

# Country Guide for

# CUBA



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	1	Contact Addresses
	2	General
	3	Passport
	4	Money
	5	Duty Free
	6	Public Holidays
	7	Health
	8	Accommodation
	9	Resorts & Excursions
	10	Sport & Activities
	11	Social Profile
	12	Business Profile
	13	Climate
	14	History and Government
	15	Overview

## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Northwest Caribbean.

Ministerio de Turismo

Calle 19, No 710, Entre Paseo y A, Vedado, Havana, Cuba

**Tel:** (7) 330 545. Fax: (7) 334 086. E-mail: promo@mintur.mit.cma.net

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba

167 High Holborn, London WC1V 6PA

**Tel:** (020) 7240 2488. Fax: (020) 7836 2602. Opening hours: 0930-1700 Monday to Friday.

Cuban Consulate

15 Grape Street, London WC2 8DR

**Tel:** (020) 7240 6897 or (0891) 880 820 (recorded visa information; calls cost 60p per minute).

Fax: (020) 7836 2602. Opening hours: Monday to Friday 1000-1700; 0930-1230 (visa section) .

Cuba Tourist Board

154 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8JT

**Tel:** (020) 7240 6655. Fax: (020) 7836 9265.

**E-mail:** cubatouristboard.london@virgin.net

British Embassy

PO Box 1069, Calle 34 No 702, Entre 7 y 17, Miramar, 11300 Havana, Cuba

**Tel:** (7) 241 771. Fax: (7) 248 104 or 249 214.

**E-mail:** embrit@ceniai.inf.cu

Cuba Interests Section

2630 16th Street, NW, Washington DC 20009

**Tel:** (202) 797 8518. Fax: (202) 797 8521.

**E-mail:** cubaseccion@prodigy.net

US Interests Section

Swiss Embassy, Calzada entre Calle L y M, Vedado, 10400 Havana, Cuba

**Tel:** (7) 333 967. Fax: (7) 334 728.

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba

388 Main Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 1E3

**Tel:** (613) 563 0141. Fax: (613) 563 0068. E-mail: cuba@idirect.com

**Web site:** <http://www.cubaweb.com>

Canadian Embassy

Calle 30, No 518, Esquina a 7, Avenida Miramar, Havana, Cuba

**Tel:** (7) 242 516/7 or 242 527. Fax: (7) 242 044 or 241 069 (visa section).

**Country Dialling Code:** 53.

## 2 GENERAL

**Area:** 110,860 sq km (42,803 sq miles).

**Population:** 11,059,000 (1997).

**Population Density:** 99.8 per sq km.

**Capital:** Havana. Population: 2,184,990 (1995).

**Geography:** Cuba is the largest Caribbean island, about the size of England, and the most westerly of the Greater Antilles group, lying 145km (90 miles) south of Florida. A quarter of the country is fairly mountainous. West of Havana is the narrow Sierra de los Organos, rising to 750m (2461ft) and containing the Guaniguanicos hills in the west. South of the Sierra is a narrow strip of 2320 sq km (860 sq miles) where the finest Cuban tobacco is grown. The Trinidad Mountains, starting in the centre, rise to 1100m (3609ft) in the east. Encircling the port of Santiago are the rugged mountains of the Sierra Maestra. A quarter of the island is covered with mountain forests of pine and mahogany.

**Government:** Socialist Republic. Gained independence from Spain in 1898. Head of State and Government: President Fidel Castro Ruz since 1959.

**Language:** The official language is Spanish.

**Religion:** Roman Catholic majority.

**Time:** GMT - 5.

**Electricity:** 110/120 volts AC, 60Hz. American-style flat 2-pin plugs are generally used, except in certain large hotels where the European round 2-pin plug is standard.

**Telephone:** IDD to Havana only. Country code: 53. Outgoing international code: 119. Some calls must be made through the international operator, and may be subject to delays.

