

# BEFORE THE TRIP

## ***What are emergency numbers I can use to contact you or have people contact me?***

In the US, you can contact Yvette (Proximity Cuba) at 202-748-6898 and Medea (CODEPINK) at 415-235-6517. In Cuba, the contacts are Rodrigo (CUBA GIRASOL) at +535-848-3343, Jessica (CUBA GIRASOL) at +535-324-7438 and Lucy (CUBA GIRASOL) at +535-349-8585.

## ***What do I NEED to do before leaving for the Cuba trip?***

1. Fill out a participant registration, a visa application, and a travel affidavit. You can download these forms at the Proximity Cuba webpage <http://www.proximitycuba.com/traveler/program-space-reservation>. You will also need to send a copy of the main page of your passport to Proximity Cuba's email address [proximitycuba@gmail.com](mailto:proximitycuba@gmail.com).
2. Make a non-refundable \$500 deposit by **September 8** and then pay in full (also non-refundable) by **October 1**. Total cost is **1,375 for a double and \$1,575 for a single**.
3. Get your plane ticket to and from Havana on JetBlue.

## ***What type of payment is accepted?***

You can pay by check, make a bank transfer or pay using PayPal option in Proximity Cuba's webpage.

Checks can be sent to International Outreach Educational Center:

IOEC  
PO BOX 143912  
Coral Gables  
Florida  
33114-3912

You may also make a direct deposit to the IOEC Bank of America Account # 898001314839

## ***What does the payment include?***

- Hotel accommodations in Hotel Vedado - Saint John (3\*) for 7 nights in Havana (additional cost for single room supplement) \*

*\*We will do our best to accommodate "double room" request for solo travelers, but we cannot guarantee availability. If a suitable roommate is not available, you will be required to pay the single room supplement.*

- Daily breakfast at hotel and a second meal as indicated in the program.
- In/out airport transfers -airport pick-up will be provided between 8:30 to 11:00 AM *JetBlue flights departing from Fort Lauderdale and Orlando are scheduled to arrive between 8:30 and 9:30 AM. If you select a flight or airline arriving outside of this time frame, you will have to arrange your own transfer. Taxis fare typically run between 20 and 30 CUC per car.*
- Ground transportation for all scheduled activities in Havana. A bus will be provided to pick up daily from the hotel according to the itinerary, except for optional activities.
- Excursion outside Havana to visit farming cooperatives.
- Entrance/Program fee associated with scheduled activities (unless otherwise indicated).
- Guided visits and cultural activities included in the program.
- Expenses for Cuban participants (coordinator, guides, drivers and others).
- Farewell dinner with some Cuban guests
- Farewell party with Cuban guests
- Administrative overhead fees

### ***What is not included?***

- Airfare (Range price with JetBlue \$200.00 -\$250.00)
- Cuban Visa (you can buy the Cuban visa directly at jetBlue counter for \$50.00)
- Meals and drinks not included in the program
- Tips and gratuities
- Personal items/expenses
- Optional/evening activities and/or unscheduled activities

### ***Do I need a travel license to go to Cuba?***

You will be traveling under a general education license under the license of our host, Proximity Cuba.

### ***Where do I get my visa?***

The Cuban Visa must be purchased before departure at the gateway airports. Most commercial airlines now sell the Cuban visas at their counters in the airports. The visa cost is \$50.00 per person, and are payable by credit or debit card.

### ***What documents do I need to bring with me?***

The only document you need to bring with you is your passport! You MUST have this to get on the flight. Passports must be valid at least 4 months beyond the date of the trip's return.

If Cuban born, the person is required to hold either a valid and stamped Cuban passport or if the person left Cuba prior to January 1, 1971, a U.S. passport and a PE-11 entry permit.

***What happens if I miss the flight to Havana?***

Try to get on a flight the next day, and use one of the emergency numbers to let us know asap.

***How can I get in touch with other delegates before the trip?***

We will create a Facebook page before the trip for delegates to connect with one another! We will also create an email listserv for delegates who are not active on Facebook.

