

## Flights

For the 2017 NCGE Cuba GeoTrip, all participants will book their own flights to/from Cuba. There is plenty of availability since US carriers have been flying direct commercial flights between the US and Cuba since mid 2016. Things to consider when booking your flight:

- The cost of airfare is not included in the program fee. You should expect to pay around \$250 for round-trip airfare between Florida (Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Tampa, etc.) and Cuba.
- We will be arriving in Havana and departing from Santa Clara – a *different* airport several hours away from Havana. You'll need to book your flight accordingly.
- **Arrival in Cuba:** In Havana on July 2, the Havanatur bus will depart the Havana airport for the city around 1:00 pm. Try to arrive in Havana as early as you can on July 2. If you don't arrive in time to catch the bus to Havana, you'll can catch a taxi to the hotel, where one of the program organizers will be waiting for you.
- **Departure from Cuba:** In order to reduce the amount of time we spend on the bus during our week in Cuba, we'll return to the U.S. from Santa Clara, *not* Havana. You'll need to book your return flight to the U.S. from Santa Clara, Cuba (airport code SNU). *Please DO NOT book your return flight from Havana.* As far as we can tell, there are THREE flights between Santa Clara and the US on July 10:
  - JetBlue, Santa Clara to Ft. Lauderdale, Departing at 1pm
  - Southwest, Santa Clara to Ft. Lauderdale, Departing at 4:15pm
  - American, Santa Clara to Miami, Departing at 6:00 pm
- Want to arrive a few days early? No problem. You'll just need to catch up with the group on Sunday, July 2. Rendezvous point to-be-announced.
- Want to stay a few extra days at the end of the trip? Also no problem. From July 8 to 10 we'll be based in the city of Trinidad, in central Cuba on the southern coast. The bus will leave for the Santa Clara airport early on July 10. At that point you'll be on your own. Remember, Trinidad is several hours from Havana. You'll need to arrange your own transportation back to Havana, or wherever you want to go.

## Is Traveling to Cuba Legal?

On January 16, 2015 the US government's Cuba travel restrictions were significantly expanded. All travel that previously required a "specific license" (that is, permission from the US government on a case-by-base basis) became allowable under what is called a general license (that is, no prior permission necessary). The bottom line, if you fit into one of 12 categories, you can travel to Cuba. Those categories are: 1) family visits; 2) official US government business; 3) journalistic activity; 4) professional research/meetings; 5) educational activities; 6) religious activities; 7) public performances, athletic activities, etc; 8) "support for the Cuban people"; 9) humanitarian projects; 10) activities of private foundations; 11) exportation, importation, or transmission of information; and 12) export-related transactions.

This trip fits under category 5, "educational activities". Furthermore, previously most educational travel to Cuba required that travelers be enrolled in a degree-seeking program to justify their travel. In the January 2015 changes, that requirement is significantly loosened. Specifically, if you read the text from section 515.565(b) (specific language pasted below - we've bolded the relevant lines), you'll see that participants on this kind of travel *do not* need to be enrolled in a formal educational program. ([Full text here.](#))

**Revise § 515.565 to read as follows:**

(b) *General license for people-to-people travel.* The travel-related transactions set forth in § 515.560(c) and such additional transactions as are directly incident to **educational exchanges not involving academic study pursuant to a degree program are authorized**, provided that:

(1) The exchanges take place under the auspices of an organization that is a person subject to U.S. jurisdiction and that sponsors such exchanges to promote people-to-people contact;

(2) Travel-related transactions pursuant to this authorization must be for the purpose of engaging, while in Cuba, in a full-time schedule of activities intended to enhance contact with the Cuban people, support civil society in Cuba, or promote the Cuban people's independence from Cuban authorities;

(3) Each traveler has a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities that will result in meaningful interaction between the traveler and individuals in Cuba;

(4) An employee, paid consultant, or agent of the sponsoring organization accompanies each group traveling to Cuba to ensure that each traveler has a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities; and

(5) The predominant portion of the activities engaged in by individual travelers is not with individuals or entities acting for or on behalf of a prohibited official of the Government of Cuba, as defined in [31 CFR 515.337](#) of this part, or a prohibited member of the Cuban Communist Party, as defined in [31 CFR 515.338](#) of this part.

*Example to § 515.565(b):* An organization wishes to sponsor and organize educational exchanges **not involving academic study pursuant to a degree program** for individuals to learn side-by-side with Cuban individuals in areas such as environmental protection or the arts. The travelers will have a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities that will result in meaningful interaction between the travelers and individuals in Cuba. The organization's activities qualify for the general license.