**Mobile telephone:** Phones from UK cannot be used. Handsets can be hired from Cubacel S.A (tel: 537 802 222).

**Fax:** Services are widely available.

**Internet/E-mail:** Available at hotels.

**Telegram:** These may be sent from all post offices in Havana and from RCA offices in major hotels in large towns.

**Post:** Letters to Western Europe can take several weeks. It is advisable to use the airmail service.

**Press:** Papers are in Spanish, although the Communist Party daily newspaper, Granma, publishes a weekly edition, called Granma International, in English, Portuguese and French. There is also a

fortnightly international newspaper, Prisma de Cuba y las Américas, published in Spanish and English. All media is government-controlled.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**

MHz17.7115.226.1955.975

**Voice of America:**

MHz13.749.7756.1305.995

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	1	Yes
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	1	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	1	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	1	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	Yes	1	Yes
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	1	Yes

**PASSPORTS:** Passports valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of stay required by all.

**Note:** Persons of Cuban origin who are nationals of other countries must travel with a Cuban passport if they left Cuba after 1970.

**VISAS:** Required by all except:

- a) those nationals whose countries have signed visa exemption agreements with Cuba (contact the Consulate for further information);
- b) 1. holders of a Tourist Visa Card. Certain tour operators, travel agencies and airlines can issue a Tourist Visa Card valid for one single trip of 30 days duration, although the stay can be extended in Cuba. Stipulations are that the traveller pre-books and pre-pays hotel accommodation in Cuba through an officially recognised tour operator. The card must be bought in the country where the trip has been arranged. All passengers must hold tickets and other documentation required for their onward or return journey unless holding special annotation issued by a Cuban Consulate.

**Note:** (a) All business travellers (except journalists, those attending a conference or those wishing to study) do need a visa regardless of nationality. (b) Persons who wish to reside in Cuba with family or friends must apply for a Visitor's Visa, not a Tourist Visa Card. (c) Neither visa exemptions nor Tourist Visa Card facilities are applicable to foreign passport holders born in Cuba, unless holding document proving withdrawal of Cuban citizenship.

**Exit permits:** Required by those whose stay in Cuba exceeds 90 days.

**Types of visa and cost:** Tourist Visa Card: £15. Business visa: £32. Visitor's Visa: £32. Transit visa. Transit visas are not required by passengers continuing their journey within 72 hours and

holding reserved onward tickets and enough funds for duration of stay (at least US\$50 per day or the equivalent in other currency).

**Note:** With the exception of Tourist Visa Cards, all visas have an additional charge of £15 for expenses in connection with visa authorisation.

**Validity:** Tourist Visa Cards must be used within 6 months of issue. Tourist Visa Cards and Business visas are valid for 30 days from date of entry; extensions are possible.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section. Application forms for tourist visa cards can be obtained from certain tour operators and travel agents.

**Application requirements:** Tourist Visa Card: (a) 1 completed application form. (b) Photocopy of valid passport. (c) Photocopy of return ticket or travel agent voucher for pre-paid package tour. (d) Fee (payable in cash, by postal order or cheque).

**Business visa:** (a) Valid passport. (b) 2 completed application forms. (c) 2 passport-size photos. (d) Details of business contact in Cuba. (e) Fee (payable in cash, by postal order or cheque).

**Visitor's Card:** (a) Valid passport. (b) 2 completed application forms. (c) 2 passport-size photos. (d) Details of private contact in Cuba. (e) Fee (payable in cash, by postal order or cheque).

**Working days required:** Tourist Visa Card: 1 day (7 days for postal applications). Business visa: 10 days (2 weeks for postal applications). Visitor's Visa: 20 days.

**Temporary residence:** Enquire at Embassy.

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Cuban Peso (peso) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of peso50, 20, 10, 5 and 3. Coins are in denominations of peso1, and 40, 20, 5, 2 and 1 centavos. Hard currency must be used in most transactions.