***Do we need any special vaccinations or immunizations? What if we get sick?***

No inoculations are required for travel to Cuba, but health insurance is required for all tourists. The fee for this is included in your plane ticket and it will cover you for any medical emergency. The health system is good, so you will be well taken care of in case of an emergency. Carrying your plane ticket and your passport you will receive medical attention if needed in the **International Health Clinic “Cira Garcia”**, located at 20th and 41st St, Playa municipality.

***What should we wear/pack?***

The temperature varies from about 66-82 degrees Fahrenheit in November, and rain is likely. There are not real equivalents to "drug stores" as we know them in the U.S., so make sure to bring all toiletries and medications you may need -- they will be challenging to find in Cuba. There is no dress code for the trip, so bring whatever you are the most comfortable in. The only places where you can't wear shorts or flip flops are the theaters, so if you're planning to attend to a play or the ballet, make sure to bring something nice.

***Must haves:***

- Your passport and visa
- Enough U.S. cash to last you the week (we will convert to Cuban CUCs once in the country)
- Any medication you use
- Toiletries (shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, toothbrush/toothpaste)
- Sun-hat, visor, sunglasses and sunscreen
- One set of nice clothes for high-level meetings (no need to be very professional, but bring something presentable!)
- One pair of comfortable shoes for city walking tours

***Some things to consider packing:***

- Aspirin, pepto bismol, or immodium just in case (it will be challenging to purchase these in Cuba)
- Mosquito repellent
- Day pack
- A notebook and pen
- Light sweater for the evenings
- Dancing outfits if you choose to go dancing
- Ear plugs (in case you are a light sleeper and your roommate snores)
- Pink clothing! :)

***What is the money situation? How much should we bring?***

You will only be able to use cash in Cuba, which means you must withdraw enough for the whole trip before we leave for Havana. In Cuba you can't use US credit cards (cards from any other country are fine).

You should get your bills from the bank in the U.S. so that they are unmarked and clean. Try to bring 50s, 20s, and 10s. Money will be changed once we land in Havana. Money can be changed at the airport in Havana, as well as at most hotels in the city.

\$100 of US currency will exchange to 87 CUC, which is the Cuban convertible currency used for tourists. Locals will use the peso, but you will not need to do so. CUCs are generally accepted everywhere. The American dollar is not widely used, however you may find some private restaurants and arts and crafts places that accepts payment in dollars.

Below is a list of items/activities that you must need money for, and might need money for. We recommend that you bring a minimum of \$200 to cover the basic (meals not covered, tips and water), but depending on your spending habits and possible extra purchases, you can gauge how much to bring.

***Must have money for:***

- 40 CUC for a cumulative tip for bus drivers and tour guides
- One meal each day (2 meals will be covered every day, usually breakfast and lunch, so you will need money for the remaining meal)
- Bottled water (it is not advisable to drink tap water, so we strongly encourage everyone to purchase bottled water throughout the trip)

***Might need money for:***

- Other beverages
- Private excursions / optional cultural activities separate from the group (evening shows, the ballet, museums not included in the program, etc.)

- Transportation if you go off on your own (the public transportation is very unreliable, but taxis are easy to find and affordable)
- Shopping! There will be lots of artwork, gifts, cigars, and rums to purchase for yourself or friends back home, so make sure to budget accordingly!  
*US citizens are allowed to bring back to US up to \$400 in souvenirs including up to \$100 in cigars and rum.*

### **What are some good reading materials on travel to Cuba?**

We recommend that you spend some time researching the economic and political situation of Cuba, as well as Cuba-US relations. We will be meeting with politicians, local activists, doctors, journalists, professors, and other experts on our trip. It is important to have a base level understanding of the history and current political context of Cuba to get the most out of our meetings.

Web resources:

- <http://www.ecocubanetwork.net/cuba/resources>
- <http://wikitravel.org/en/Cuba>
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/cuba>

Books:

- *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* by Peter Kornbluh
- *The Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba* (2013)
- *The Cuba Reader* edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff
- *The Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba*
- *Eyewitness Guide to Cuba*
- *Wonderful Havana* by Julie Napier
- *Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana* by Marc Frank (2013)
- *Cuba: Between Reform & Revolution* by Lou Perez

We will post good articles on the facebook page.

