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TRANSPORTATION

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR

The only realistic way of reaching Habana from an outside country is by air.

All travelers leaving Cuba are expected to pay a CUC\$25 departure tax at José Martí International Airport. The tax is paid at a cashier's window just after you've checked your luggage and received a boarding card. Departure-tax payments are accepted in cash only.

Airlines

Most of the popular airlines have offices in the Airlines Building on Calle 23 (La Rampa) in Vedado, close to the intersection with the Malecón (Av de Maceo). There is additional representation at Terminal 3 of José Martí International Airport.

Despite a dubious safety record, Cuban national carrier Cubana de Aviación serves 11 Cuban cities, as well as numerous desti-

nations in Europe, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. Aerocaribbean also provides scheduled flights to destinations within Cuba.

Aerocaribbean (code 7L; Map pp224-5; ☎ 879-7524, 870-4965; www.aero-caribbean.com; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Air Canada (code ACA; Map pp224-5; ☎ 836-3226/27; www.aircanada.com; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Air Europa (code AEA; Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-6905/6/7/8; www.air-europa.com; Miramar Trade Center, cnr Av 3 & Calle 80, Playa)

Air France (code AFR; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-2642; www.airfrance.com; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Air Jamaica (code AJM; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3636; www.airjamaica.com; Hotel Meliá Cohiba, Paseo btwn Calles 1 & 3, Vedado)

Air Transat (code TSC; www.airtransat.com)

Cubana de Aviación (code CU; Map pp224-5; ☎ 834-4446, 649-5666; www.cubana.cu; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Iberia (code IBE; Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-3444; www.iberia.com; Miramar Trade Center, cnr Av 3 & Calle 80, Playa)

Lacsa (code LRC; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3114; www.grupotaca.com; Hotel Habana Libre, cnr Calles L & 23, Vedado)

LAN (code LAN; Map pp224-5; ☎ 831-6186; www.lan.com; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

LTU International Airways (code LTU; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3524; www.ltu.com; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Martinair (code MPH; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3729; www.martinair.com; cnr Calles 23 & E, Vedado)

Mexicana de Aviación (code MXA; Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3532; www.mexicana.com.mx; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Virgin Atlantic (code VIR; Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-0747; www.virginatlantic.com; Miramar Trade Center, cnr Av 3 & Calle 80, Playa)

Airport

Twenty-five kilometers southwest of Habana via Av de la Independencia (Av de Rancho Boyeros), **José Martí International Airport** (code HAV; Map p232; ☎ 33-56-66) serves the international and domestic needs of air travelers arriving in and leaving the Cuban capital. On a clear run it takes 30 minutes to get into central Habana by taxi.

There are a number of terminals here. Terminal 1, on the southeast side of the runway, handles only domestic Cubana de Aviación flights. Opposite, on the north side of the runway, but 3km away via Av de la Independencia, is Terminal 2, which receives Corsair flights and charters from Miami. All other international flights use Terminal 3, an ultramodern facility that opened in 1998 at Wajay, 2.5km west of Terminal 2. Charter flights by Aerocaribbean, Aerogaviota and Aerotaxi to Cayo Largo del Sur and elsewhere use the Caribbean Terminal (also known as Terminal 5), at the northwest end of the runway, 2.5km west of Terminal 3. (Terminal 4 hasn't been built yet.)

BICYCLE

While rural Cuba might be a cyclist's paradise, negotiating the increasingly clogged streets of urban Habana is an entirely different matter. If you do elect to use two wheels rather than four, be sure to wear a helmet, cycle at an off-peak time (Saturday or Sunday mornings are quietest), and take extra care when weaving in and out of the traffic.

Habana has just one official bike-hire outlet; it's called El Orbe (p145) and is located in Centro Habana.

GETTING INTO TOWN

José Martí International Airport is notoriously inaccessible by public transportation. For first-time visitors, a taxi is the best bet. Shop around and you should get something in the vicinity of CUC\$20.

Habana stalwarts might want to wait around for the sporadic terminal connector bus (a red, white and blue vehicle with *conexión* displayed on the front), which for CUC\$1 will drop you in nearby Av de la Independencia (Av de Rancho Boyeros), where a cheaper yellow or white Lada taxi will take you into the city center for CUC\$10 to CUC\$15.

BOAT

Cruise Ships & Yachts

Cruise ships that include Habana on their itineraries are few and far between due to the ongoing US trade embargo, which prohibits vessels calling at Cuban ports from visiting the US for six months.

Access by private yacht or cruiser is a little easier. Habana is served by one port authority in the **Marina Hemingway** (Map pp228-9; ☎ 209-7270; cnr Av 5 & Calle 248, Santa Fe), situated 20km west of Habana. The marina has four identical docking channels, which are 1km long by 15m deep by 6m wide. No prior visas or reservations are required for those traveling by yacht, but you'll have to purchase CUC\$25 tourist cards upon arrival if you plan to stay longer than 72 hours. Private yachts bound for Cuba should try to make radio contact with the Cuban port authorities over channel 16 or 7462 SSB before crossing the 12-mile limit. Say *llamando seguridad marítima* (calling maritime security) and quote the name of the port.

Required documents include the passports of everyone on board; the ownership papers, title and registration certificate of the vessel; and the clearance document from your last port, with Cuba listed as your destination.

Ferries

Ferries shuttle from Habana Vieja to Regla and Casablanca, leaving every 10 or 15 minutes from **Muelle Luz** (Map p220; cnr San Pedro & Santa Clara, Habana Vieja). Thanks to an attempted hijacking in 2003, expect to be searched before boarding. Foreigners are usually charged CUC\$1, and the crossings take 10 minutes.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travelers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

BUS

Local Buses

Bus travel in Habana is not for the faint-hearted. Queues, crowds, belching fumes and the kind of claustrophobia that even Houdini would have struggled with are all part of the unrelenting package. Regular city buses are called *guaguas* (wah-wahs), while the much larger metro buses are termed *camellos* (camels) for their two elevated metallic humps that allow room for more passengers. Within the city the fare is a flat 25 centavos in an extended bus with an accordion connection in the middle or 50 centavos in a regular bus, which you must toss into a box near the driver or pay to a conductor.

You will find queues at most *paradas* (bus stops), even though they may be difficult to spot at first glance. To mark your place ask for *el último* (the last in line), and when the bus arrives get behind that person. At the originating stops, there are generally two lines, one for *sentados* (people who want a seat) and another for *parados* (people willing to stand). The second line moves faster and is best if you're going only a short distance and have no luggage.

Gas-guzzling *camellos* run along the routes of Habana's projected Moscow-style subway system, which was never built due to lack of money. The buses can squeeze in up to 300 passengers (uncomfortably) into their two humps and are hauled by fume-belching heavy-duty trucks. All have the prefix M before their number and run on well-established routes:

- M-1 Alamar–Vedado via Parque de la Fraternidad
- M-2 Parque de la Fraternidad–Santiago de las Vegas
- M-3 Alamar–Ciudad Deportiva
- M-4 Parque de la Fraternidad–San Agustín via Marianao
- M-5 Vedado–San Agustín
- M-6 Calvario–Vedado (corner of Calles 21 and L)
- M-7 Parque de la Fraternidad–Alberro via Cotorro

Long-Distance Buses

Buses depart from Habana to every corner of Cuba. Of the two main bus companies, **Viazul** (www.viazul.com) is undoubtedly the best option with punctual, air-conditioned

coaches to destinations of interest to travelers. Viazul is a convertible service for tourists and well-heeled Cubans, and you can be confident you'll get where you want to on these buses. Its buses cost slightly more than those of its competitor Astro, but the difference is marginal and gets even more negligible the further you travel. It's also a good way to meet other foreigners.

Viazul buses leave from the **Viazul Bus Terminal** (Map pp218-19; ☎ 881-1413, 881-5652; cnr Calle 26 & Zoológico, Nuevo Vedado), which is inconveniently situated 3km southwest of Plaza de la Revolución. It'll cost you CUC\$5 in a taxi to get here from Parque Central.

