

cuba fact file



cuban embassy in uk	Website: www.cubaldn.com Address: 167 High Holborn, London WC1 6PA Telephone: (020) 7240 2488 Facsimile: (020) 7836 2602 Office Hours (GMT): Mon–Fri: 09.00–17.00
british embassy in cuba	Address: 702-704,34 Street, Miramar Telephone: +537 2041771/2 Facsimile: +537 2048104 Office Hours (GMT): Summer: 12.00-19.30 Winter: 13.00-20.30
area	110,860 square kilometres (almost exactly the same size as Bulgaria)
population	11 million (Oct 2004)
capital	Havana
language	Spanish is the official language but English is quite widely spoken in urban areas.
tipping	Tips and service charges are never included in the bill at restaurants, and until 1993 tipping was discouraged. It is not essential, but if you feel you were attended well, a small sum up to 10% to the staff will be welcome.
bank opening hours	Monday to Friday 08.30 – 12.00 and 13.30 – 15.00, Saturdays 08.00 – 10.00
post office hours	Monday to Saturday 08.00 – 18.00 (some stay open until 22.00)
office opening hours	Monday to Saturday 08.30 – 17.30 (sometimes offices close for lunch between 12.30 and 13.30)
shops opening hours	Monday to Saturday 09.30 – 12.30 and 14.00 – 17.00. In Havana many shops open from 12.30 – 7.30
time (+/- GMT)	5 hours behind GMT. Between April and September only 4 hours behind GMT
electricity	110v, 60 cycles. However some of the newer hotels operate on 220v. Always check before plugging in any electrical appliance!
public holidays	January 1 st (Liberation Day), May 1 st (Labour Day), July 25 th , 26 th and 27 th (Celebration of the National Rebellion) and October 10 th (Day of Cuban Culture).
telephone	All towns have a telephone centre where you can place long-distance calls, but the best service is available at the post offices or larger hotels. Please check with your mobile phone provider if your network & contract enable you to have coverage in Cuba.
photograph	You can buy film at most hotel and tourist shops. Taking photos of military facilities, soldiers or factories is not permitted. However, Cubans love to have their pictures taken and will happily pose if you ask. If you enjoy photographing people, Cuba is paradise.
postal	Mailboxes are blue. The mail service is no worse than any other Latin American country and even the US Postal Service delivers postcards mailed from Cuba!
currency	The Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) is used in Cuba. 1 Cuban Convertible Peso = 100 centavos. £1 = 1.53 Cuban Convertible Peso (August 2008). For up to date currency exchange, go to www.xe.com . USD\$ are not acceptable currency but can be changed at the airport to Cuban Convertible Peso at 10% commission rate.
credit cards & travellers cheque	Credit Cards and Travellers Cheques issued by US companies such as American Express, Citibank and Diners Club, or Travellers Cheques that clear through New York & the rest of the US are not negotiable in Cuba. Euro cheques are also not accepted. Banamex, Carnet, Eurocard, JCB, MasterCard and Visa Credit Cards issued by non US banks are quite acceptable, as are Thomas Cook and Visa Travellers Cheques expressed in US dollars provided they are not issued by a US bank. Credit card transactions are subject to local commission charges of between 11% -13%.
passport/visa	A full passport valid for a further 6 months is required and also a tourist card. This allows a stay of up to 30 days and one entry only. Charity Challenge will supply your tourist card with your flight tickets.

duty free	Those over the age of 18 may import three litres of wine or other alcoholic beverages, plus a choice of 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars or 250g of cut tobacco. Cuban customs regulations allow visitors to bring along their personal belongings, gifts of up to a value of US\$100 and 10kg of medicine.
vaccination and health	Nomad Travel Stores Medical Centre recommended the following vaccinations: Tetanus and Hepatitis A. They also suggest taking advice from your GP about: Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Hepatitis B and Rabies. There is no malaria in Cuba, however you should always take necessary precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes. This includes wearing long sleeved shirts, long trousers and socks at dawn and dusk. You should also wear plenty of insect repellent. Also see Health notes.
risks	Thoroughly cooked food is safest but not if it has been left to cool or if it has been reheated. Shellfish such as mussels, oysters and clams should be avoided unless they're served in a high-class restaurant. Visitors should be on the alert for bag snatchers and other street theft, especially in the area of old Havana and major tourist sites. Due to a continuing spate of thefts from suitcases, we recommend that all valuables be removed from suitcases (and suitcases locked) prior to submitting them at the check-in desks at Havana airport. We further recommend that visitors take advantage of the airport shrink wrap facilities (costing \$4) to reduce the possibility of tampering with the contents once the baggage is out of your control. Military zones and other restricted areas, which are not always well sign posted should be avoided. Be particularly careful when taking photographs.
hospitals/pharmacies	Cuba's public health system is easily the best in Latin America. There are clinics, which specialise in treating foreigners and charge reasonable fees in dollars. Pharmacies generally open from 08.00 – 20.00m, but those marked <i>turno permanente</i> or called <i>pilotos</i> are open 24 hrs.
water	The water is NOT safe to drink in Cuba. When in doubt, don't drink the water and that includes ice. Bottled water is available in every dollar grocery store, cafe or restaurant. Also see Health notes.
climate	Cuba's pleasant subtropical climate is strongly influenced by the gentle northeast trade winds that shift slightly to the east in the summer.
temperature	Temperature varies little all year round. The average daily temperature in the coolest months – December to March is 26C (79F). In the hottest months – July and August temperature is usually 32C (89F). Humidity varies little averaging 62%.
geography	Cuba lies just South of the Tropic of Cancer at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico. The Atlantic Ocean is to the North and the Caribbean Sea to the South. Forested mountains make up a quarter of Cuba's territory, and fertile plains account for much of the rest.
culture/customs	Cubans are very informal in their public behaviour, but when approaching a stranger for information, you should always preface your question with a greeting like <i>Buenos días</i> or <i>Buenos tardes</i> . Generally, the Cubans will pick up on your attitude instantly, and if you come across as friendly, you'll always get a friendly response.
do's & don'ts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? Rather than say what you think, ask the Cubans what they think is good or bad about their system. ? Do respect Cuban law. Prison sentences are imposed for offences that might only incur a warning in the UK. Although not against the law, homosexuality is frowned upon by Cuban society and law enforcement agencies. ? Do pack all of your luggage yourself and do not carry any items that do not belong to you. ? Do take care of you valuables at all times. Don't carry excessive amounts of cash. Bag snatching and pickpockets are common, especially in the area of Old Havana. Leave valuables, important documents and the balance of your holiday cash in the hotel safe. ? Do report robberies to the police, especially when losing important documents (eg passport, credit cards, Cuban visa, etc) or large sums of money. Police reports are needed to obtain a new passport and Cuban visa. Keep a photocopy of your main passport page. ? Don't try to generate political discussions in hotel lobbies, bars or other public places where you could end up embarrassing someone without even realising! ? Do keep a copy of the photo page of you passport in case your documents are stolen. ? Do ensure your luggage does not contain any items that could be considered offensive as these may be confiscated on arrival. ? Don't get involved with drugs. Cuba is increasingly used as a transit country for drugs destined for Europe. Cuban law allows for the death penalty and courts are handing out severe penalties for all drugs related offences. Don't carry anything through customs for someone else unless you know exactly what it contains. ? Many medicines are unavailable in Cuba so you should bring any prescription drugs you take regularly. A copy of the prescription and a letter from your doctor explaining your condition can be helpful at customs.