



**BIRDING TOUR CUBA:
GENERAL INFORMATION**



Passports and visa

Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond departure. A tourist visa is compulsory for entry into Cuba. This is valid for 30 days from the day of arrival. Clients staying for a longer duration may extend these locally via the Cuban embassy. If you are traveling to another country from Cuba and then returning, you will need another tourist visa in order to re-enter the country. Please ensure you have your tourist visa correctly completed before check-in at the airport, as it will be requested with your ticket and passport at check-in. While you are in Cuba you must retain the tear-off part of the visa given to you by customs, as it will be required on departure.

Tourist card

A tourist card needs to be completed when visiting Cuba.

Health requirements

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for Cuba, but the following are sometimes recommended: Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis A, and Typhoid. Please check with your doctor for the most up-to-date information. We strongly advise you to read the Center for Disease Control advice on Cuba, at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cuba>.

Your health while in Cuba

Cuba's health facilities are good, and some of the larger hotels have their own doctor on site. International clinics can be found in all the main resorts as well as in Havana, Trinidad, Santiago de Cuba, and Cienfuegos. Mosquitoes can be a problem. Use plenty of repellent and keep covered in the evenings, especially at sundown. Many medicines are not commonly available (e.g. Imodium, TCP, Piriton, sanitary protection) and we strongly recommend you take your own supply. Although tap water is considered safe we recommend bottled water, which is widely available. Should you have to visit a doctor in Cuba, ensure you keep receipts for doctors' fees or medicine paid for in Cuba, as these will be required for any insurance claim on your return.

Currency and credit cards

There are two currencies in circulation in Cuba: the peso (CUP), which you will not use, and the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC). The value of the CUC is on a par with the US Dollar rate of exchange. CUCs are of no use outside of Cuba and must be changed before leaving the country. Visitors will be given the CUC when they exchange money on arrival in Cuba. Take cash in British Pounds (GBP) or Euros (EUR), which then can be exchange locally for the convertible peso on arrival in Cuba – do NOT take US dollars because a premium of 11% is charged to exchange these! Damaged or defaced notes are often refused.

Cash can be changed in the main hotels and also in exchange houses called CADECA (Casa de Cambio) across the country. Please note that Maestro and Solo are not widely accepted in Cuba. In these days with an increasing number of credit cards with individual names it is very important to check that your card has not been issued by an American bank; the parent company may well be of US origin. Non-American-issued credit cards are acceptable.

Please note: Some hotels/restaurants will charge a 3% credit card surcharge.

National Bank regulations apply to the import and export of foreign currency. It is prohibited to import or export local Cuban currency.

Exchange offices and duty-free shops overseas are not familiar with Scottish or Ulster banknotes and therefore do not always accept them.

Cash can be easily drawn against Visa debit or credit cards at the Banco Financiero. They are open from 8.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., but note that your transaction can only be made when your home country bank is open!

ATM machines are available in Havana and other major cities – and they are starting to appear in smaller towns (such as Viñales) as well. There can be long queues at times, especially in Havana.

Personal security

Cuba is on the whole very safe. However, as at home take care and do not flaunt expensive possessions or jewelry in a public place. Large amounts of cash should always be left in the safety box at the hotel.

Electricity

Most of the sockets in the hotels are of the American two-pin, flat type ([ITA Type A](#)), although more modern hotels have the round-pin (European) variety ([ITA Type C](#)). The normal voltage is 110 V, although some of the more modern hotels have 220 V.

Local time

Cuba is GMT -5.

Post and communications

Post can be very unreliable and slow, so it is rare for a postcard to reach home before you do, or at all! Some hotels now offer Internet access at a charge, and connection may be slow. International telephone calls are very expensive, and we therefore recommend you purchase phone cards to call internationally from pay phones. Text messages/SMSs from your own cell phone (which you need to make sure is on international roaming before leaving your country) are inexpensive, and we recommend this in the unlikely event that you need to contact family back home (or vice versa).

Tipping

This is a much-appreciated source of income. Plenty of small notes and coins are advisable for tipping purposes to porters at hotels and airports, guides, and drivers.

Food

The most popular food in Cuba is their traditional pork, chicken, and rice dishes. In suburban areas the variety is limited and more traditional Cuban food is offered. In all-inclusive hotels there is a wide range of international cuisines. The higher-category hotels will provide more choice and a better selection of food and beverages. Outside of the main resorts choices are limited due to the general restrictions within Cuba. Vegetarians/vegans may struggle with the choice available to them and may find meals to be repetitive.

Food also tends to arrive slowly compared to the speedy service you might be used to at home. However, the vast majority of Cuban food is cooked to order, which inevitably takes longer.

Climate

Peak holiday months for visits to Cuba range from November through April, although July and August are popular with Canadians and Europeans. The quietest months are June, September, and October; it can be very humid indeed between May and October. The east, particularly in the Santiago province, is much hotter than the west around Havana.

In July and August temperatures average 30 °C (90 °F), with 10 hours of sunshine a day. Hurricane season for Cuba runs between May and November, and there is a high chance of a short shower or thunderstorms during the afternoon when the humidity has built up. Most hotels, offices, and restaurants have air conditioning, which at times can be turned up to the extent that it is uncomfortably cold. We therefore recommend a shawl or light jacket for eating out.

Water temperatures can range from 24 °C (75 °F) in February and March to 28 °C (82 °F) between July and October. The sea temperature in the north-eastern province is cooler than on the western end of the island.

Communications

Wi-Fi is very patchy in Cuba and you should probably not expect to have such access anywhere. Some hotels have an internet connection – ask at reception and expect quite a high cost.

Mobile phones will work in Cuba, and coverage is good in all but the most remote areas. Charges for your own network (roaming) will vary but generally text (SMS) messages are free to receive and very cheap to send. Call charges can be quite high. It is possible to buy a Cuban SIM card for your phone, which will make it cheaper.

What to bring

Cuba specifically: We recommend bringing snorkeling gear, as there is often time for this during the heat of the day. The guide will have a spotting scope on this tour, but you might consider bringing your own as well (although certainly not critical).