Tickets for Viazul services are sold immediately prior to the departure in the Venta de Boletines office. You can get full schedules on the website or at Infotur (p197), which also sells tickets. Bookings via the Viazul website are unreliable and best avoided. Reservations with Viazul are advisable during peak travel periods (June to August, Christmas and Easter) and on popular routes. Destinations include Cienfuegos (CUC\$20, five hours, two daily), Pinar del Río (CUC\$11, four hours, two daily) and Varadero (CUC\$10, three hours, three daily).

The other option is Astro, whose new fleet of modern Chinese-made buses venture to slightly more off-the-beaten track places. Astro sells passages to Cubans in pesos and tourists in convertibles, so you'll meet lots of locals this way. Foreign students with a Cuban *carnet* (identification document) can pay in pesos. If you plan on taking Astro buses, check ahead of time as there's never any printed schedule and only two tickets per bus are available for foreigners on each departure (although if there's space left 30 minutes before departure, staff will sell the seats to anyone). Many services only run on alternate days.

Astro buses depart from the **Terminal de Ómnibus** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 870-9401; cnr Av de la Independencia & Calle 19 de Mayo, Vedado), near the Plaza de la Revolución. Tickets sold in Cuban convertibles are readily available at the office marked **Venta de Boletines** (☎ 870-3397; 🕒 24hr), down the hall to the right of the main entrance.

There's also a new daily Havanatur transfer bus that runs Habana–Soroa–Viñales, with further connections from Viñales. Inquire at Havanatur (p67) in Miramar.

CAR

With a plethora of inexpensive taxis and walking options, there's little reason to rent a car in Habana unless you intend to drive well beyond the city's limits. If you do decide to take the plunge, bear in mind that Habana's road rules are sketchy, signage is conspicuous by its absence and traffic is getting more congested by the day.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Gas is widely available in Servi-Cupet and Oro Negro stations all over Habana. The stores are often open 24 hours and may have a small spare-parts store on site. Gas is sold by the liter and comes in regular (CUC\$0.75/L) and *especial* (CUC\$0.95/L) varieties. Rental cars are advised to use *especial*. All gas stations have efficient pump attendants, usually in the form of *trabajadores sociales* (students in the process of studying for a degree).

While you cannot count on spare parts to be available per se, Cubans have decades of experience in keeping old wrecks on the road without factory parts, and you'll see them do amazing things with cardboard, string, rubber tubes and clothes hangers to keep a car mobile.

Petty theft of mirrors, antennas, taillights etc is common, so it's worth paying someone a convertible or two to watch your car for the night.

If you need air in your tires or you've got a puncture, use a gas station or visit the local *ponchero* (fixer of flat tires). There often aren't measurers, so make sure they don't overfill the tires.

Rental

Renting a car in Habana is very straightforward and you can usually be signed up and fitted out in well under an hour. You'll need your passport, driver's license and refundable CUC\$200 deposit (in cash or non-US credit card). Note that there are very few rental cars with automatic transmission.

If you want to rent a car for three days or fewer, it will come with limited kilometers, while with contracts for three days or more, you'll get unlimited kilometers. In Cuba you pay for the first tank of gas when you rent a car (CUC\$0.95/L) and return it empty – a suicidal policy that sees many

tight-fisted tourists running out of gas a kilometer or so from the drop-off point. Just to make it worse, you will not be refunded for any gas left in the tank.

If you lose your rental contract or keys, you'll pay a CUC\$50 penalty. Drivers under 25 pay a CUC\$5 fee, while additional drivers on the same contract pay a CUC\$15 surcharge.

Check over the car carefully with the rental agent before driving into the sunset as you'll be responsible for any damage or missing parts. Make sure there is a spare tire of the correct size, a jack and a lug wrench. Check also that there are seat belts and that all the doors lock properly.

We have received many letters about poor/nonexistent customer service, bogus spare tires, forgotten reservations and other car-rental problems. Reservations are only accepted 15 days in advance and are still not guaranteed. While agents are usually accommodating, you might end up paying more than you planned or have to wait hours until someone returns a car. The more Spanish you speak and the friendlier you are, the more likely problems will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction (tips to the agent might help). As with most Cuban travel, always be ready to go to plan B.

There's no shortage of car-rental offices in Habana. The fanciest cars are provided by Rex Rent a Car, and the most economical by Micar. Somewhere in between lie Havanautos, Cubacar, and Vía Rent a Car. Bank on paying CUC\$60 a day for the cheapest small car and well over CUC\$100 for something fancier. All of the car agencies have a info desk at the airport.

Cubacar Hotel Deauville (Map p222; cnr Av de Italia & Malecón, Centro Habana); Hotel Inglaterra (Map p222; Paseo de Martí No 416, Centro Habana); Hotel Meliá Cohiba (Map pp224-5; ☎ 833-3636; Paseo btwn Calles 1 & 3, Vedado); Hotel Meliá Habana (Map pp228-9; Av 3 btwn Calles 76 & 80, Playa); Hotel NH Parque Central (Map p222; Neptuno btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte, Centro Habana)

Havanautos Hotel Nacional (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles O & 21, Vedado); Hotel Riviera (Map pp224-5; cnr Paseo & Malecón, Vedado); Hotel Sevilla (Map p222; ☎ 866-8956; Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte, Centro Habana)

Micar Calle 21 (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles 21 & M, Vedado); Calle 23 (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles 23 & H, Vedado); Hotel Nacional (Map pp224-5; ☎ 873-3891; cnr Calles O & 21, Vedado); Malecón (Map pp224-5; cnr Malecón & Calle 23, Vedado)

Rex Rent a Car (Map pp224-5; ☎ 33-77-88; cnr Línea & Malecón, Vedado)

Via Rent a Car Aparthotel Montehabana (Map pp228-9; Calle 70 btwn Avs 5A & 7, Playa); Hotel Kohly (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-2606; cnr Av 49A & Calle 36, Kohly); Occidental Miramar (Map pp228-9; cnr Av 5 & Calle 74, Playa); Panorama Hotel Havana (Map pp228-9; cnr Av 3 & Calle 70, Playa)

Road Rules

Cubans drive how they want, where they want. It seems chaotic at first, but it has its rhythm. Seat belts are supposedly required and maximum speed limits are technically 50km/h in the city, 90km/h on highways and 100km/h on the Autopista (the national highway), but some cars can't even go that fast – and those that can go faster still.

While the rest of Cuba is refreshingly traffic free, Habana is fast becoming a congested city, with cheap Venezuelan oil adding more vehicles to the road by the day.

A major problem is lack of signage: road junctions and turnoffs are often not indicated at all. Not only is this distracting, it's also incredibly time-consuming. The dearth of signage also extends to road instructions. Often a one-way street is not clearly indicated or a speed limit not highlighted, which can cause problems with the police (who won't understand your inability to telepathically absorb the rules).

TAXI

Metered tourist taxis are readily available at all of the upscale hotels, with the air-conditioned Nissan taxis charging higher tariffs than the non-air-conditioned Ladas. The cheapest official taxis are operated by **Panataxi** (☎ 55-55-55) and cost CUC\$1 flag-fall, then CUC\$0.50 a kilometer. Tourist taxis charge CUC\$1 a kilometer and can be ordered from **Taxi OK** (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-9518; Calle 8 btwn Avs 1 & 3, Miramar). Almost all hotel receptions will be able to book you a taxi relatively quickly.

The cheapest taxis are the older yellow-and-black Ladas, which are state-owned but rented out to private operators. They won't wish to use their meters, as these are set at an unrealistically low rate, but you can bargain over the fare. They're not supposed to pick up passengers within 100m of a tourist hotel.

Bici-taxis

If you bargain hard, two-seater bici-taxis (bicycle taxis) will take you anywhere around Centro Habana for CUC\$2. It's a lot more than a Cuban would pay, but cheaper and more fun than a tourist taxi. Bici-taxis are licensed to carry only Cubans, and drivers may wish to go via a roundabout route through the backstreets to avoid police controls (if the drivers get caught breaking the rules, it's their problem not yours).

Colectivos

Colectivos are old prerevolution American cars that act as collective taxis for Cubans. They're not supposed to take foreigners but, if you're stuck somewhere out of the way – Guanabacoa, for instance – you can bargain for a ride.

