

NORTH AMERICA · BEACHES · HISTORY · CULTURE · ARCHITECTURE · NIGHTLIFE · DIVING

 Cuba

Cuba means Old Havana's peeling grandeur and live son music, the tobacco farms and limestone mogotes of Viñales, the cobbled sugar town of Trinidad and long white beaches on the north coast. Travel takes patience: bring plenty of cash, be ready for power cuts and shortages, and stay in casas particulares, family homes that offer the best food and insight.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to Cuba.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 25 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Havana	 CURRENCY Cuban peso (CUP) £1 ≈ CUP 32.07	 LANGUAGE Spanish	 BEST TIME Nov–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £45–£220 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B, C, L 110V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h via Madrid or Paris ~£650–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-5 standard time

Cuba is the Caribbean's largest island, and its appeal lies less in beaches than in history you can walk through: Spanish colonial plazas, 1950s American cars, revolutionary murals and a music scene that spills out of every bar. A first trip usually runs west to east, starting with several days in Havana, a side trip to the Viñales valley for its tobacco farms and caves, then the south-coast towns of Cienfuegos and Trinidad. With two weeks or more, continue to Santiago de Cuba for Afro-Cuban culture and remote Baracoa at the island's far eastern tip.

The economy has been in a long crisis, and visitors notice it in blackouts, fuel and food shortages and a money system in which foreign cash is king. Travel is still rewarding, but it rewards preparation. Casas particulares are the best value and the most human way to stay, with hosts who cook, arrange taxis and explain what is working this week. Costs are moderate rather than cheap. It suits curious, flexible travellers who enjoy music, conversation and architecture more than smooth logistics, and who can laugh when plans change.

Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Old Havana

Habana Vieja's four main squares, Plaza de Armas, Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza Vieja and Plaza de San Francisco, are linked by streets of restored mansions, bars and museums. Walk early, then retreat to a shady courtyard.

2

NATURE

Viñales Valley

Steep limestone mogotes rise from red-earth tobacco fields where farmers still cure leaves in palm-thatched barns. Hike or ride between farms, explore the caves, and stay in one of the village's hundreds of casas.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Trinidad

Founded in 1514 and left frozen in time when the sugar trade collapsed, Trinidad's cobbled streets and pastel mansions are UNESCO-listed with the nearby Valle de los Ingenios. Evenings centre on the Casa de la Música steps.

4

BEACH

Varadero

A 20-kilometre ribbon of white sand on the Hicacos Peninsula, about two hours east of Havana and lined with all-inclusive resorts. Easy for a few lazy days, though independent travellers may prefer quieter beaches and cays.

5

NATURE

Baracoa

Cuba's first Spanish settlement sits at the remote eastern tip, cut off by mountains until the La Farola road opened in the 1960s. Cocoa farms, the flat-topped El Yunque, rivers and local chocolate repay the journey.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Havana

≈ 2.1 million people

The restored lanes of Habana Vieja, crumbling Centro and leafy Vedado deserve at least three days; ride a 1950s convertible along the Malecón and hear live music every night.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Santiago de Cuba

≈ 430,000 people

Cuba's second city is hotter, hillier and more Caribbean than Havana, a cradle of son and the revolution, with the Moncada Barracks, the clifftop Castillo del Morro and a famous July carnival.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Camagüey

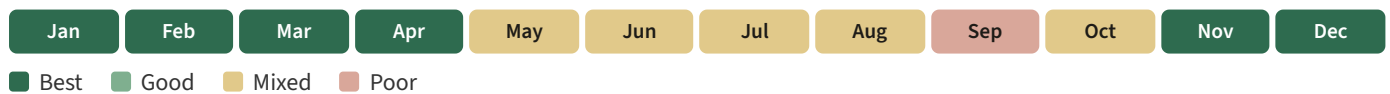
≈ 310,000 people

A maze of winding colonial streets laid out, legend says, to confuse pirates; its UNESCO-listed centre, giant clay tinajones and quiet plazas make a good stop between Trinidad and Santiago.