**Currency exchange:** Money should be exchanged at official foreign exchange bureaux, banks or international air and sea ports, who issue receipts for transactions. At official tourist shops, purchases are made only in US Dollars; it is therefore advisable not to change too much hard currency into pesos. Black marketeers may offer as much as 20 times the official rate for US Dollars, but tourists are advised to avoid them as severe penalties for black marketeering are imposed.

**Credit cards:** Visa and MasterCard are accepted, but check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available. American Express is not accepted.

**Travellers cheques:** US Dollar, Sterling and other major currencies are accepted, but US Dollar cheques issued by American banks are not acceptable. Do not enter the place and date details on any travellers cheque or it will be refused. The white exchange paper received upon encashment must be retained and shown when money is spent.

**Currency restrictions:** The import and export of local currency is prohibited. The import of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration on arrival. Generally, a maximum of pesos10 may be reconverted to foreign currency for re-export at the end of the stay but it may only be reconverted on presentation of a correctly filled out official exchange record.

**Banking hours:** 0830-1200 and 1330-1500 Monday to Friday; 0830-1030 Saturday.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be taken into Cuba by persons aged 18 years and over without incurring customs duty:  
200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 3 bottles of alcoholic beverages; gifts up to a value of US\$50; 10kg of medicines.

**Prohibited Items:** Natural fruits, beans or vegetables; meat and dairy products; weapons and ammunition; video cassettes and household appliances; all pornographic material and drugs.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 Liberation Day. May 1 Labour Day. Jul 25-27 Anniversary of the 1953 Revolution. Oct 10 Wars of Independence Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day.

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	No	No
<b>Cholera</b>	No	No
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	Yes	-
<b>Malaria</b>	No	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	1	-

**1:** Mains water is chlorinated and, whilst relatively safe, may cause mild abdominal upsets. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of stay. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafoods and fruit are generally considered safe to eat.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.  
Hepatitis A has been reported in the northern Caribbean Islands.

**Health care:** Cuba's medical services are good and some emergency treatment may be available to visitors at no cost. However, health insurance is necessary, as foreigners must pay most of their own health care costs.

Travel - International

**AIR:** Cuba's national airline is Cubana, Empresa Consolidada de Aviación (CU). Other airlines serving Cuba include Aeroflot, Air France, AOM French Airlines, Air Jamaica, British Airways, Iberia, Mexicana and Spanair.

**Approximate flight times:** From Havana to London is 10 hours, to Los Angeles is 9 hours and to New York is 5 hours.

**International airport:** Havana (HAV) (José Martí International) is 18km (11 miles) south of the city. Bus and taxi services to the city are available. Airport facilities include duty-free shops, bank, tourist information/hotel reservation and car hire.

There are also international airports at Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Holguin and Varadero. Facilities at Havana and Santiago de Cuba have recently been upgraded.

**Departure tax:** US\$20 from Havana and Varadero. US\$5 from all other airports.

Travel - Internal

**AIR:** Cubana operates scheduled services between most main towns but advance booking is essential as flights are limited.

**RAIL:** The principal rail route is from Havana to Santiago de Cuba, with two daily trains. Some trains on this route have air conditioning and refreshments. There are also through trains from Havana to other towns.

**ROAD:** Most sightseeing is pre-arranged, though internal travel arrangements may be made through any of the several ground handlers. Traffic drives on the right. Bus: Most tours will include travel by air-conditioned buses. The Cubans themselves use the long-distance buses that link most towns; fares are low and services are reliable, but the buses can be very crowded especially during the rush hour. Taxi: Taxis and chauffeur-driven cars are cheap but can be scarce and are in general very old. It is usual to order them through the hotel. All official taxis have meters but in private taxis fares should be pre-arranged. Car hire: There are several car hire companies. Bicycles can be hired. Documentation: Valid national driving licence required. Drivers must be aged 21 or over.

**URBAN:** Buses, minibuses and plentiful shared taxis operate in Havana at low flat fares. Buses are frequent but often very crowded.