### **Should we bring gifts or presents for Cubans?**

It's always nice to have something to give to people you meet or even for the folks in the hotels. Some suggestions are school supplies and art supplies, a thumb drive for computers, first aid over-the-counter pills (aspirin, ibuprofen), baseballs, small garden tools, hygiene products like creams, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes and strings for musical instruments. If you would like us to give them to the Cubans, please give them to a trip leader once we arrive. If you would like to give them to the Cubans yourselves, remember to bring them along to your activities each day.

### ***Where should I stay in Miami before we leave for Cuba?***

For those of you looking for accommodations before the flight out of Ft. Lauderdale or Orlando, we would suggest staying near the airport. There are shuttles that take you to and from the airport for free in many of the hotels close by. You can use the facebook to ask where others might be staying and to find a roommate.

### ***Can I arrive early or stay after the tour?***

If you want to arrive early or stay after the tour in Cuba, you must sort out the logistics PRIOR to departure and let any of the coordinators know about your plans. So don't leave this to the last minute!

### ***If I take one of the JetBlue flights, will someone pick me up at the Havana airport?***

Yes, our Cuban hosts will meet us at the Havana airport.

### ***What if I am taking another flight or coming in from another country?***

If you are arriving at different times than the majority of the group, you will have to arrange your own ride to the hotel by taking a taxi at the airport. Taxis cost between 20 and 30 CUC, no more than 30, and it's for the ride, not per person, so if several people share the taxi it's cheaper. Participants arriving before the majority come in can wait for the rest of the group and join the bus, if they want to. The bus can also wait for participants arriving up to 1 hour after the majority, if you let us know beforehand.

### ***Will there be an orientation?***

The official orientation will take place once we arrive in Havana. CODEPINK will also lead a brief, informal orientation in the Florida airports before leaving.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS AND LOGISTICS**

### ***Hotels***

#### ***What is our hotel in Havana?***

It is the very centrally located Hotel Vedado, in the heart of Havana at Calle O between 23rd and 25th Streets. Don't expect anything fancy (including hot water, which is "iffy") but the staff loves our groups and have bent over backwards to accommodate us. Hotel Vedado's phone number: +53.7836.4072

### ***If I don't have a roommate but want a double, will you pair me up?***

Yes, we will pair roommates according to the information provided on your applications. We will contact you with the name of your roommate as soon as the logistics are worked out. We appreciate your patience.

*\*We will do our best to accommodate "double room" request for solo travelers, but we cannot guarantee availability. If a suitable roommate is not available, you will be required to pay the single room supplement.*

### ***What are the internet options?***

You can buy Wifi cards for 1.50 CUCs at the Hotel Vedado. These cards have a user ID and a password and last for 1 hour of connection. You don't have to use the whole hour at once, you can use 15 minutes today, 15 minutes tomorrow and so on, just make sure to turn off your Wifi once you finish to stop the connection timer.

As much as possible, think of this as a time to detox from our electronic gadgets!!!

### ***Food***

#### ***How do meals work?***

Two meals a day are included in the cost of the trip. Most of the time it's breakfast and lunch (which is usually a very big lunch!). All meals beside breakfast will consist in a fixed menu usually including: an appetizer, several choices of main dish to choose one, desert and/or coffee and one Cuban drink. If you want to pay for extra drinks or food it's totally fine.

We will also give you a list of private restaurants and recommendations for dinner nearby the hotel.

#### ***Won't providing meals for such a large group be difficult?***

Yes, it might be, although the majority of our meals will be in smaller groups and will consist on a fixed menu to avoid the delay of the service. Breakfast every day is a large buffet with many options. In any case, bring power bars and snacks in case a meal is late or skipped because of activities. Bring extras to give out to people--it's a great way to make friends!

#### ***What about folks with special dietary needs?***

The guides and coordinators will do their best to get a menu option suited to your needs, but if you have strong dietary restrictions, we recommend that you bring along packaged trail mix, power bars, or whatever packaged foods meet your particular dietary needs.