TRAIN

Trains to most parts of Cuba depart from **Estación Central de Ferrocarriles** (Map p220; ☎ 862-4971, 861-8540; Av de Bélgica & Arsenal, Habana Vieja). Foreigners must buy tickets for dollars at **La Coubre Train Station** (☎ Map p220; 862-1006; cnr Av del Puerto & Desamparados, Habana Vieja; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri). If it's closed, try the Lista de Espera office adjacent, which sells tickets for trains leaving immediately. Kids under 12 travel half-price. Rail services include Holguín (CUC\$27, one daily), Matanzas (CUC\$4, eight daily) and Pinar del Río (CUC\$6.50, one daily). Services are routinely delayed or canceled; always double-check scheduling and the terminal from which your train will leave.

Cristina Station (Map pp224-5; cnr Av de México & Arroyo, Cuatro Caminos) lies about a kilometer southwest of the Estación Central de Ferrocarriles. It handles local trains within the city limits but is notoriously unreliable. The once convenient train to Boyeros (for Parque Lenin) and ExpoCuba was not working at the time of writing.

The **Casablanca Train Station** (Map p230; ☎ 862-4888), next to the ferry wharf on the east side of the harbor, is the western terminus of the only electric railway in Cuba. In 1917 the Hershey Chocolate Company of the US state of Pennsylvania built this line to Matanzas, and trains still depart for

Matanzas five times a day (currently at 4:43am, 8:35am, 12:39pm, 5:21pm and 9:17pm). The 8:35am service is an 'express.' You'll travel via Guanabo (CUC\$0.80, 25km), Camilo Cienfuegos (Hershey; CUC\$1.45, 46km), Jibacoa (CUC\$1.65, 54km) and Canasí (CUC\$1.95, 65km) to Matanzas (CUC\$2.80, 90km). The train usually leaves Casablanca on time but often arrives an hour late. It's a scenic four- to five-hour trip, and tickets are easily obtainable at the station (except on weekends and holidays when it could be crowded). For more information, see p177.

PRACTICALITIES ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations in Habana run the whole gamut, ranging from the CUC\$25 a night Hotel Lido to the CUC\$290 a night Hotel Saratoga, with plenty of variety and quality in between.

For the purposes of this book, budget means anything under CUC\$60 for two people in the low season. In this range, *casas particulares* (private houses that let out rooms to foreigners) compete with rough-and-ready government hotels in dire need of a renovation (with a couple of notable exceptions). As a result, private rooms are usually the best deal, though bear in mind that in cheaper *casas particulares* (around CUC\$20), you may have to share a bathroom, and the room will have a fan instead of air-con. Only the most deluxe *casas particulares* in Vedado and Miramar

will cost anything over CUC\$35; in these places you'll be assured of quality amenities and attention.

The midrange category is a lottery, with some stylish colonial hotels for CUC\$60 to CUC\$130 a double in the low season, and some less distinguished places. In midrange hotels, you can expect air-con, hot-water bathrooms, clean sheets, satellite TV, a restaurant and a swimming pool – although the architecture is often uninspiring and the food not exactly gourmet.

Unsurprisingly, the most comfortable hotels cost CUC\$130 and up for two people. These are usually partly foreign- or Habaguanex-owned and maintain international standards, although service can sometimes be a bit lax. Rooms have quality beds and linens, a minibar, international phone service and perhaps a terrace or view. In this category, Habana has some real gems.

Factors influencing rates are the time of year, the location and the hotel chain. Low season is usually mid-September to early December, and February to May (except for Easter week), though different hotels post slightly different schedules. Check before you book.

Casas Particulares

Private rooms are the best option for independent travelers in Habana, and a great way of meeting locals on their home turf. Staying in these family-run establishments will show you the city with its guard down, and your understanding (and appreciation) of Habana will be far richer as a result. Casa owners also often make excellent tour guides.

MISIÓN MILAGROS

Misión Milagros (Miracle Mission) is the unofficial name given to a pioneering medical program hatched between Cuba and Venezuela in 2004 that offers free eye treatment for impoverished Venezuelans in Cuban hospitals. By the beginning of 2006, over 150,000 Venezuelans had been successfully treated for eye ailments caused by cataracts, glaucoma, diabetes and other diseases under the scheme and, as a result, the program had been extended to at least 10 other Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Guyana and Bolivia.

In order to participate in Misión Milagros, foreign patients are first diagnosed and selected in their home country before being flown free of charge to Habana for treatment. Here advanced laser technology is able to correct easily rectified eye disorders and restore obscured or diminished vision within a matter of hours. Newly sighted patients are given complimentary accommodation in a variety of Cuban hotels and are bused around for free on a special fleet of Chinese-made Astro buses.

At the time of writing, a number of tourist hotels in Habana were temporarily out of action due to the Misión Milagros program. These included the Copacabana and Bello Caribe in Playa, El Viejo y El Mar in Marina Hemingway, the Panamericano in Cojimar and a number of hotels in Playas del Este.

Owners of *casas particulares* must keep a register of all guests and report each new arrival within 24 hours. For these reasons, you will find it hard to bargain for rooms. You will also be requested to produce your passport. For more information, see p160.

Hotels

All tourist hotels and resorts are at least 51% owned by the Cuban government and are administered by one of five main organizations.

Islazul has the cheapest hotels, and is the only accommodation option that rents to both Cubans and foreigners (although at different prices). While the facilities can be variable and the architecture a tad Sovietesque, Islazul hotels are invariably clean, cheap, friendly and, above all, Cuban. One downside is the blaring on-site bars and discos that often keep guests awake until the small hours.

Cubanacán is a step up and offers a mix of midrange options ranging from the scruffy Hotel El Viejo y El Mar in the Marina Hemingway to the boutique Hotel Chateau Miramar in Miramar.

Gaviota manages higher-end Cuban resorts ranging from the value-for-money Hotel Bosque to the ubermodern Hotel Panorama.

Gran Caribe does midrange to top-end hotels, including the three-star Hotel Vedado, the four-star Hotel Inglaterra and, the jewel in its crown, the five-star Hotel Nacional.

Lastly, Habaguanex is based solely in Habana and manages most of the fastidiously restored historic hotels in Habana Vieja. The profits from these ventures go directly toward restoring the old town (see p42).

Because each group has its own niche, throughout this book we mention the chain to which a hotel belongs to give you some idea of what to expect on the ground.

BUSINESS HOURS

Some offices are open from 8:30am to 5:30pm Monday to Saturday with a lunch break from 12:30pm to 1:30pm, although most stay open continuously from 9am to 5pm. Offices remain closed every other Saturday. Post offices are generally open

8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday; banks only open 9am to 3pm weekdays and close at noon on the last working day of each month.

Shopping hours are generally from 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday and 9am to 2pm Sunday. Pharmacies are open from 8am to 8pm daily, while museums maintain hours from 9am to 5pm Tuesday to Saturday and 8am to noon Sunday. Make a note that a lot of touristy stuff is closed in Habana on Monday. Churches are often open only for Mass, although you'll sometimes be let in the back door if you ask around.

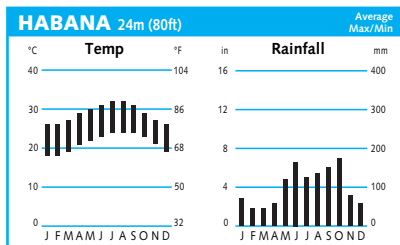
Most restaurants are open 10:30am to 11pm daily; paladares (privately run restaurants) usually open at noon and stay open a little later.

CHILDREN

There are many travelers with kids in Cuba, especially Cuban-Americans visiting family with their children; these will be your best sources for on-the-ground information. One aspect of the culture that parents may find foreign (aside from the material shortages) is the physical contact and human warmth that is so typically Cuban: waitresses will mind your baby, strangers will ruffle your kids' hair and Cuban babysitters will quickly introduce your children to the whole neighborhood. Diapers are available in Habana, but can be expensive – best bring your own. Basic kid-specific medicines are also sometimes hard to get. See p66 for sightseeing ideas. For more general advice, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*.

CLIMATE

Habana has a warm, tropical climate, although the heat is moderated by trade winds. See p26 for further details.



COURSES

Art

The **Taller Experimental de Gráfica** (Map p220; ☎ 7-862-0979; Callejón del Chorro No 6, Habana Vieja) offers classes in the art of engraving. Individualized instruction lasts one month, during which time the student creates an engraving with 15 copies; longer classes can be arranged. The cost is around CUC\$250.