**JOURNEY TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Havana to other major towns in Cuba.

Air	Road
Varadero	0.152.00
Trinidad	0.205.00
Santiago de Cuba	1.1517.00
Playas del Este	0.30
Pinar del Rio	0.152.00

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

The range of accommodation available is expanding. The best hotels are in Havana or at Varadero Beach. Since many visitors to Cuba go as part of a package holiday the hotel will have been selected in advance. The hotels are clean, functional and adequate. Contact the Cuba Tourist Board for further information (see address section).

## 9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

Since the 1950s, Havana has transformed itself from the notorious gambling centre of the Caribbean to the respectable capital of the Republic of Cuba. Apart from seeing the city on organised tours, visitors can take a bus ride from one end of the town to the other, beginning in the former brothel quarter and ending in the beautiful suburbs of Vedado and Miramar. Revolution Square has large tableaux of revolutionary heroes surrounding it. By way of contrast, the Cathedral Square in Old Havana retains many old houses and cobbled streets and there are interesting art shows in the vicinity on Saturday afternoons. Although Old Havana is largely falling apart - a situation now being remedied by extensive renovation - the concentration of historic buildings has placed the area on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Best preserved are the Spanish colonial buildings, such as the Museum of the City of Havana or the Castillo de la Fuerza. Visitors interested in tracing the footsteps of the American writer Ernest Hemingway, who lived in Havana for 21 years, may head to the hilly suburb of San Francisco de Paula where Hemingway's villa, La Vigia, has been preserved as it was when he killed himself there in 1961 (including empty rum bottles, hunting trophies and a yacht on display next to an empty swimming pool). It should be noted that it is not possible to enter the house, although the rooms can be viewed through the windows. Literary enthusiasts may also visit the La Floridita and La Bodeguita bars in Old Havana, which were often frequented by Hemingway. Other cultural and architectural attractions include the open-air Tropicana Club; the famous Ballet Nacional de Cuba; the Columbus Cemetery and the Museum of the Revolution. About 17km (10 miles) east of the capital, the Playas del Este is a good beach located in an area with a traditional Cuban flavour.

**Isla de la Juventud:** Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth), 129km (80 miles) south of Havana, is the largest of the 350 islands making up the Canarreos archipelago, a region administered from Isla de la Juventud's capital, Nueva Gerona. Once known as 'Parrot Island' and a hideout for pirates such as Henry Morgan, most of the island's few inhabitants live in the north.

**Varadero:** Varadero, 144km (89 miles) northeast of Havana, situated along a sheltered peninsula, is Cuba's most famous beach resort. Villas, parks and hotels line 20km (12.5 miles) of beaches ideal for year-round swimming. Some 195km (121 miles) southeast of the capital, Cayo Largo is another of Cuba's well known tourist resorts, considered to have some of the best beaches in the Caribbean.

**Pinar del Río:** Pinar del Río is located in the province of the same name, 161km (100 miles) southwest of Havana, perhaps the most beautiful part of Cuba. The area is especially noted for its spectacular countryside, characterised by mogotes (limestone mountains) and tobacco fields. The road between Viñales and the coast is particularly scenic. Some of the best tobacco plantations can be visited at Vuelta Abajo, a short distance southwest of Pinar del Río. The latter is also home to several cigar factories, which can be visited on tour buses leaving from Havana. The growing season for tobacco is generally from December to April.

**Guama:** Guama, 179km (111 miles) southeast of Havana in Matanzas Province, is a reconstructed Indian village, built on a series of islands linked by wooden bridges, and now including a holiday resort. Set beside a broad lagoon, the vanished culture of Cuba's first inhabitants, who were wiped out by the early colonisers, is commemorated with sculptures showing Indians taking part in everyday activities.

**Trinidad:** Trinidad, 290km (180 miles) southeast of Havana retains the atmosphere of an old colonial town. Founded in the year 1514, Trinidad was one of Cuba's seven original towns, and the presence of many beautiful 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century buildings rightly now grants it a

place on UNESCO's World Heritage list. The town's small centre has cobblestone streets and several interesting museums, including the Museo Histórico Municipal and the Museum of Decorative Arts. The Taller Alfarero, a ceramics workshop where traditional techniques are still used, is also worth visiting. The nearby Yznaga Tower (50m/165ft), another colonial building, offers good views of the surrounding hills.