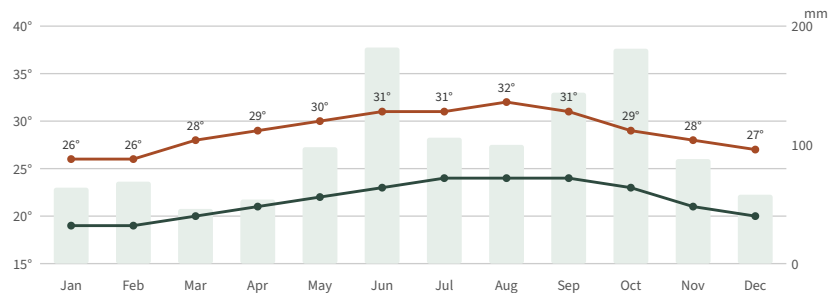
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Cuba

Best time: **Nov–Apr.**

**Average climate in Havana**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Jazz Plaza Festival Havana's international jazz festival brings Cuban and foreign musicians to theatres, clubs and open-air stages across the city, usually in January.
Jul	Carnaval de Santiago de Cuba Cuba's biggest street party takes over Santiago in July, with conga bands, comparsa dance troupes, floats and street food, peaking in the last week of the month.
Dec	Las Parrandas de Remedios On 24 December the small town of Remedios splits into two rival neighbourhoods that try to outdo each other with giant illuminated floats and deafening fireworks.

How much does Cuba cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ CUP 1,443 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ CUP 3,207 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £220 per person / day ≈ CUP 7,056 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Ropa vieja Shredded beef slow-cooked with tomato, peppers, onion and cumin, its name meaning 'old clothes'; served with rice, black beans and fried plantain.	Moros y cristianos Black beans and white rice cooked together with garlic, onion and pork fat, the everyday companion to almost every main course.	Lechón asado Roast pork marinated in mojo of sour orange, garlic and oregano, the centrepiece of family celebrations, especially on Christmas Eve.
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Getting around

Víazul coaches link Havana, Viñales, Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Santiago and other towns; book well ahead. Shared taxis (colectivos) on the same routes cost little more, leave when full and are often faster, and your casa host can arrange one. Trains are slow and unreliable, domestic flights scarce and hire cars expensive. In Havana use official taxis, classic-car taxis or bicitaxis, and agree the price before setting off.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE A B C L 110V — bring a UK-to-A/B/C/L adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 104 Fire: 105 Police: 106 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +53	TIME ZONE UTC-5 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Tips make a real difference to Cuban incomes: leave around 10% in restaurants, and tip musicians, guides, drivers and casa hosts in cash, ideally foreign currency.

ETIQUETTE

Cubans are open and chatty, but don't push political conversations that could cause trouble for your hosts. Ask before photographing people, and expect anyone posing in costume for photos to want a tip.

MAIN AIRPORTS

José Martí International Airport (HAV), Havana; Juan Gualberto Gómez Airport (VRA), Varadero; Frank País Airport (HOG), Holguín

Visas & entry for Cuba

Shown for a British passport.

e-visa — apply online before you go

If you're visiting Cuba as a tourist, you need to get a tourist visa, also known as a tourist card, before you travel. Apply through the Cuban Embassy in the UK or check with your travel agent or tour operator. You can also apply for an electronic visa through the eVisa-Cuba site. When your application is approved, you will receive a ten-character code which should be entered as you fill in your advance passenger information on the DViajeros platform (see below). This will generate a QR code to be presented to the immigration authorities at the border. The electronic visa will be linked to the applicant's passport.

You must also show proof of onward or return travel. See Cuba's consular services information for details.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Cuba

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Thu 31 Dec 2026	New Year's Eve
Fri 1 Jan 2027	Liberation Day
Sat 2 Jan 2027	Victory Day
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	International Workers' Day
Sun 25 Jul 2027	Commemoration of the Assault of the Moncada garrison
Mon 26 Jul 2027	Day of the National Rebellion
Tue 27 Jul 2027	Commemoration of the Assault of the Moncada garrison
Sun 10 Oct 2027	Independence Day
Mon 11 Oct 2027	Independence Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAN-toh KWES-tah

Know before you go

- Bring all the money you will need in euros or US dollars cash, in clean notes: foreign cards are unreliable, ATMs are scarce, and many private businesses price in foreign currency.
- Pack a torch, power bank, rehydration salts and basic medicines; blackouts are frequent and pharmacies are often poorly stocked.
- Mobile data is patchy, so check current ETECSA tourist SIM or eSIM options before you go, and download offline maps and a translation app before you fly.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.