Language

The first port of call for aspiring foreign-language students is the **Universidad de la Habana** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-4245, 831-3751; dpq@uh.cu; 2nd fl, Edificio Varona, Calle J No 556, Vedado), which offers Spanish courses throughout the year, beginning on the first Monday of each month. Costs start at CUC\$100 for 20 hours (one week) – including textbooks – and cover all levels from beginners to advanced. You must first sit a placement test to determine your level. Aspiring candidates can sign up in person at the university or reserve beforehand via email or phone.

Other places to inquire about Spanish courses include **Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba** (Uneac; Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-4551; cnr Calles 17 & H, Vedado) and **Paradiso** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 832-9538; Calle 19 No 560, Vedado).

Private lessons can be arranged by asking around locally; try your *casa particular*.

Music & Dance

Courses for foreigners can be arranged throughout the year by the **Oficina de Relaciones Internacionales de the Instituto Superior de Arte** (ISA; Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-208-8075; Calle 120 No 1110, Cubanacán). Courses in percussion and dance are available almost anytime, but other subjects (such as visual arts, music, theater and aesthetics) are offered when teachers are available.

Courses usually involve four hours of classes a week, costing between CUC\$10 and CUC\$15 per hour. Prospective students must apply in the last week of August for the fall semester, or in the last three weeks of January for spring. The school is closed for holidays from the start of July until the third week in August. The institute also accepts graduate students for

its regular winter courses, and an entire year of study here (beginning in September) as part of a regular five-year program costs approximately CUC\$2500. Accommodations in student dormitories can be arranged.

The **Conjunto Folklórico Nacional** (Map pp224-5; El Gran Palenque, Calle 4 No 103, btwn Calzada and Calle 5, Vedado) teaches highly recommended classes in *son* (Cuba's basic form of popular music), salsa, rumba, mambo and more. The classes start on the first Mondays in January and July, and cost in the vicinity of CUC\$400 to CUC\$500 for a 15-day course. An admission test places students in classes of four different levels. It also offers 15-day courses in percussion starting on the third Monday in January and the first Monday in July.

Travelers might be able to organize flamenco guitar lessons by inquiring at the **Centro Andaluz** (Map p222; ☎ 863-6745; Paseo de Martí No 104 btwn Genios & Refugio, Centro Habana).

See p145 for one-off dance classes.

CUSTOMS

Cuban customs regulations are complicated. For the full scoop, see www.aduana.islagrande.cu.

Travelers are allowed to bring in personal belongings (including photography equipment, binoculars, musical instrument, tape recorder, radio, personal computer, tent, fishing rod, bicycle, canoe and other sporting gear), gifts up to a value of US\$250 and 10kg of medicine in its original packaging. Those over the age of 18 may import 2L of liquor and one carton of cigarettes.

Items that do not fit into the categories mentioned above are subject to a 100% customs duty to a maximum of US\$1000.

Items prohibited entry into Cuba include narcotics, explosives, pornography, electrical appliances (which are broadly defined), GPS, prerecorded video cassettes and 'any item attempting against the security and international order of the country,' including some books. Canned, processed and dried foods are no problem, nor are pets.

Exporting art and items of cultural patrimony is restricted and involves fees, paperwork and forethought. See *Exporting Artwork* (p150) for details. You are allowed to export 23 single cigars duty free.

DISCOUNT CARDS

There are no youth hostels in Habana, so a HI card won't prove useful. It is also unlikely that a student or seniors' card will get you reduced entry into museums. Students with a Cuban *carnet* (identification document) can pay for museums, bus and train tickets, and theater performances in pesos.

ELECTRICITY

The most common voltage is 110 volts, 60 cycles, but you'll also find 220 volts. Side-by-side sockets that have different voltage are usually labeled, but always ask. The sockets are suited to North American-style plugs with two flat prongs.

EMBASSIES

Most embassies are open from 8am to noon on weekdays.

Austria (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2825; fax 7-204-1235; Calle 4 No 101, Miramar)

Belgium (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2410; fax 7-204-1318; Av 5 No 7406, Miramar)

Canada (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2516; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/cuba; Calle 30 No 518, Playa) Also represents Australia.

Denmark (Map p222; ☎ 7-33-81-28; dancons@enet.cu; 4th fl, Paseo de Martí No 20, Centro Habana)

France (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2308; http://www.ambafrance-cu.org; Calle 14 No 312 btwn Avs 3 & 5, Miramar)

Germany (Map pp224-5; ☎ 7-33-25-69; alemania@enet.cu; Calle 13 No 652, Vedado)

Japan (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-3508; fax 7-204-8902; Miramar Trade Center, cnr Av 3 & Calle 80, Playa)

Mexico (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-7722; fax 7-204-2666; Calle 12 No 518, Miramar)

Netherlands (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2511; hav@minbuza.nl; Calle 8 No 307, btwn Avs 3 & 5, Miramar)

Spain (Map p222; ☎ 7-33-80-25; embespcu@correo.mae.es; Capdevila No 51, Centro Habana)

Sweden (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2831; http://www.swedenabroad.com/havanna; Calle 34 No 510, Miramar)

Switzerland (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-2611; fax 7-204-2729; Av 5 No 2005 btwn Avs 20 & 22, Miramar)

UK (Map pp228-9; ☎ 7-204-1771; www.britishebassy.gov.uk/cuba; Calle 34 No 708, Miramar) Also represents New Zealand.

US (Map pp224-5; ☎ 7-833-3546; http://havanna.usinterestsection.gov; Interests Section, Calzada btwn Calles L & M, Vedado)

EMERGENCY

The English-speaking staff at **Asistur** (Map p222; ☎ 866-4121, 866-4499; Paseo de Martí No 208, Centro Habana; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) can help with most emergencies, including getting money sent from abroad (except the US), expediting insurance claims, arranging rental cars and booking hotel rooms. This is a place to go if you are a victim of crime or need legal advice. The staff may also be able to help if your credit cards aren't accepted in Cuba.

If you get robbed you will need to obtain a police statement as quickly as possible. Contact the **Policía Nacional Revolucionaria** (Map p220; ☎ 882-0116; Picota btwn Leonor Pérez & San Isidro, Habana Vieja; ☎ 24hr), located near the Estación Central de Ferrocarriles.

Always carry a copy of your passport in Habana. If you lose the original, report it to your embassy first of all.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

While Habana can't be called a queer destination (yet), it's more tolerant than many other Latin American cities. The hit movie *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate) sparked a national dialogue about homosexuality, and Habana is pretty tolerant, all things considered. People from more accepting societies may find this tolerance token (everyone has a gay friend/relative/coworker, whom they'll mention when the topic arises), but what the hell, you have to start somewhere, and both Habana and Cuba are moving in the right direction.

A few gay and lesbian gathering spots have been established, although gay bars and clubs don't really exist on a permanent basis. To connect with private parties, called *fiestas de diez pesos* (10 peso parties; so called for the cost of admission), see p138.

HOLIDAYS

Cuba's public holidays are as follows:

Liberation Day January 1

Labor Day May 1

Commemoration of the Assault of the Moncada

Garrison July 26

Independence Day October 10

Christmas Day December 25

On these days, most shops, offices and museums are closed.

July and August are the main holiday months for *habaneros* (inhabitants of Habana), when most families flock to the beaches of Playas del Este.

See p12 for festivals and events throughout the year in Habana.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cuba's internet service provider is national phone company Etecsa. Etecsa runs two *telepuntos* (internet-café-cum-call-centers) in Habana, one in **Habana Vieja** (Map p220; Habana 406; ☎ 8am-9:30pm) and one in **Centro Habana** (Map p222; Aguilar No 565; ☎ 8am-9:30pm). The drill is to buy a one-hour user card (CUC\$6) with a scratch-off user code and *contraseña* (password), and help yourself to a free computer. These cards are interchangeable in either *telepunto*, so you don't have to use up your whole hour in one go.

The downside of the Etecsa monopoly on the internet is that there are few, if any, independent internet cafés outside of the two *telepuntos* and many of the cheaper hotels – unable to afford the service fee – have had to dispose of their computers. Your best bet is to use the internet facilities at one of Habana's four- or five-star hotels. While the fees here are often higher than at an internet café, the hotels can at least guarantee quick service, fast access and fully functioning computers. Habaguanex have recently installed computers in all of their city-center hotels, which all take the same one-hour interchangeable card (which can be purchased for CUC\$6).