While meals will vary every day, here is an overview of what to expect:

- Breakfast: the breakfast buffet will include eggs, rice, beans, fruit, yogurt, meat options, pastries, and more -- it is possible to find vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options during breakfast
- Lunch: lunch will normally be included in the daily programs, and will almost always consist of rice, beans, and a choice of meat (fish, chicken, beef, or other seafood). It is possible to find vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options during lunch (although in this case you will need to ask, and if your gluten and dairy allergies are severe you should communicate that to your trip leaders to make sure you are safe).
- Dinner: dinner will normally be on your own, and you will have the choice to find a restaurant that meets your needs. For the most part, however, dinner options will be similar to lunch: rice, beans, and a choice of meat. It is possible to find vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options.

## **GENERAL CUBA QUESTIONS**

### ***What is the exchange rate?***

\$100 of US currency will exchange to 87 CUC, which is the Cuban convertible currency used for tourists. Locals will use the peso, but you will not need to do so. CUCs are generally accepted everywhere. The American dollar is not widely used, however you may find some private restaurants and arts and crafts places that accepts payment in dollars.

### ***What is the electrical voltage and what plugs do they use?***

The plugs are the same as American plugs! The voltage is usually 110 V in Cuba, like in the US, but in Hotel Vedado the voltage is 220 V. All iPhones, iPads, and laptops use now up to 240 V, but please check your device's charger to be certain. The only problem you will have is with hairdryers, because they only support 110 V. Some of the plugs are the old-fashioned 2-prong outlets so you might want to bring an adapter plug (3-prong to 2-prong).

### ***What is recommended for tipping?***

Individuals who manage to find jobs in the tourism industry in Cuba are usually supporting a large extended family, and tips are extremely helpful. In several restaurants and bars you may find that 10% tip is included in your bill, check this before you pay. If tips are not included in your bill we recommend 10%, but depending on the quality of the service you can tip more or less than that. A 1 CUC donation to musicians, bellboys, hotel maids and others who provide service is helpful. We will be collecting 40 CUC per person, which we will distribute as tips for the Cuban tour guides, drivers, and hotel staff.

### ***Will all the meetings be translated?***

Yes, everything will be translated to English.



### ***I've heard that toilet paper can be an issue. What should I know?***

The hotel bathrooms are fully stocked with toilet paper, but you may not find any when we go out to various locations around the city. Often you will find a bathroom attendant who hands out pieces of toilet paper for a small tip. You are welcome to bring your own toilet paper from home, or you may take some from the hotel to bring with you when we leave for meetings or excursions.

It's very important that you make sure not to throw the toilette paper inside the toilette!!! Cuban sewer system is very old and in most bathrooms you will find a small basket where you can throw the paper.

### ***Can we use our cell phones?***

If your phone carrier is Sprint or Verizon you may want to check with them because they are authorized to do roaming in Cuba, but it will be expensive.

If you have an unlocked phone you can rent SIM cards to put into your phone for 20 CUC, plus you'll have to buy the minutes. However, we recommend that you plan not to use your phones while you are there. Local phones will be available in case of emergency.

### ***Can we use credit cards?***

The US announced that folks can soon start using US credit cards in Cuba, but that still has not materialized. So bring dollars. There are places all over to change in special currency, Cuban Convertible Currency (CUC's), used for most transactions.

### ***What can you bring back?***

\$400 worth of souvenirs. \$100 worth of rum and cigars. A lot of people usually buy art and other crafts. Small art pieces don't require special permits to get them out of Cuba, but always check with the artists.

### ***Is there much theft?***

With the austerity and hard times in Cuba, there has been an increase in petty crime. It is nowhere near the level it is in the U.S. and in other low-income countries, and violent crime is extremely rare. Please take extra precautions, as you would during international travel anywhere. A money belt, worn under clothing, is the recommended option for carrying your valuables during travel.

On our last trip, delegates started to get so comfortable that they lost their vigilance - one person accidentally left their backpack in the lobby, while someone else was robbed while in a crowded area. This is no different than in any other tourist area, but remember to keep track of your possessions.

You can leave your valuables in your hotel room, specially for passport and visa, you don't need them during the program. We have not had any issues with items getting stolen from people's hotel rooms.

***Can we go off on our own?***

Yes, you don't have to attend every meeting. In fact, we recommend that you take off a morning or afternoon to explore with a buddy/buddies. Then tell us about your experiences!

