

Cuba is a cool choice for Canadians with its friendly people and lively music. If you only read one thing, take this Inside Scoop with your travel documents. It's packed with top tips.

travel: delighting in the spirit of adventure • a vacation from home to explore places that are not your home • knowing life is different, knowing this is a joy of travel • enjoying the journey, not just the destination • a privilege best used with patience, humour and curiosity • fun • coming home with great tales •

Before You Go

All visitors must have medical insurance. You must present proof of insurance such as your travel insurance card and provincial health insurance card. LeGrow's Travel *strongly* advises you to buy travel insurance before leaving Canada. Be sure—ask your counsellor.

Your Counsellor

Our knowledge and experience help turn dreams into first-rate vacations. Ask your counsellor about any details, including:

- advance seats & upgrades
- booking excursions ahead including local tours
- the Cuban peso
- voucher exchanges
- medical and cancellation/interruption insurance.

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Inside Scoop: CUBA

Know before you go: travel isn't just your destination, it's also the journey

Canadians flock to Cuba for a classic beach vacation—blue water, warm sandy beaches and great value for money (food is basic, hearty and lots of it). Sample the mojitos—travellers rave about them. Some other tips:

- Be realistic: we know you want value in balancing choices and amenities with your budget. No matter what, aim to relax and enjoy. Special requests are requests only. Unless you've paid for upgrades such as an oceanview suite, these are premium (why fees apply).
- Everyone must have a valid passport www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/index.asp.
- Check with your bank for credit card use, ATM sites and log the dates you'll be away. Be aware of conversion fees. Travellers cheques are reported as "a hassle" (see "Currency" at right). **Tip:** While Canadian credit cards are widely accepted, plan to pay in pesos at smaller restaurants and stores.
- Check with your provider for cell phone use. Calls from hotels are usually expensive; look for ETECSA phones. Cuba is starting to offer visitors preferential roaming rates.
- Cuba is rolling out nation-wide internet and wifi with all hotels to be covered by 2019. While it's improving; access can be spotty (and anyway, you're on vacation...).
- Electrical service is 110volts/60Hz but most hotels and resorts have 220volts. If you're bringing an appliance, you'll need an adaptor/converter. Outlets take flat plug prongs.
- Tourists can bring in personal effects they "reasonably need" for the length and purpose of trips. See www.aduana.co.cu. Dress codes are casual.
- The time zone is Eastern Standard. May to October, Cuba follows Daylight Saving Time.

Above all, travel with a positive attitude—patience and a spirit of adventure will carry you through any experience!

Pack Strategically

The world is overrun with black bags so put coloured tape or ribbon on your luggage to spot it quickly. Put your name outside and inside and remove old tags. In your carry-on, pack valuables such as jewellery; over-the-counter and prescription drugs in original containers with a list, dosage and doctor's phone number.

Pack liquids/lotions/gels in checked bags (inside plastic bags)—due to carry-on restrictions, the maximum size container is 100ml(3.4oz). All must fit in 1 clear/resealable plastic bag of no more than 1 litre (often available at airport security), then place the bag in the tray. You may take baby formula, food or milk for a child under 2 years of age (0-24 months) travelling with you.

In carry-on pack pens/notebook, hand wipes, favourite munchies (no fruit, meat or veg) and crackers. Permitted in carry-on: cell phones, laptops, canes, disposable razors, umbrellas and nail clippers. Items you can't take on include knives, corkscrews and sports gear such as golf clubs, baseball bats, racquets and pool cues. Check with your airline and www.catsa.gc.ca/home for restrictions.

Currency

The national currency is the Cuban Peso. Bring Canadian cash; it can be easily exchanged for **Cuban Convertible Pesos** at banks (your best bet), hotels, airports and money exchange houses. A 10% exchange fee applies if you convert US dollars to pesos. **Do not deal in the black market.** The Cuba Tourist Board says you can't get Convertible Pesos before going to Cuba. Don't assume

your debit card can withdraw funds; although debit use is increasing, get a cash advance in pesos on your Canadian credit card at Cuban ATMs/banks (take your PIN number). When tipping, only tip in Convertible Pesos.



Your Airline

Sign up online for your airline(s) email or text flight notifications as your flight could be delayed (the plane might be flying in). CATSA notes "Travellers should arrive at the airport earlier than usual, exercise patience and **contact their airline for further information on their flight(s)**" www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca. Airline staff are on duty some 3hrs prior: due to staffing and security, check-in closes 1hr before departure. If late, you're not entitled to board (or a refund). Unless booked ahead, seats are first-come first-served. **For check-in or carry-on baggage allowances**, see your airline's website as size and weight restrictions for checked and carry-on varies by airline. Keep a separate photocopy or a photo on your cell of your passport's ID page. **Entry & Departure:** Cuba's Departure Tax is included in your package price; ensure you have your Tourist Card from your arrival.



Get Packing Checklist and General Planning & Packing Tips at www.legrowstravel.ca/inside-scoops

- Your sense of adventure & humour!