**Santa Clara:** Santa Clara, 300km (186 miles) east of Havana, is a busy city at the centre of the agricultural region.

**Cienfuegos:** Cienfuegos, 325km (202 miles) southeast of Havana, is a prosperous modern city built around a fine harbour at the foot of the Escambray Mountains.

**Camagüey:** Camagüey, 563km (350 miles) east of Havana, is in the centre of a fertile plain and has long been the centre of Cuba's sugar industry. In 1666, it joined the long list of Caribbean ports sacked by Captain Henry Morgan, the notorious English pirate.

**Santiago de Cuba:** Santiago de Cuba, 780km (485 miles) east of Havana, is situated around a large natural harbour and was, until 1549, the capital of Cuba. Santiago witnessed the start of the Cuban revolution when, in July 1953, Fidel Castro's troops stormed the Moncada Barracks. The influence of French planters and Haitians who settled in Santiago de Cuba during the 19th century gives the city a distinctively Caribbean flavour. Although many buildings were destroyed by earthquakes, the city's dramatic setting at the foot of the Sierra Maestra Mountains makes for a worthwhile visit. Many houses feature intricate ironwork balconies and narrow external staircases. Some of Cuba's oldest palaces and museums are located in Santiago de Cuba, including the Colonial Museum (located in the Casa de Diego Velázquez, the house of the famous conquistador); and the Museo Municipal Bacardí. Also of interest is the Casagrande Hotel, located adjacent to the square in the Parcque Cespedes area, and a favourite haunt of the British author Graham Greene. The Cemeterio Santa Ifigenia is the resting place of many famous revolutionaries, including José Martí and the Bacardí brothers. Santiago's African heritage has led to a vibrant local culture and many Cuban musical styles, such as the son, have originated here. Santiago's carnival is the most famous in Cuba.

**Baracoa:** Baracoa, 878km (546 miles) southeast of Havana, is located on Cuba's eastern tip, near Cabo Maisí, between two picturesque bays. Founded in 1512 by Diego Velázquez, Cuba's oldest European settlement was accessible only by boat until the 1960s, when a road connecting it to the mainland was constructed. The town's role as a former Spanish outpost is evidenced by its three forts, the Fuerta Matachín (now housing the municipal museum), the Castillo de Seboruco (now a hotel), and the Fuerte de la Punta (which now also houses a restaurant).

## 10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

All sporting events are free in Cuba. The country participates in many sports in the Olympic Games. Baseball is the national sport; soccer and a variety of ball games are also played. There are many stadia, and sport, both playing and watching, is one of the national pastimes.

**Watersports:** Watersports: Diving can be practised at major resorts and at some lesser-known locations. The 12-mile/19-km long Varadero Beach, one of Cuba's best developed resorts, offers good diving and snorkelling. For those not wanting to venture underwater, boat tours to the reef are available. Cayo Largo, an island to the south of Cuba, also has a beautiful beach, with facilities for snorkelling, diving, windsurfing and fishing. Lesser-known resorts offering good facilities include Cayo Coco, an island off the northern coast, Cayo Guillermo, accessible along a

causeway from Cayo Coco and Guardalvaca, to the north of Holguín. The Isla de la Juventud, a large island to the south of Cuba, offers excellent reef diving. Wildlife including turtles and iguanas can be observed on the coral keys to the east. Expeditions leave from hotels on the west side of the island. There is also very good diving from resorts in the Pinar del Río province in the northwest of the island, an area characterised by clear water and long white-sand beaches. Beautiful corals can be seen off the coast. Some of the best fishing is to be had off the more remote beaches, which can be difficult to get to without one's own transport. Local dive operators offer organised dives, equipment hire and tuition.