Further, on Sept 8, 2015 the regulations were eased even more. Specifically, it specified that family members (i.e. "close relatives") could travel as well. Again, we've pasted the relevant section of the text below ([full text here](#)):

Close relatives will be allowed to visit or accompany authorized travelers for certain additional activities. In the January [2015] changes, OFAC permitted close relatives to join visits related to official government business and certain educational activities, and to visit additional family members residing in Cuba. **Close relatives now also will be allowed to visit or accompany authorized travelers for additional educational activities**, journalistic activity, professional research, and religious activities, as well as activities related to humanitarian projects and activities of private foundations or certain research or educational institutes. **For purposes of this provision, a close relative is defined as someone related to a person by blood, marriage, or adoption – and who is no more than three generations removed from that person or a common ancestor with that person.**

**Flexibility & Final Itinerary**

We're working with our Los Angeles-based travel provider, who contracts with the Cuban tour company Havanatur, to hammer out the final details of our itinerary. It will closely resemble the draft itinerary that is posted on the NCGE website. That said, we very much appreciate your flexibility and understanding regarding any last-minute changes/adjustments. And even when we do publish the finalized itinerary, the hour-by-hour specifics will be handled on a day-to-day basis once we're in Cuba

working with our guide and driver. The specific plan for each day (pick-up times, meeting locations, etc.) will be announced the afternoon/evening before.

### **Money**

While it's impossible to say how much cash any individual should bring, here are a couple of guidelines. All prices below are in CUC. To get a rough idea for US dollars, increase all prices below by about 10%. Remember, it is highly doubtful that you'll be able to use American credit cards, and we don't recommend traveler's checks because of the hassle to cash them (see below)

**Food:** All breakfasts and lunches, and three dinners, are already included in the program fee. You'll be responsible for dinner on five nights. We recommend that you budget about \$10 to \$15 each for the dinners (more for drinks, etc). Of course it's possible to find places that are more or less expensive, but these prices represent an easy-to-encounter medium price range. As for other meal-related items, beers usually go for between \$1 and \$2 (depending on the place), and mixed drinks perhaps a little more than that. Tips are nice, but don't need to be the typical American 18-20 percent. 10 percent is more typical. Tips for our tour guide and bus driver is already included in the program fee. But participants will be responsible for tipping at lunch and dinner (including where the cost of the meal is covered by the program fee).

Shared taxis in the city are about \$0.50 along the fixed routes, but if you hire a traditional cab, the fares will probably run about \$7 to \$10 basically anywhere that we'd be going in the city (though daytime transportation for the group is already included... you'll only need a cab if you go farther afield for dinner or evening entertainment).

**Nightlife:** As for evening entertainment, cover charges for the city's two jazz clubs generally run about \$10, and generally include at least half of that amount toward your bar tab. But those prices of course change depending on who's performing. Covers for other venues can run from \$2 or \$3 (especially for places where a lot of Cubans hang out) to \$30 to \$50 for the famous venues and/or high-end places that cater especially to tourists. As of summer 2016, the Tropicana was \$95 per person.

**Souvenirs:** Costs for souvenirs depends entirely on what you're looking for. You'll have several opportunities to visit a large art/souvenir market in an old warehouse right on the bay in Old Havana. There are also lots of places close to where we'll be staying that you can purchase souvenirs. These range from \$3 to \$5 on the low end for small knick-knacks to hundreds of dollars for original artwork, and everything in between. We've generally found that you can get very nice pieces of art, prints, etc. for \$20 to \$30. Hand-made leather sandals, bags, purses, etc. also run in that price-range. A nice bottle of aged Cuban rum can be purchased for \$8 to \$15, and cigars range from \$100 to \$500 per box.

In general, if you've traveled in Latin America before, you'll probably find that Cuba is somewhat more expensive, especially now that more and more Americans are traveling.

### **Currency**

Cuba has a bizarre two-currency system in which two different Cuban currencies circulate in the country. First, there is the Cuban Peso, often known as the *moneda nacional*, or national currency, or by its abbreviation: CUP. Then there is the Cuban Convertible Peso, or CUC. The CUC is pegged to the US dollar; one US dollar buys about \$0.90 CUC, and one CUC buys about 25 CUP. Although many stores now accept either currency, the general rule is that stores that sell domestically produced items sell in CUP, and stores that sell imported items, or items directed at foreign visitors/tourists sell in CUC. Oftentimes

the price in CUC is comparable to what you would pay in the US or Europe (for instance, a can of soda would cost about CUC\$0.75, and a meal in a restaurant can easily cost CUC\$10.00 to \$15.00 (depending, of course, on where you go). On the other hand, the “CUP economy” can often feel very inexpensive. For instance, shared taxis that operate all over Havana charge a flat rate of CUP\$10 (or the equivalent of about US\$0.40) for a ride anywhere along their fixed routes through the city.