As internet access for Cubans is restricted, you may be asked to show your passport when using an internet-linked computer.

LIBRARIES

The main city library is the **Biblioteca Pública Provincial Rubén M Villena** (Map p220; Obispo No 59, Habana Vieja; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat).

The **Biblioteca Nacional José Martí** (Map pp224-5; Av de la Independencia, Vedado; ☎ 8am-5:45pm Mon-Sat), on the Plaza de la Revolución in Vedado, is also open to the general public, but you must leave your bags in a cloakroom.

MAPS

Free maps can be procured from Infotur (p197). Cubacar (p187) also produces a good free city map, which highlights its sales offices, but also plenty of other city sights. Most of the Habaguanex hotels offer a decent tear-off map of Habana Vieja that clearly marks all Habaguanex-run properties.

Otherwise your best guide to the old city is *La Habana Vieja Guía Turística*, published by the Instituto Cubano de Geodesia y Cartografía (GeoCuba). It contains 35 maps of the old town, along with 222 pages of references and helpful descriptions in Spanish, English, French and German. It is available at some hotel shops.

GeoCuba also publishes *Ciudad de la Habana Mapa Turístico*, which covers all 15 municipalities in detail, including good scale street maps of the city center and Playas del Este. The fold-out *Guía de Carreteras*, with countrywide and Habana city maps, is very useful if you'll also be exploring other provinces. Highway signs around Habana are poor to nonexistent, and these maps are almost essential for drivers.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Most medical problems can be addressed at the **Hospital Nacional Hermanos Ameijeiras** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 877-6053; San Lázaro No 701, Vedado), just off the Malecón. Foreigners pay in hard currency. Entry is via the lower level below the parking lot off Padre Varela (Belascoáin); ask for 'CEDA' in Section N.

Another decent international clinic is **Clínica Central Cira García** (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-2811; fax 24-16-33; Calle 18A No 4101, Playa). Consultations at both places cost in the vicinity of CUC\$30.

MONEY

Two currencies circulate in Cuba: convertible pesos (CUC\$) and Cuban pesos (also called *moneda nacional*, abbreviated to MN). Most things tourists buy are in convertibles (eg accommodations, rental cars, bus tickets, museum admission and internet access). At the time of writing, Cuban pesos were selling at 29 to one convertible, and while there are many things you can't buy with *moneda nacional*, using them on certain occasions means you'll see a bigger slice of authentic Cuba.

As far as money transactions go, cash is king and you should arrive in Cuba with enough to last for the duration of your trip. Changing currency will incur a 10% commission. The best currencies to carry are euros, Canadian dollars or pound sterling; the worst is US dollars and – despite the prices you might see posted up in bank windows – the commission you'll get charged is a whopping 20% (the normal 10% commission plus an extra 10% penalty).

Cadecas (change booths) in every city and town sell Cuban pesos, and travelers are perfectly within their rights to buy them; you won't need more than CUC\$10 worth of pesos a week. In addition to the *cadecas* listed in this book, there is almost always a *cadeca* at the local agropecuario (free-enterprise vegetable market). However, most peso shops, restaurants, and buses will also accept the equivalent convertible payment.

You can't take more than CUC\$200 out of Cuba. Travelers attempting to smuggle out more are liable to have the money confiscated by customs with no compensation.

See p23 for information about costs, and inside front cover for exchange rates.

ATMs

Although there are numerous ATMs springing up around Habana, at the time of research, none of them were accepting foreign debit cards. Unless you want to risk losing your card, don't attempt to use the machines.

Changing Money

The following is a list of useful banks and kiosks for changing money.

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (Map pp224-5; Línea No 705, Vedado)

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (Map pp224-5; Airlines Bldg, Calle 23 No 64, Vedado)

Banco de Crédito y Comercio (Map pp224-5; Av Independencia No 101, Vedado)

Banco Financiero Internacional (Map p220; cnr Oficinas & Brasil, Habana Vieja)

Banco Financiero Internacional (Map pp228-9; cnr Av 5 & Calle 92, Playa)

Banco Metropolitano (Map p222; cnr Av de Italia & San Martín, Centro Habana)

Banco Metropolitano (Map pp224-5; cnr Línea & Calle M, Vedado)

Cadeca (Map p220; cnr Oficinas & Lámpara, Habana Vieja)

Cadeca (Map pp224-5; Calle 23 btwn Calles K & L, Vedado)

Cadeca (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles 19 & A, Vedado)

Cadeca (Map p231; cnr Paseo Panamericano & 5D, Cojimar)

Cambio (Map p220; Obispo No 257; Habana Vieja; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Money-changing kiosk (Map pp224-5; Hotel Habana Libre, cnr Calles L & 23, Vedado)

Money-changing kiosk (Map pp224-5; Hotel Nacional, cnr Calles O & 21, Vedado)

Money-changing kiosk (Map p222; Hotel NH Parque Central, Neptuno btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte, Centro Habana)

Money-changing kiosk (Map p222; Hotel Sevilla, Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte, Centro Habana)

Credit Cards

Credit cards are liable for an 11.25% commission and thus are normally demoted to the emergencies-only bracket. Some of the better hotels will accept credit cards, and you can draw money on them from most banks, but the commission's always the same.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks in currencies other than US dollars can be exchanged in some banks, but it's a hassle and the commission runs between 4% and 6%.

NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES

Foreign Publications

CubaNews (www.cubanews.com) puts out a surprisingly evenhanded monthly business report on the Cuban economy that was formerly published by the *Miami Herald*. Subscription rates are listed on its website, though it's mainly aimed at top executives.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and unbiased news source is the *Havana Journal* (www.havanajournal.com), which is based in the US. News reports are interesting, well written and up-to-the-minute. Of the international heavyweights, the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) has a good mixture of both quirky and news-breaking stories.

Government Publications

Cuba's two national dailies, the insipid *Granma* (www.granma.cu) and the slightly edgier *Juventud Rebelde*, won't take you more than 10 minutes to read cover to cover, primarily because neither is more than eight pages long. Packed with a mix of politics, politics and – um – politics, *Granma* is the official organ of the Communist Party of Cuba, and was founded in 1963 through the merger of *Revolución* and *Hoy*. It ain't exactly the *New York Times*.

Granma Internacional, a weekly summary of the Cuban press, is published in Spanish, English, French, Portuguese and German. Old men will come up to you on the streets of Habana Vieja and attempt to peddle you a copy for CUC\$1.

Other Habana newspapers include *Trabajadores*, the organ of the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (published Monday), and *El Habanero* (Tuesday and Friday).

The tourism magazine *Prisma* is published every other month in English and Spanish. The best cultural periodical is the beautifully presented *Opus Habana*, which you should be able to browse for free in any Habaguanex hotel. Alternatively, you can pick up back copies at the Publicaciones de la Oficina del Historiador (p152).

PHARMACIES

Cuba has a good selection of international pharmacies catering to foreigners.

