.





- **Medications:** Over-the-counter medications (Liquid/infant Tylenol, allergy medications, cold remedies, vitamins, etc. are very hard to find in Cuba and are much needed. If you have access to samples of prescription medications (such as blood pressure medication, or diabetes medication), they are also in high demand.
 - **Medical supplies:** Blood pressure monitors, syringes (for insulin (5cc and 10 cc), walkers, canes, wheelchairs etc. are in very high demand. If you are willing, you could come in using the wheelchair or cane as if it were your own and then donate once there!
 - **Toiletries:** Soaps, shampoo, conditioner, face wash, shaving creams, etc. are all popular items. \$100 can go a very long way in the dollar store or CVS and would make wonderful gifts (even travel sized items are much appreciated!)
 - **Clothing and undergarments:** Especially for the elderly, who have very little income opportunity in Cuba, the Sephardic Temple in Havana hosts a wonderful Senior Center and can distribute much needed items to those in the community.
 - **Print and video materials:** Many communities have expressed the need for movies, books, and magazines translated into Spanish. Copies of Hadassah Magazine especially would be appreciated, as well as Jewish prayer books and/or text.
 - **IMPORTANT:** If you are asked at the customs area in Cuba, you are NOT BRINGING DONATIONS; please say that you have some small gifts to hand out. Donations require prior authorization and are usually given in large quantities, so this is not what you are bringing.
 - If possible, when packing your suitcases, try to make a number of small/individual bundles, so that it is easy to find and distribute your gifts as you go. In some cases, donations may be collected by your tour director upon arrival in Cuba and divided for the best possible distribution amongst the various communities with whom you will be visiting.
 - It is advised to refrain from giving gifts out to children in the streets on a one-to-one basis (especially in Trinidad). This encourages the children to skip school and wait for tourist groups and also has the potential to draw a large crowd, which can be uncomfortable for tour passengers on a tight schedule. However, if you have the space in your purse to carry a few pens, Purell, or travel-sized bars of soap, they make great “street gifts” for those that may ask on the spot.
- **CALLS AND INTERNET**
 - **Cell Phones:** US cell phones with Verizon Wireless plans now work in Cuba. AT&T and Sprint will also soon work and others will soon follow, however rates are still very expensive. Please check directly with your cell provider before departure. As a foreigner it is possible to rent a local sim card at ETECSA offices throughout for use on your own unlocked phone, though keep in mind that visiting these facilities is not easy to coordinate with your schedule, and can become very pricey. Our best suggestion is to rent a Cuban-capable cell phone, either in advance or at the airport in Havana when you land in Cuba. While also pricey, it is considerably less expensive than international Cuban roaming fees.
 - **Calling Home:** It is possible to call home from your hotel by visiting the business center or dialing direct from your room. If you wish to use the phone in your room, you will need to leave a cash-deposit at the front desk, so that they activate your line. It can be expensive to call home, sometimes more than 3 CUC per minute, and connection charges may also apply.





- **Internet:** Wi-Fi is not available throughout Cuba except at some hotels. Most hotels also have a business center with computer, with limited hours, where internet service is available. Charges can be up to 12 CUC per hour depending on the hotel. Because of the limited technology in Cuba, it is not uncommon to have internet outages. Computers also run very slowly.
- **Communication with the US:** Though internet is the best way to communicate with family back at home, you may want to warn them of the difficulty in communications between Cuba and the US. Not only can it be costly, but sometimes business centers are not open at the hours that are convenient to your schedule, internet may be experiencing difficulties, or you may have problems getting a line to the US from Cuba, since they are often rerouted through third countries.
- **ELECTRICITY**
 - **Electric Current:** 220 V at most hotels, though it is common to find both 110 and 220 throughout Cuba. Sometimes both European and American plugs can be used. It is advisable to bring a converter, if your electronics are not travel-ready (105-240 V). You will also need an adapter that changes the prongs from flat to round.



- **Outages:** Though many hotels are well equipped, in Cuba it is possible to experience temporary power outages due to limited resources on the island. Though this seems to be happening less frequently in the past few years.
- **SAFETY**
 - **Safety Deposit Boxes:** Hotels are equipped either with a safe in the room or with safety deposit boxes and may charge a per day fee. Check with the front desk. It is advisable to leave valuables, including passports in the safe. A copy of the passport should suffice for ID purposes. You will however need your passport for exchanging of currency.
 - **Pick-pockets:** Though Cuba is generally a very safe place to travel (more than other parts of the world), it is always best to watch your belongings and beware of pick-pockets and purse snatchers. Leave expensive or highly sentimental jewelry and accessories at home.
 - **Politics:** You never know where anti-Americanism or anti-Semitism is lurking. We suggest you exercise caution and common sense before getting into any heavy political or religious discussions with the locals.



- **TAXIS AND TRANSPORTATION**

- Transportation has been provided while on tour for all included activities. Taxis are available throughout the city and are quite safe. Payment will be in CUC. There are different types of taxis and your local guide in Cuba can explain the difference.