**Hiking:** Hiking and trekking are possible in some of the more remote areas of the island, though permits may be required. Check with the authorities before departure. There are few marked trails, so it is best to hire a local guide. There are three main mountain ranges: in the west, centre and east of the island. Beautiful and unspoilt scenery can be found all over Cuba. Pico Turquino, Cuba's highest mountain, is in the Sierra Maestra range which offers good hikes and treks. The Sierra de Cubitas range near Camguëy is characterised by river gorges and cliffs, while the Escambray Mountains near Trinidad contain dense rainforest. Guama, on the Zapata peninsula is an extensive marshy area, which hosts many interesting varieties of birds, including parrots. The Cordillera de Guaniguanico in the north of the island features spectacular scenery with rivers and limestone mountains and caves.

**Horseriding:** Horseriding is available at special tourist ranches at Baconao and Trinidad.

## 11 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** Restaurants (both table- and self-service) are generally inexpensive although the choice of food can be restricted due to shortages. Cuisine is continental or Cuban with a strong emphasis on seafood. Favourite dishes are omelettes, often stuffed with meat and/or cheese; a thick soup made of chicken or black beans; roast suckling pig; chicken and rice; plantains baked or fried; and local Cuban ice cream. Tour food served in hotels is not always exciting but it is adequate and will include chicken, fish, ham and cheese, fresh papaya, melon, pineapple, mangoes, bananas, fresh vegetables and green salads. Desserts are sweet and include pastries, flans, caramel custard, guava paste and cheese. Drink: Bars generally have waiter and counter service. Cuban coffee is very strong, but weaker British-style coffee is available. Cuban beer is tasty but weak. Spirits are reasonably priced, and rum is good and plentiful and used in excellent cocktails such as daiquiris and mojitos (pronounced 'meh-hee-to').

**Nightlife:** Nightlife is concentrated in Havana, Varadero Beach and in the major tourist resorts. Much entertainment may be planned by the visitor's guide or tour operator, and it is common to attend in organised groups. There is a choice of floor-show entertainments, nightclubs and theatres. The Tropicana nightclub stages spectacular open-air shows. Theatre, opera and ballet are staged all year round in Havana and seats are very cheap. Cinemas show films in Spanish, but some have subtitles.

**Shopping:** Special purchases include cigars, rum and local handicrafts. The main hotels have a few luxury shops stocked with East European items, especially radios and crystal. There are duty-free shops at the airport and in the centre of Havana. Shopping hours: 0900-1900 Monday to Friday.

**Special Events:** The following is a selection of the major special events and festivals taking place in Cuba in 2001. All events take place in Havana unless otherwise stated. For further details contact the Office of the Cuban Convention Bureau and the Cuban Association of Organizers of

Events, Incentives and Related Activities (ACOE), Calle M et/ 17 y 19, Edificio Fosca Vedado, Ciudad Habana (tel: (7) 552 923; fax (7) 334 261; e-mail@ buroconv@buroconv.mit.cma.net; web site: <http://www.buroconv.cubaweb.cu>).

Jan 2-13 2001 CUBA DANZA (contemporary Cuban dance). Mar 28-Apr 4 12th International Biennial Comedy Festival. May 4-13 Theatrical May (Theatre Festival). Jun 4-9 51st International Ernest Hemingway White Marlin Fishing Tournament. Jun 11-16 Elsinor Theatre and Dance Festival. Jul 3-9 Fiesta of Fire (Festival of Caribbean Culture), Santiago de Cuba. Jul 20-Aug 12 Havana Carnival. Oct 20-25 Festival of Cuban Culture, Granma. Oct 24-30 Jamaica-Cuba Festival, Holguín. Dec 5-15 International Festival of New Latin American Film. Jan-Aug 2002 CUBA DANZA (contemporary Cuban dance). Jan-Jul FOLK CUBA (traditional music and dance). Feb International Festival of New Latin America Film. May Havana International Guitar Competition and Festival. Jul Fiesta of Fire (Festival of Caribbean Culture), Santiago de Cuba. Oct International Ballet Festival; Jamaica-Cuba Festival, Holguín. Dec International Jazz Festival.