For our purposes, since we’ll mostly be interacting with the tourist economy, we will be operating largely in CUC rather than CUP. And there is no need to exchange currency before we travel. There are places all over the city to change money, including right at the airport when we arrive.

### **Cash/Credit Cards/Traveler’s Checks**

DON’T count on American credit/debit cards working. Technically speaking US regulations have changed to allow for American credit and debit cards to be used in Cuba. That DOES NOT mean that: a) US credit card companies are operating in Cuba, or b) Cuban stores/restaurants/etc will accept credit cards at all. As for Traveler’s Checks, they do add some security at the cost of significant inconvenience. There are not very many places to cash traveler’s checks in Cuba, and generally will require you to go to a bank and wait in sometimes very long lines (hours, not minutes). Given that Cuba is quite a secure place to travel, and that we’ll be staying in a tourist hotel and traveling by private bus, my advice is to bring cash.

### **Internet/Computers**

Internet in Cuba is famously spotty. It’s getting better, to be sure. There are even public WIFI access points. But they are not free (about \$2.00 for one hour of access), and the connection is slow. Don’t count on being able to FaceTime with your family back home. That said, we’ve checked with the hotels where we’ll be staying, and both of them confirmed that there is WIFI available for guests. You’ll have to purchase an access card (\$2.00 per hour). Those cards can be purchased right there at each hotel.

Keep in mind that because of a combination of the ongoing US embargo, and Cuban internet censorship, there are certain websites/internet services that you probably won’t be able to access. For instance, you probably won’t be able to access US-based online banking from Cuba, and some services like Skype are not available from Cuba.

Also, it is recommended that you disable any two-step logins that require access codes that are delivered via text message, since US-based cell service is spotty at best.

### **Converters**

While electricity in Cuba is mostly the same as in the US, in many hotels electricity is 220v and the plugs are the European style round with 2 pins. Most (but not necessarily all) modern electronic devices can handle different voltages. The only converter necessary in most cases is for the physical plug, not a voltage converter (see, for example, articles about [Macs](#), [iPhones](#), and [Canon](#) cameras). In other words, the only converter you should need is something like [this](#). That said, you should take a few minutes to look up your particular electronic devices to see if they can handle 220 as well as 110. If they can’t then you’ll need a voltage converter (not just the plug converter).

### **Phone Service**

Calling the US from Cuba is *really* expensive. According to the state-run *Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba* (ETECSA), if you use your US-based phone roaming in Cuba, the cost to call from Cuba back to the US \$2.90 per minute, if it even works ([details here](#)). If you have an unblocked cell phone in the US and you’d like to get a local Cuban SIM card and phone number, that’s possible, too, but would cost a

minimum of about \$30. [Details on renting a SIM card are here](#). Scroll all the way to the bottom of the page to where it says “Contrato Temporal”. Local calling rates are [here](#).

### **Hotels**

In Havana we'll be staying the [Hotel Telegrafo](#), and in Trinidad we'll be staying at the all-inclusive, sea-side hotel [Brisa Trinidad del Mar](#) (check it out on a google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/DsdSX5eZ4wB2>).

### **That heat!**

Remember, it's going to be HOT! Average July temperatures in Havana are in the mid 80s with high humidity. Our hotel and bus will have air conditioning, but a lot of other places won't. Dress for the heat. Light colored clothes, lightweight/cotton fabrics, sandals, shorts, etc. During the day dress can be casual. At night it really depends a lot on what you're doing. It's probably not appropriate to go to the jazz clubs, for instance, in a t-shirt, shorts, and sandals.

Also, we'll be walking a lot, so bring footwear—shoes and/or sandals—that is comfortable for walking.

Also, it rains, sometimes a lot. Bring raingear and/or an umbrella.

Also, weather permitting there will be at least a couple opportunities to get a little beach time. So bring swimsuits, sunscreen, etc.

### **Vaccines**

Please refer to the CDC's page on Cuba: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cuba>. Here's a summary of their current recommendations:

1. Zika is in Cuba, so pregnant women should avoid traveling to Cuba (much more info on Zika in Cuba is available here: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/zika-virus-cuba>).
2. All routine vaccinations should be up to date before traveling.
3. Typhoid and Hep A vaccinations are recommended for most travelers (but not required, see details on CDC page)
4. Rabies and Hep B vaccinations are recommended for some travelers (see how the CDC classifies particular risk groups on their website).