Before You Leave

Do a room sweep for belongings. If you leave clothes or gifts for a staff member, leave a signed note as s/he'll need it to pass hotel security. Clothes for children, school supplies and toiletries are welcome. Although there's usually a noon check-out you may be able to pay a late fee if you have a later flight. Or, pack what you need for those few hours and check luggage with the hotel. Before buying wooden items, check for worm holes: if so, your item may be confiscated at customs. Don't buy or accept anything suspect or that may be taken from you on your return (plants, drugs, meat or animal products or endangered species parts). It is a traveller's responsibility to know Canada's limits and exemptions, www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/bgb-rmf-eng.html such as on duty free alcohol and tobacco.



Websites and emails in blue are hyperlinked; just click!

Canadian citizens: Emergency, contact the Embassy of Canada in Havana, (537) 204-2516. See Emergency Services: www.canadainternational.gc.ca/cuba/index.aspx. Or call Global Affairs (collect if needed), 613-996-8885 sos@international.gc.ca

When You Arrive

When clearing customs (usually to the lively music of a band) you'll need to show your passport, return ticket and Tourist Card. If on a charter, a rep will meet you outside the baggage area to show you the bus to your hotel. Locals might say they'll drive you and you'll be reimbursed—not true! If you don't want help with your bags, politely say "no gracias." Before you get on your bus, check luggage to ensure it's secure and loaded. The bus may drop travellers at other resorts—it's a great way to see other properties.

You'll be told of the time/place for your orientation meeting—don't miss it. The rep works part-time at your hotel (and other resorts) during posted hours. Since others are leaving, rooms are often not ready when you arrive, but start on the fun: pack a swimsuit in your carry-on or shed clothes and head to the pool or beach. The hotel's front desk will hold luggage. After noon, some banks and stores close. Take photo ID to change money/use a credit card. Keep your passport in your room safe or hotel's safety deposit box.

What To Do...What To Do...

While a main attraction is beaches, get out of the sun for other fun. Book excursions through your counsellor as you're confirmed; if you pay on site, use cash as credit cards are charged hefty fees. Attractions depend on your locale:

- Swim with dolphins at **Varadero Delfinario** at **Punta Hicacos Nature Park**; **Bahia de Naranjo Nature Park** at **Guardalavaca** in **Holguin Province**; **Acuario de Bacanao** in **Santiago de Cuba**; and **Cienfuegos Delfinario** at **Cienfuegos Rancho Faro Beach**. Or, watch sea lions and tropical fish at the **Varadero Aquarium**. Sample the terrific ice cream all across Cuba and watch for classic cars kept in great repair. Cigar factory tours are intriguing (even if you don't smoke). www.gocuba.ca
- In **Cayo Coco** or **Holguin**, try a "seedoo seafari" with snorkelling. Cuba is a diver's paradise: 500+ sites with shipwrecks, caverns and coral. Saddle-up for horseback trails or care to meet crocodiles? Take a jeep safari trip to explore exotic wildlife (cold drinks included). Fore! Cuba speaks your language at the scenic **Varadero Golf Club** (18-hole par 72) with lagoons (hazards!) and an infamous 19th hole.
- Don't miss **Havana**, two hours from Varadero. There's gorgeous architecture, those classic cars and **La Tropicana** cabaret with an outdoor ballroom.

The International Language of Courtesy

Delays and cancellations are all part of the adventure. Indeed a slower pace is guaranteed down south: enjoy it! Don't expect everyone speaks English; just as visitors to Canada don't expect you to be fluent in their language, learn a few words in Spanish; take LeGrow's Travel's Inside Scoop: Spanish. Tread lightly—on holiday we're all casual; littering and cigarette butts are unwelcome everywhere. For buffets, start small. Staff work long hours—a smile, patience and kind words are always welcome.

When You're There

Enjoy food and drink in moderation: sun and alcohol don't mix. Drink only bottled water and wash your hands often. Avoid uncooked food and street vendors. Avoid street animals (possible rabies). Ice at resorts is safe; check with your tour rep.

Many travellers go to the beach early to "reserve" beach chairs with towels: don't leave valuables or swap chairs already taken. Beach towels are available at the hotels; to reduce loss, often a deposit is charged and returned to you on departure.

Water is a precious commodity: when people leave the beach to get ready for dinner, expect reduced pressure or hot water; consider returning earlier and relax as you're getting ready. If you book tours, make sure you can handle the level: don't book Advanced Scuba diving if you can't swim. If you take in local nightlife: go with others and return to your resort. Avoid the beach (bug bites) at dusk.

Our 24/7 Emergency Service

We constantly survey airlines, local tour companies and hotels to ensure they meet our customer service standards, so don't let a problem ruin your holiday. Nearly all issues can be handled quickly on site—first seek help from the venue's local staff. Otherwise, call our Emergency Travel Service at **1-888-551-1181**. Deposits are non-refundable and non-transferrable. Schedule changes can occur and airlines and tour operators have the right to change flight and/or tour times, alter, combine services or substitute accommodations. Your counsellor will work with you to ensure you receive information as soon as possible and ensure satisfaction. See your brochure and ticket terms and conditions.

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