**Social Conventions:** Handshaking is the normal form of greeting. Cubans generally address each other as *compañero*, but visitors should use *señor* or *señora*. Some Cubans have two surnames after their Christian name and the first surname is the correct one to use. Normal courtesies should be observed when visiting someone's home and a small gift may be given if invited for a meal. Formal wear is not often needed and hats are rarely worn. Men should not wear shorts except on or near the beach. Women wear light cotton dresses or trousers during the day and cocktail dresses for formal evenings. Tipping: Moderate tipping is expected.

## 12 BUSINESS PROFILE

**Economy:** The economy, which is still largely state-controlled, is primarily agricultural. The main crop is sugar, of which Cuba is one of the world's largest exporters. However, with the prevailing low price for the commodity throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the Government has attempted to diversify into other crops. Tobacco and citrus fruits are of increasing importance. Cuban industry is largely devoted to the processing of agricultural products but also produces cement, fertilisers, textiles, prefabricated buildings, agricultural machinery and domestic consumer goods. Tourism, the only significant service industry, is a projected growth industry and a vital source of foreign exchange; the Government has invested heavily in developing infrastructure for that purpose. Overshadowing the Cuban economy, however, has long been the US economic blockade against the island which has proved increasingly punitive, especially since the passage in 1996 of the so-called Helms-Burton act which penalises foreign companies which do business in Cuba (by preventing them from doing any in the USA). Unable to trade fully effectively (even though bilateral US-Cuban trade is estimated at \$300 million annually, mostly in telecommunications traffic and other instruments such as credit cards), and suffering from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba has experienced severe economic difficulties in recent years. Domestic reforms of the rigid state-controlled structure - and opening up to foreign investment (Helms-Burton notwithstanding) and the creation of export-processing zones - have allowed some relief but, barring a comprehensive political settlement with the USA, the economy is likely to remain in difficulties. Argentina, Canada, China and Spain are Cuba's main trading partners.

**Business:** Courtesy is expected and hospitality should not be lavish, being offered to groups rather than individuals. Best months for business visits are November to April. Office hours: 0830-1230 and 1330-1630 Monday to Friday; some offices also open on alternate Saturdays from 0800-1700.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisation can offer advice: Cámara de Comercio de la República de Cuba, Calle 21, No 661/701, esq. Calle A, Apartado 4237, Vedado, Havana (tel: (7) 303 356; fax: (7) 333 042).

**Conferences/Conventions:** Modern facilities are available at Havana International Conference Center, Pabexpo and ExpoCuba. Further information can be obtained from Cubanacan UK Ltd, Unit 49, Skylines, Limeharbour, London E14 9TS (tel: (020) 7537 7909; fax: (020) 7537 7747; e-mail: tai10@dial.pipex.com).

## 13 CLIMATE

Hot, sub-tropical climate all year. Most rain falls between May and October and hurricanes can occur in autumn (August to November). Humidity varies between 75% and 95%. Cooler months are January to April when the least rain falls.

**Required clothing:** Lightweight cottons and linens most of the year; the high humidity makes it unwise to wear synthetics close to the skin. Light waterproofs are advisable all year round.