### **Travel insurance:**

Trip/travel insurance is not included in the program cost. If you would like to purchase trip/travel insurance, you're certainly welcome to do so, but that would be separate from the group. Our travel agent has reported to us that many of her clients traveling to Cuba have been able to get affordable insurance through AAA or TravelX (NCGE is not endorsing these companies... we're just passing on information from the travel agent). Cuban medical insurance is included in the cost of airfare sold by the commercial carriers, but does not does not cover trip cancellation or repatriation of remains.

### **Readings**

Here are some good reading lists compiled by others:

- The NY Times Cuba Reading List: <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/cuba-a-reading-list/>
- The Daily Beast's Five Best Cuba Books: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/12/17/5-great-books-about-cuba.html>

- The Boston Globe's Seven Books on Cuba:  
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2015/05/09/seven-books-cuba/Q4gUhnyrovSFyYdgYMobSK/story.html>
- The Foreign Policy Association's page on Cuba and US Relations (including a very good timeline of US-Cuba relations):  
[http://www.fpa.org/great\\_decisions/index.cfm?act=topic\\_detail&topic\\_id=57](http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions/index.cfm?act=topic_detail&topic_id=57)
- The Cuba Study Group Suggested Cuba Reading List: <http://www.cubastudygroup.org/index.cfm/suggested-books>

And, here are a couple readings that don't make any of these reading lists:

- *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, by Thomas Patterson (Oxford University Press, 1995). On Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.com/Contesting-Castro-United-Triumph-Revolution/dp/0195101200>. This is an intriguing, detailed accounting of the Cuban Revolution and the early years after its "triumph" in terms of US-Cuba relations.
- The Yankee Comandante: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Betrayal, in *The New Yorker*, by David Grann (2012): <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/28/the-yankee-comandante>. This is a well written, *long* article about an American who went to fight in the mountains with Fidel.
- Unexpected Cuba, in *The New Left Review*, by Emily Morris (2014): <https://newleftreview.org/II/88/emily-morris-unexpected-cuba>. For economic policy wonks, this article is for you and provides a relatively optimistic view of Cuba's growing economy (especially when compared to how other post-Soviet socialist countries have done).

And here are a couple of academic papers that Johnny Finn has published on different aspects of his research in Cuba (sorry for the shameless self-promotion :)

- Finn, J.C. 2017. Cuban Kitchens: Spaces of Food and Life in Cuba. *GeoHumanities*. This is a photo essay of Cubans, mostly women but also some men, in their kitchens. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/31372419/Cuban\\_Kitchens\\_Spaces\\_of\\_Food\\_and\\_Life\\_in\\_Cuba](https://www.academia.edu/31372419/Cuban_Kitchens_Spaces_of_Food_and_Life_in_Cuba)
- Bono, F. and J.C. Finn. 2016. Food Diaries to Measure Food Access: A Case Study from Rural Cuba. *The Professional Geography*. This article is based on my current research with a Belgian PhD student on the Cuban agricultural cooperative system and rural food access. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/26408524/Food\\_Diaries\\_to\\_Measure\\_Food\\_Access\\_A\\_Case\\_Study\\_from\\_Rural\\_Cuba](https://www.academia.edu/26408524/Food_Diaries_to_Measure_Food_Access_A_Case_Study_from_Rural_Cuba).
- Finn, J.C. Muscapes of heritage and memory, in *Social Memory and Heritage Tourism Methodologies*, eds. S. Hanna, A. Potter, E.A. Modlin, P. Carter, and D.L. Butler, 153-169. New York: Rutledge. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/11508564/Muscapes\\_of\\_heritage\\_and\\_memory](https://www.academia.edu/11508564/Muscapes_of_heritage_and_memory).

- Finn, J. Contesting Culture: Commodification in Cuban Music. *GeoJournal*. 74 (3): 191-200. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/7164509/Contesting\\_culture\\_a\\_case\\_study\\_of\\_commodification\\_in\\_Cuban\\_music](https://www.academia.edu/7164509/Contesting_culture_a_case_study_of_commodification_in_Cuban_music).
- Finn, J., and C. Lukinbeal. Musical Cartographies: Ritmos de los Barrios de la Habana. In *Sound, Society, and the Geography of Popular Music*, eds. O. Johansson & T. Bell, 127-144. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/7164536/Musical\\_Cartographies\\_Los\\_Ritmos\\_de\\_los\\_Barrios\\_de\\_la\\_Habana](https://www.academia.edu/7164536/Musical_Cartographies_Los_Ritmos_de_los_Barrios_de_la_Habana).