Centro Oftalmológico Camilo Cienfuegos (Map pp224-5; Calle L No 151, Vedado)

Cira García Pharmacy (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-2880; Calle 18A No 4104, Playa; ☎ 24hr)

Farmacia Homopática (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles 23 & M, Vedado; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

Farmacia Internacional (Map pp228-9; Hotel El Comodoro, cnr Av 1 & Calle 84, Playa)

Farmacia Taquechel (Map p220; ☎ 862-9286; Obispo No 155, Habana Vieja; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Hospital Nacional Hermanos Ameijeiras (Map pp224-5; ☎ 877-6053; San Lázaro No 701, Vedado)

Pharmacy (Map pp224-5; Hotel Habana Libre, cnr Calles L & 23, Vedado)

Pharmacy (Map p222; Hotel Sevilla, Trocadero No 55 btwn Paseo de Martí & Agramonte, Centro Habana)

Pharmacy (Map pp228-9; cnr Calle 20 & Av 41, Playa; ☎ 9am-8:45pm)

POST

Habana has numerous post offices sprinkled all around the city. Letters and postcards sent to Europe and the US take about a month to arrive. If you're sending stuff to a Cuban from abroad, it'll probably take even longer. Postcards and letters are cheap to send and you won't have to pay more than CUC\$1 to send them anywhere in the world. Prepaid postcards, including international postage, are available at most hotel shops and post offices and are the surest bet for successful delivery. For important mail, you're better off using DHL, located in **Miramar** (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-1578; cnr Av 1 & Calle 26; ☎ 8am-8pm) and at the **Hotel Nacional** (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles O & 21, Vedado; ☎ 8am-8pm); it costs approximately CUC\$55 for a 2lb letter pack to Australia, or CUC\$50 to Europe. Post offices can be found at the following locations:

Centro Habana (Map p222; cnr San Martín & Paseo de Martí)

Habana Vieja (Map p220; Oficinas No 102)

Miramar (Map pp228-9; Calle 42 No 112 btwn Avs 1 & 3)

Vedado (Map pp224-5; cnr Línea & Paseo)

Vedado (Map pp224-5; cnr Calles 23 & C; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri)

Vedado (Map pp224-5; Av de la Independencia btwn Plaza de la Revolución & Calle 19 de Mayo)

SAFETY

Habana is ostensibly a safe city, and violent crime is rare. A heavy police presence on the streets and stiff prison sentences for crimes such as robbery and assault have acted as a major deterrent to potential thieves and kept the dirty tentacles of organized crime firmly at bay.

That's not to say that incidents don't occur. Indeed petty crime against tourists is on the rise, with bag snatching by youths mounted on bicycles a particular worry.

Keep your money belt on you at all times, making sure that you wear it concealed – and tightly secured – around your waist.

In hotels always use a safety-deposit box and never leave money/passports/credit cards lying around during the day. Theft from hotel rooms is rife in Habana at the moment, with the temptation of earning three times their monthly salary in one fell swoop often too hard to resist for some people.

In bars and restaurants it is wise to always check your change. Intentional overcharging, especially when a customer is mildly inebriated, is tediously common.

Visitors from the well-ordered countries of Europe or litigation-obsessed North America should be subconsciously aware of crumbling sidewalks, manholes with no covers, overenthusiastic drivers, veering cyclists, carelessly lobbed front-door keys (in Habana Centro) and badly pitched baseballs (almost everywhere). Waves cascading over the Malecón sea wall might look romantic, but the resulting slime-fest has been known to throw Lonely Planet-wielding tourists unceremoniously onto their asses.

TELEPHONE

The Cuban phone system is still undergoing some upgrading, so beware of phone-number changes. Normally a recorded message will inform you of any recent upgrades. Habana's two main Etecsa *telepuntos* (p193) have recently been refurbished and the phones generally work pretty well, even if the internet doesn't.

Cell Phones

Cuba's two cell-phone companies are c.com and Cubacel. While you may be able to use your own equipment, you have to pre-buy their services. Cubacel has offices at José Martí International Airport and in the **Miramar Trade Center** (cnr Av 3 & Calle 80, Playa). Its plan costs approximately CUC\$3 per day and each local call costs from CUC\$0.52 to CUC\$0.70. Note that you pay for incoming as well as outgoing calls. International rates are CUC\$2.70 per minute to the US and CUC\$5.85 per minute to Europe.

Phonecards

Etecsa *telepuntos* (p193) are where you buy phonecards, send and receive faxes, use the internet and make international calls. Blue Etecsa public phones accepting magnetized or computer-chip cards are everywhere. The cards are sold in convertibles (CUC\$5, CUC\$10 and CUC\$20) and pesos (3, 5 and 7 pesos). You can call nationally with either, but you can only call internationally with cards in convertibles. If you are mostly going to be making national and local calls, buy a peso card as it's much more economical.

International calls made with a card cost from CUC\$2.50 per minute to the US and Canada, and CUC\$5 to Europe and Oceania. Calls placed through an operator or from a hotel cost slightly more.

TIME

Habana is five hours behind GMT/UTC, the equivalent of Eastern Standard Time in the US and Canada. If it's noon in Habana, it will be 9am in California, 11am in Mexico City, 5pm in Britain, 6pm in Western Europe and 5am the next day in New Zealand.

Habana is on daylight saving time from April to September, when the city is only four hours behind GMT/UTC. In other words, clocks are turned an hour back at the beginning of October and an hour forward in late March.

TIPPING

If you're not in the habit of tipping, you'll learn fast in Cuba. Wandering *son* septets, parking guards, ladies at bathroom entrances, restaurant wait staff, tour guides – they're all working for hard-currency tips. Musicians who besiege tourists while they dine, converse or flirt will want a convertible peso, but only give what you feel the music is worth. Washroom attendants expect five or 10 cents, while *parqueadores* (parking attendants) should get CUC\$0.25 for a short watch and CUC\$1 for 12 hours. For a day tour, CUC\$2 per person is appropriate for a tour guide. Taxi drivers will appreciate 10% of the meter fare, but if you've negotiated a ride without the meter, don't tip as the whole fare is going straight into their wallets.

Tipping can quickly *resuelvan las cosas* (fix things up). If you want to stay beyond the hotel check-out time or enter a site after hours, for instance, small tips (CUC\$1 to CUC\$5) bend rules, open doors and send people looking the other way. For tipping in restaurants and other advice, see p110.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Nearly every hotel in Habana has a tour office and/or travel agency representing one of the five main companies. Anyone off the street can effectively pop in and use them. As there's no real sense of business competition in socialist Habana, all the agencies

are much the same in terms of prices, although San Cristóbal Agencia de Viajes has the best tours and guides. See p66 for travel agencies.

Habana's only official tourist information service is **Infotur** (Map p220; ☎ 33-33-33; www.infotur.cu; Obispo No 358, Habana Vieja; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm), which sells locally published maps and guidebooks, and can book a variety of excursions and activities at competitive rates (including Viazul bus tickets). The staff speak English and are usually good about answering questions. Aside from its Habana Vieja HQ, Infotur has other offices in **Habana Vieja** (Map p220; ☎ 862-4586; cnr Obispo & San Ignacio; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm), **Playa** (Map pp228-9; ☎ 204-7036; cnr Av 5 & Calle 112; ☎ 8:30am-5pm) and **José Martí International Airport** (☎ 66-61-01; Terminal 3; ☎ 8:30am-5pm).

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Cuba's inclusive culture translates to travelers with disabilities, and while facilities may be lacking, the generous nature of Cubans generally compensates.

Travelers in wheelchairs will find the few ramps ridiculously steep and will have trouble in colonial parts of town, where sidewalks are narrow and streets are cobblestone; elevators are also often out of order.

However, sight-impaired travelers will be helped across streets and (like travelers in wheelchairs) given priority in lines. Etecsa phone centers have telephone equipment for the hearing impaired, and TV programs are broadcast with closed captioning. The Hotels NH Parque Central (p164), Meliá Cohiba (p168) and Meliá Habana (p170) all have specific facilities for travelers with disabilities.

VISAS

Regular tourists who plan to spend up to two months in Cuba do not need visas. Instead, you get a *tarjeta de turista* (tourist card) valid for 30 days (Canadians get 90 days), which can be easily extended for another 30 days once you're in Cuba. Those going 'air only' usually buy the tourist card from the travel agency or airline office that sold them their plane ticket; you'll receive the card on the plane before landing. Package tourists receive their card with their other travel documents.

Unlicensed tourists originating in the US buy their tourist card at the airline desk in the country through which they're traveling en route to Cuba (equivalent of US\$25). You are usually not allowed to board a plane to Cuba without this card, but if by some chance you find yourself cardless, you should be able to buy one at the José Martí International Airport in Habana – although this is a hassle (and a risk) that's best avoided. Once in Habana, tourist-card extensions or replacements cost another CUC\$25. You cannot leave Cuba without presenting your tourist card, so don't lose it. You are not permitted entry to Cuba without an onward ticket.

The 'address in Cuba' line should be filled in with the name of hotel or a legal casa particular, if only to avoid unnecessary questioning. Take care to fill the card out properly and clearly as Cuban customs officials are meticulous.