## 14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** Three main native groups inhabited Cuba when Columbus reached it in 1492. The Ciboney and Guanahatabey lived in the western, while the Taino people populated the remainder of the island's Permanent settlement. Slavery and the establishment of large plantations, began almost immediately. The indigenous population was quickly decimated by disease, fighting and maltreatment. Cuba was also used as a base for Spanish treasure ships and it was from here that the Spanish organised trips to the Americas. Throughout the 17th century, life in Cuba was rendered difficult for the Spanish by persistent epidemics, hurricanes and the attentions of rival colonial powers. The next century proved more successful, at least in economic terms, as a huge increase in the population took place as hundreds of thousands of slaves were imported from Africa. Spanish refusal to deal with the growing independence movement in the late 19th century led to two wars of independence. The first, between 1868 and 1878, ended in stalemate; the second, in which the rebels were inspired by the poet and revolutionary Jose Marti, began in 1895 and ended when the USA was drawn into the war in 1898. Although nominally independent thereafter, Cuba was initially occupied for two years by US forces. After their withdrawal in 1901, the USA maintained effective political and economic control of the island while Cuba was governed by a series of corrupt dictators such as Fulgencio Batista and Carlos Pro Socarrás. In 1959, after a classic guerilla campaign, Fidel Castro overturned the hugely corrupt Batista Government and established a socialist state. All US businesses were expropriated in 1960 and diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken by the US. In 1961, the US Central Intelligence Agency organised a corps of anti-Castro rebels to invade the island and galvanise an uprising to overthrow the Castro regime. This 'Bay of Pigs' invasion was a complete fiasco: all the invaders were captured or killed and the US (supposedly) covert involvement was quickly revealed. Later that year Castro declared Cuba a Marxist-Leninist state and accelerated the development of close relations with the Soviet Union. The following year, Soviet missiles were installed on Cuba capable of hitting targets in the USA. President Kennedy ordered a naval blockade against the island. The confrontation escalated to the threshold of nuclear war before Kennedy and Krushchev reached a settlement. After the crisis, Cuba for the most part proved a loyal Soviet ally and was the largest recipient of Soviet foreign aid. The other main plank of Cuba's foreign policy was military assistance to weaker Third World nations. Since the demise of

the Soviet Union and the resulting economic retrenchment at home, Cuba's foreign adventures have ended as it concentrates on its domestic situation and relations with the rest of Latin America. There were notable improvements in relations with its Caribbean neighbours and with Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Argentina. At home, Cuba has enjoyed an impressive reputation for the quality of its health care and social services, though not for its overall quality of life or tolerance of opposition. The US economic blockade has undoubtedly hindered the development of the Cuban economy: the strength of the 'Cuba lobby' in the USA effectively prohibits any US administration from normalising relations. (The recent case of Elian Gonzales, a child rescued from drowning while attempting to cross the 90 mile strait between Cuba and Florida, showed how strong feelings remain.).

**Government:** Under the terms of the 1976 constitution, all legislative power in the Republic of Cuba is vested in a 499-member National Assembly of People's Power, which is elected every five years by municipal deputies. A 31-member Council of State is elected by the Assembly from the Assembly. The Council's President is both Head of State and Head of Government. Executive and administrative power is vested in a Council of Ministers, appointed by the Assembly on the Head of State's recommendation. The constitution also guarantees that the Communist Party (PCC) should remain not only the sole legal party in Cuba but 'the leading force of society and state'.

## 15 OVERVIEW

**Country Overview:** Cuba is an island that assaults the senses. Surprisingly for one of the last remaining communist countries, you are greeted with strains of exotic rhythms - the salsa or rhumba - emanating from every corner. An aquamarine sea laps the white, palm-fringed beaches of Varadero and offshore Cayos Largo and Coco. Here you can try your hand at blue marlin or barracuda fishing just as Hemingway depicted in his novel 'The Old Man and the Sea' or dive to the coral reef and search for shipwrecks. The little-visited Zapata Peninsula or the Bahia de Naranjo Nature Park offer the chance to swim with the dolphins.

Inland, only the roar of 1950s American cars disturbs deserted roads. The tobacco-growing area of Vinales with its intriguing limestone 'mogotes' (outcrops), contrasts dramatically with the rugged tree-covered mountains of the Sierra Maestra. Cuba's rich history as a Spanish colony is evident in the wealth of colonial architecture in major towns such as Havana and Santiago de Cuba.

A tourism revolution is transforming this once isolated country with an ever-increasing range of flights and hotels opening up previously inaccessible corners. Once faded and crumbling houses with ornate wrought iron balconies, and central courtyards are now being lovingly restored, while weathered campesinos sucking on titanic cigars watch contentedly as visitors discover this intoxicating island.