***How will we break up into small groups to go to various meetings?***

You will sign up beforehand to choose the activity you want. If there is a popular activity, we will try to have it available more than once.

***Will we get to go to the beach?***

Yes, if that is an option you choose. Given that Donald Trump doesn't want you to go to a beach in Cuba (remember, tourism is illegal!), we'll send postcards to the White House from the white sands of the Caribbean!

If you would like to go to the beach on your own, you can take a taxi for 15 CUC (depending on your bargaining skills!) or a bus, which takes 20-30 minutes. The closest beach is Playa Santa Maria.

***Can we drink the water?***

You should drink bottled water during your stay in Cuba. It is available in stores throughout the island and in the hotels. For those of you with environmental concerns regarding the use of bottled water, an alternative is to bring with you a water purifier or tablets– the kind used for backpacking in regions where the water is impure. We encourage you to buy large bottles of water and fill up your individual bottle as needed.

***Can we eat fresh fruit and vegetables?***

Yes. However, on our last trip, a few people did have stomach issues. This could be because of water, produce, or just a different cuisine. If you have a sensitive stomach or just want to be safe, it's good to carry Pepto Bismol and imodium. If you are sensitive, it's good to stay away from salad and unpeeled fruits as well.

***Should we let the press know we are going and/or contact them on our return?***

Yes, it would be great if you contact your local press both before and after your trip. Now that Trump has changed the policies, going back to the old days when individual travel was illegal, your local media may well be interested in your trip. We'll be sending you a sample press release you can use.

Once in Cuba, take photos that capture your experience and try to keep a diary so that you can speak and/or write articles when you return. We encourage all of you to share your experiences through social media, writing articles/op-eds, seeking to be interviewed

in your local press, setting up talks at your community center/place of workshop/workplace.

***Will there be documentation of the trip?***

We encourage participants to share their best photos and videos. You can add your photos to our flickr account, and also check out pictures from the last trip. You can also use the Facebook page to share photos and videos.

***What else can we do on our return?***

In addition to giving talks and contacting the press, you can also help pushing your elected officials to lift the restrictions on travel to Cuba and the other economic sanctions. We'll provide you will information on your return.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

***Be patient and flexible:***

Traveling in any group presents challenges, and this is especially true in such a large group. Number one requirement to make this a great experience is PATIENCE (something difficult for many of us!). Number two requirement is FLEXIBILITY. Plans change at the last minute. Speakers don't show up. Buses break down. Make the best of these snafus by making new friends in the group, leading us in song, telling jokes. Have fun and bring up the spirits of the others, especially the grumpy ones!

***Be courteous:***

Please be courteous to your fellow participants, our country hosts, guides, translators, waiters and hotel staff and those Cubans who choose to make presentations to our group. If a difficult situation should arise, try to think in terms of how you, as a member of the group, can contribute to a solution.

***Respect and help the trip leaders:***

All of the trip leaders, both in the US and Cuba, have been working very hard to put this trip together, and will be working REALLY hard during the trip. Many of the US trip leaders are not only volunteers, but have actually paid their own way!!! Please give all the trip leaders thanks, encouragement and assistance.

For reasons of safety or for the interest of the group, there may also be times when the group leaders will advise against a particular action. Please respect their request.

***Be punctual:***

Please try to be at our meeting places on time. Being mindful about punctuality will ensure that the group isn't late and/or you won't be inadvertently left behind. If you miss an event

you signed up for because you were late, take it as an opportunity to do something else, like join another group or take a stroll along the *Malecón* (the famous boulevard along the ocean).

***Respect different political views:***

Please remember that we are guests in Cuba, a country with a different culture from that of the US, with a different (although intertwined) history. It is best to approach each new situation with an open mind. You are not there to convince either the other participants or the Cubans that Cuba (or the US) are really great or really terrible. You're there to learn, exchange ideas and have a good time. And remember: there are very different political viewpoints among Cubans, and among the trip participants.

During this trip, you'll be hearing the pro-government side at many of our official visits. Some of your best information about everyday life in Cuba can come from interactions with your guides, the informal evening sessions, and conversations you might strike up with people on the street.