Extensions

For most travelers, obtaining an extension once in Cuba is easy: you just go to an immigration office and present your documents and CUC\$25 worth of stamps. You should obtain these stamps from a branch of **Bandec** or **Banco Financiero Internacional** (p194) beforehand. You'll only receive an additional 30 days after your original 30 days; after this expires you must re-enter the country on a separate card and start over again. Attend to extensions at least a few business days before your visa is due to expire and never attempt to travel around Cuba with an expired visa.

Habana's **Immigration Office** (☎ 203-0307; cnr Factor & Santa Ana, Nuevo Vedado; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 2pm-4pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) is inconveniently located way out in the sticks and you'll need a taxi to get there. It gets crowded so get there early and be prepared to queue. Staff don't generally speak English and aren't over helpful, so make sure you have all your documentation on hand.

Restrictions on US Visitors

In 1961 the US government imposed an order limiting the freedom of its citizens to visit Cuba, and forbidding airline offices and travel agencies in the US from booking tourist travel to Cuba via third countries.

However, the Cuban government has never banned Americans from visiting Cuba, and it continues to welcome US passport holders under exactly the same terms as any other visitor.

Americans traditionally go to Cuba via Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, Jamaica or any other third country. Most Americans book their trips with a foreign travel agency, which will arrange Cuban tourist cards, flight reservations and accommodation packages.

The immigration officials in Cuba know very well that a Cuban stamp in a US passport can create problems and as result no passports are stamped; instead the Cubans stamp your tourist card.

The US government has an Interests Section in Habana, but American visitors are advised to go there only if something goes terribly wrong. Therefore, unofficial US visitors should be especially careful not to lose their passports while in Cuba, as this would put them in a very difficult position. Many Cuban hotels rent security boxes (CUC\$2 per day) to guests and nonguests alike, and you can carry a photocopy of your passport for identification on the street.

There are two types of licenses issued by the US government to visit Cuba: general licenses (typically for family members, artists and academics) and special licenses (for journalists on assignment, foreign officials based in the US, and occasionally for other people on humanitarian grounds). In 1995 the list of permissible travel was expanded to include educational and cultural exchanges, but George W Bush discontinued this license category in 2003, cutting off 70% of the travel that had been deemed 'legal.' Cuban-Americans may visit relatives in Cuba once every three years with a general license. Such permits are never issued for the purpose of business travel or tourism.

For more information, contact the **Licensing Division** (☎ 202-622-2480; www.treas.gov/ofac; Office of Foreign Assets Control, US Department of the Treasury, 2nd fl, Annex Bldg, 1500 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC, 20220).

Under the Trading with the Enemy Act, goods originating in Cuba are prohibited from being brought into the US by anyone but licensed travelers. Cuban cigars, rum, coffee etc will be confiscated by US customs, and officials can create additional problems

if they feel so inclined. Possession of Cuban goods inside the US or bringing them in from a third country is also banned.

American travelers who choose to go to Cuba generally get rid of anything related to their trip to Cuba, including used airline tickets, baggage tags, travel documents, receipts and souvenirs, before returning to the US. If Cuban officials don't stamp their passport, there will be no official record of their trip. They also use a prepaid Cuban telephone card to make calls to the US in order to avoid there being records of collect or operator-assisted telephone calls.

Since September 11, 2001, all international travel issues have taken on a new importance, and there has been a crackdown on travel to Cuba. Though it has nothing to do with terrorism, some Americans returning from Cuba have had 'transit to Cuba' written in their passports by Jamaican customs officials. Customs officials at major US entry points (eg New York, Houston, Miami) are onto backpacker types coming off Cancún and Montego Bay flights with throngs of honeymoon couples, or tanned gentlemen arriving from Toronto in January. They're starting to ask questions, reminding travelers that it's a felony to lie to a customs agent as they do so.

The maximum penalty for unauthorized Americans traveling to Cuba is US\$250,000 and 10 years in prison. In practice, people are usually fined US\$7500. Since George W Bush came into the White House, the number of people threatened with legal action has more than tripled and it's likely to go higher still. Over 100,000 US citizens a year travel to Cuba with no consequences; however, as long as these regulations remain in place, visiting Cuba certainly qualifies as soft adventure travel for Americans.

There are many organizations, including a group of congress people on Capitol Hill, working to lift the travel ban; see www.cubacentral.com for more information.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

In terms of personal safety, Cuba is a dream destination for women travelers. Most streets can be walked alone at night, violent crime is rare and the chivalrous aspect of machismo means you'll never step into oncoming traffic. But machismo cuts both ways, with protection on one side and pursuit on the other. Cuban women are used

to *piropos*, the whistles, kissing sounds and compliments that constantly ring in their ears, and might even reply with their own if they're feeling frisky. For foreign women, however, it can feel like an invasion. Like any cross-cultural situation, you'll have to come to terms with it somehow.

Ignoring *piropos* is the first step. But sometimes ignoring them isn't enough. Learn some rejoinders in Spanish so you can shut men up who can't seem to themselves. *No me moleste* (don't bother me), *esta bueno yá* (all right already) and *que falta respeto* (how disrespectful) are good ones, as is the withering 'don't you dare' stare that is part of the Cuban woman's arsenal. Wearing plain, modest clothes might help lessen unwanted attention; topless sunbathing is out. An absent husband, invented or not, seldom has any effect. If you go to a disco, be very clear with Cuban dance partners what you are and are not interested in. Dancing is a kind of foreplay in Cuba and may be viewed as an invitation for something more. Cubans appreciate directness and as long as you set the boundaries, you'll have a fabulous time. Being in the company of a Cuban man is the best way to prevent *piropos*, but if all else fails, retire to the pool for a day out of the line of fire.

Traveling alone can be seen as an invitation for all kinds of come-ons, and solo

women travelers will not have an easy time of it. Traveling with a male traveler (or another woman – at least you'll share the barrage) can do wonders. Marriage proposals will come fast and from all corners, as matrimony is an easy way to immigrate for Cubans who want out.

WORK

There are a number of bodies offering volunteer work in Cuba, though it is always best to organize things in your home country first. Just turning up in Habana and volunteering can be difficult, even impossible. Take a look at the following websites:

Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project (www.farmerstofarmer.ca) A Vancouver-based sustainable agriculture organization.

Canada World Youth (☎ 1-514-931-3526; www.cwy-jcm.org) The head office is in Montreal, Canada.

Cuban Solidarity Campaign (☎ 44-20-72-63-64-52; www.cuba-solidarity.org) The head office is in London, UK.

National Network on Cuba (www.cubasolidarity.com) US-based solidarity group.

Pastors for Peace (☎ 1-212-926-5757; www.ifconews.org) Collects donations across US to take to Cuba.

Witness for Peace (☎ 1-202-588-1471; www.witnessforpeace.org) The organization is looking for Spanish speakers for a two-year commitment.

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Language ■

Language

It's true – anyone can speak another language. Don't worry if you haven't studied languages before or if you studied a language at school for years and can't remember any of it. It doesn't even matter if you failed English grammar. After all, that's never affected your ability to speak English! And this is the key to picking up a language in another country.

You just need to start speaking.

Learn a few key phrases before you go. Write them on pieces of paper and stick them on the fridge, by the bed or even on the computer – anywhere that you'll see them often.

You'll find that locals appreciate travelers trying their language, no matter how muddled you may think you sound. So don't just stand there, say something! If you want to learn more Spanish than we've included here, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's comprehensive but user-friendly *Latin American Spanish Phrasebook*.



SOCIAL

Meeting People

Hi!
¡Hola!
Bye!
¡Chau!
Please.
Por favor.
Thank you (very much).
(Muchas) Gracias.
Yes.
Sí.
No.
No.
Excuse me. (to get past)
Permiso.
Sorry!
¡Perdón!
Pardon? (as in 'What did you say?')
¿Cómo?/¿Qué?
Do you speak English?
¿Habla inglés?
Does anyone speak English?
¿Hay alguien que hable inglés?
Do you understand? (informal)
¿Me entendés?
Yes, I understand.
Sí, entiendo.
No, I don't understand.
No, no entiendo.

Could you please ...? (polite)
¿Puede ... por favor?
speak more slowly **hablar más despacio**
repeat that **repetirlo**
write it down **escribirlo**

Going Out

What's there to do in the evenings?
¿Qué se puede hacer a las noches?