- **FOOD & MEALS**

- **Selection:** Restaurants don't always have as much selection as in the US, menu choices can be limited, but always another option for vegetarians etc. can be arranged (guide will arrange in advance). Most restaurants do offer at least two choices for the main course, which the guide may communicate and take orders for in advance. Everything moves more slowly in Cuba. Please expect each meal to become a leisurely experience. Ordering in advance can speed up the service for larger groups, but this is not always possible.
- **Restaurants:** There are two types of restaurants in Cuba: Government run restaurants and Paladars (privately operated restaurants). On the whole, Paladars tend to be nicer, with a wider selection. For the most part, we try our best to stick with Paladars on your tour, unless an unexpected event requires us to move to a government run restaurant.
- **Breakfast and Other Meals at Hotel:** Breakfast buffets are included and offer lots of variety, sometimes with limited products and different than you may be used to.
- **Beverages:** Most included restaurants on this tour will provide you with one welcome drink (usually a cocktail, such as a mojito, Cuba Libre, etc) and an additional national drink during your meal (examples can be beer, soft drink, water, or juice). Coffee may not always be included after the meal, as some restaurants are not equipped to serve coffee to large parties. Check with the local guide to figure out what options you have for each meal, as not all restaurants are the same. For tea drinkers, it is usually difficult to find tea bags at every restaurant, so you may wish to bring your own tea bags just in case.
- **Snacks:** Plan on bringing some snacks with you during each day. We have a very busy itinerary with very full days, and a little pick-me-up may be wanted from time to time. You may want to bring a small supply of snacks with you from home, but snacks and bottled water are readily available at markets along the way, so you'll be able to stock up as we go.

- **WATER**

- It is best to drink bottled water while in Cuba. You will find that both still and sparkling water are available. Water is purified in many of the hotels and restaurants, however, we do not recommend using tap water at all. Use bottled water to brush your teeth. We do not recommend eating fruit or vegetables from street vendors, unless you can peel them (bananas, oranges).

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- **WEATHER**

- The rainy season in Cuba typically runs from May to October and the dry season is from November to April. Keep in mind that it may however rain at any time, so it is wise to always have rain gear when traveling to Cuba. The temperatures in Cuba can range from the 60's in the winter (though not very common) to the 90's in the summer months. Wear comfortable, cool clothing. It is common to have AC in restaurants, hotels, and other indoor facilities, so layering clothing is advised. Do keep in mind that not all places have AC in Cuba, so sometimes it can also be quite hot. Bring insect repellent as the tropical weather also means mosquitos at dusk and at dawn.

- **US CUSTOMS/RETURN TRIP**

- Upon returning to the US, you will have to go through immigration and customs. Often travelers returning from Cuba are asked additional questions. You may need to provide a copy of the authorization letter that allows you to travel to Cuba (this can be found I your travel documents packet). You may also be asked to undergo additional screening in the customs area, mostly for agricultural products.

- **HOTELS**

- **Standards:** Please note that the star system in Cuba is quite different than that in the US. Expect slightly lower standards at the properties with fewer amenities than you are used to elsewhere, especially in the interior cities such as Cienfuegos and Trinidad. Remember that Cuba has had limited resources for a very long time and they do what they can to try to update their facilities as needed.
- **Outages/AC/Plumbing Issues:** Again because resources in Cuba can be limited, it is not uncommon to have temporary power outages, problems with AC (either being too cold or not working properly), and problems flushing toilets due to lack of pressure, etc. Sometimes water pressure varies as well. Expect the unexpected and you may be pleasantly surprised, as things have been getting better and better in Cuba.

- **TOILETS**

- **Public:** Be prepared with toilet paper and small coins when using public facilities. Avoid throwing away paper into the toilet due to flushing problems. Use the waste basket placed next to the toilets. Many public rest rooms do not have toilet seats, so please be prepared for that eventuality.

- **GENERAL TOUR TIPS**

- Your Cuban guides will be there to assist with any and all matters, including emergencies, additional information required and recommendations, and any problems or concerns while on tour. Make sure you take down their cell phone number as they will not always be staying at the hotel with you. You can reach out to them at any time for assistance.
- Please take into account that, despite the political differences and regulations that Americans must follow when travelling to Cuba, Cuba is a very special destination where the people welcome American tourists respectfully and always try to show you their most authentic traditions and ways of life in a very friendly and courteous manner.
- For the most up-to-date information on recommended vaccines, and other health related suggestions, please visit the CDC's website at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cuba>



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- **EMERGENCIES**

- Please provide your relatives at home with a copy of the trip details page with contact information for the hotels and emergency contact numbers in the US:
- Ayelet Tours Office:
During Office Hours (Monday-Friday 8:30AM – 8:00pm EST): 1.800-237-1517 or 518-783-6001
*24 Hour Emergency line: 646-207-3937
- Travelex Insurance:
From within the US and Canada – 1-866-866-8155.
If outside the US / Canada call collect to the US: Dial 0 and connect to 001-410-308-2903.
- There is a US Embassy in Havana to also assist with any emergencies that may arise while you are there. Their contact information:

U.S. Interests Section/Embassy
Calzada between L & M Streets, Vedado, Havana
Main switchboard (53) (7) 839-4100
Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 PM (closed on U.S. and Cuban Holidays)
Emergencies/After Hours: call main switchboard at (+53)(7)-831-4100, dial 1 to speak with emergency operator

The memories last forever!

Shalom V L'Hitraot