What's on ...?
¿Qué pasa ...?
around here **para acá**
this weekend **este fin de semana**
today **hoy**
tonight **esta noche**

Where are the ...?
¿Dónde hay ...?
places to eat **lugares para comer**
clubs/pubs **boliches/pubs**
gay venues **lugares para gays**

Is there a local entertainment guide?
¿Hay una guía de entretenimiento de la zona?

PRACTICAL

Question Words

Who?
¿Quién/Quiénes?
(singular/plural)
Who is it?
¿Quién es?
What?
¿Qué?
Which?
¿Cuál/Cuáles?
(singular/plural)
When?
¿Cuándo?
Where?
¿Dónde?
How?
¿Cómo?
How much is it?
¿Cuánto cuesta?
Why?
¿Por qué?

Numbers & Amounts

0 **cero**
1 **uno**
2 **dos**
3 **tres**
4 **cuatro**
5 **cinco**
6 **seis**
7 **siete**
8 **ocho**
9 **nueve**
10 **diez**
11 **once**
12 **doce**
13 **trece**
14 **catorce**
15 **quince**
16 **dieciséis**
17 **diecisiete**
18 **dieciocho**
19 **diecinueve**
20 **veinte**
21 **veintiuno**
22 **veintidós**
30 **treinta**
31 **treinta y uno**
32 **treinta y dos**
40 **cuarenta**
50 **cincuenta**
60 **sesenta**
70 **setenta**
80 **ochenta**
90 **noventa**
100 **cien**
1000 **mil**
2000 **dos mil**

Days

Monday **lunes**
Tuesday **martes**
Wednesday **miércoles**
Thursday **jueves**
Friday **viernes**
Saturday **sábado**
Sunday **domingo**

Banking

I'd like to change ... **Quisiera cambiar ...**
cash **dinero en efectivo**
money **dinero**
a traveler's check **un cheque de viajero**

Where's the nearest ATM?
¿Dónde está el cajero automático más cercano?

Where's the nearest foreign exchange office?
¿Dónde está la oficina de cambio más cercana?

Do you accept ... ? **¿Aceptan ... acá?**
credit cards **tarjetas de crédito**
debit cards **tarjetas de débito**
traveler's checks **cheques de viajero**

Post

Where's the post office?
¿Dónde está el correo?
I want to buy a stamp/an envelope.
Quiero comprar un estampilla/sobre.

I want to send a ...
Quiero enviar ...
fax **un fax**
parcel **un paquete**
postcard **una postal**

Phone & Cell Phones

I want to buy a phonecard.
Quiero comprar una tarjeta telefónica.

I want to make a ...
Quiero hacer una ...
call (to ...) **llamada (a ...)**
collect call **llamada con cobro revertido**

Where can I find a/an ...?
¿Dónde puedo encontrar ...?

I'd like a/an ...
Quiero ...
adaptor plug **un adaptador**
charger for my cell phone **un cargador para mi celular**
cell phone for hire **un celular para alquilar**
prepaid cell phone **un celular pagado por adelantado**
SIM card for your network **una tarjeta SIM para su red**

Internet

Where's the local internet café?
¿Dónde hay un cibercafé por acá?

I'd like to ...
Quiero ...
get online **usar internet**
check my email **revisar mi correo electrónico**

Transportation

What time does the ... leave?

¿A qué hora sale el ...?

boat **barco**
bus **guagua**

What time's the ... (bus)?

¿A qué hora es el ... (colectivo)?

first **primer**
last **último**
next **próximo**

Is this taxi available?

¿Está disponible este taxi?

Please put the meter on.

Por favor, ponga el taxímetro.

How much is it to ...?

¿Cuánto cuesta ir a ...?

Please take me (to this address).

Por favor, lléveme (a esta dirección).

FOOD

breakfast **desayuno**
lunch **almuerzo**
dinner **cena**
snack **snack**
to eat **comer**
to drink **tomar**

Can you recommend a ...?

¿Puede recomendar ...?

bar **un bar**
café **un café**
restaurant **un restaurante**

Is the service charge included in the bill?

¿El precio en el menú incluye el servicio de cubierto?

For more detailed information on food and dining out, see p17.

EMERGENCIAS

It's an emergency!

¡Es una emergencia!

Could you help me, please?

¿Me puede ayudar, por favor?

Where's the police station?

¿Dónde está la comisaría?

Call ...!

¡Llame a ...!

the police **la policía**
a doctor **un médico**
an ambulance! **una ambulancia**

HEALTH

Where's the nearest ...?

¿Dónde está ... más cercano?

dentist **el dentista**
doctor **el médico**
hospital **el hospital**

Where's the nearest (night) chemist?

¿Dónde está la farmacia (de turno) más cercana?

I need a doctor (who speaks English).

Necesito un médico (que hable inglés).

Symptoms

I have (a/an) ...

Tengo ...

diarrhoea **diarrea**
fever **fiebre**
headache **dolor de cabeza**
pain (here) **dolor (acá)**

I'm allergic to ...

Soy alérgica a ... (for a woman)

Soy alérgico a ... (for a man)

antibiotics **los antibióticos**
peanuts **los maníes**
penicillin **la penicilina**

GLOSSARY

See also p22 for Cuban slang.

agropecuario – free-enterprise vegetable market; also sells rice, beans and fruit

altos – upstairs apartment, when following an address

americano – citizen of any western hemisphere country; a citizen of the US is called a *norteamericano* or an *estadounidense*

Autopista – national highway that runs west to Pinar del Río and east toward Santa Clara

babalawo – *Santería* priest; also spelled *babalao*

bajos – lower apartment, when following an address

balseros – rafter; used to describe the emigrants who escaped to the US in the 1990s on homemade rafts

batá – conical two-headed drum

batanga – subgenre of mambo, popularized by Benny Moré

bici-taxi – bicycle taxi

bloqueo – Cuban term for the US embargo

bohío – thatched hut

bolero – romantic love song

cabildo – town council during the colonial era; also an association of tribes in Cuban religions of African origin

cadeca – change booth

camello – literally 'camel'; metro buses in Habana named for their two humps

campesino – person who lives in the country

caliente – hot

canoñazo – shooting of the cannons; a nightly ceremony performed at the Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña

casa particular – private house that lets out rooms to foreigners (and sometimes Cubans); all legal casas must display a blue-and-white symbol on their door

chachachá – dance derived from the mambo and *rumba*, invented in 1951

charanga – *son*-influenced music from 1940s and '50s played with violin and flute

chekere – gourd covered with beads to form a rattle

coco taxi – yellow egg-shaped taxi that holds two or three people and runs on batteries

cola – line, queue

colectivo – collective taxi (usually a classic American car) that operates for Cubans

comida criollo – traditional Cuban food; normally rice, beans and pork

conseguir – to get, obtain

convertibles – convertible pesos

criollo – Creole; Spaniard born in the Americas

daiquirí – rum cocktail made with crushed ice and other ingredients; named for the Río Daiquirí, near Santiago de Cuba, where it was invented in 1899

danzón – traditional Cuban ballroom dance colored with African influences

El Líder Máximo – Maximum Leader; term often used to describe Fidel Castro

el último – the last; used to ascertain who is last when you join a Cuban queue

Elegguá – god of destiny in *Santería*

encomienda – land with an indigenous workforce; entrusted to an individual by the Spanish Crown during the early colonial era

esquina caliente – literally 'hot corner'; where baseball fanatics debate stars, teams and form in the most animated fashion

Granma – yacht that carried Fidel and his companions from Mexico to Cuba in 1956 to launch the revolution

guayabera – pleated, buttoned men's shirt

habanero/a – inhabitant of Habana

Habaguanex – City Historian's Office; responsible for restoring Habana Vieja

Icaic – Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos; Cuban Film Institute

jinetera – woman who attaches herself to male foreigners for monetary or material gain; the exchange may or may not involve sex

jinetero – male tout who hustles tourists

M-26-7 – 26th of July Movement; Fidel Castro's revolutionary organization, was named for his abortive assault on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953

machetero – one who cuts sugarcane using a machete
Misión Milagros – unofficial name given to a pioneering medical program hatched between Cuba and Venezuela in 2004 that offers free eye treatment for Venezuelans in Cuban hospitals

mojito – stirred drink made from rum, lime juice, sugar, soda, mint leaves and ice

moneda nacional – Cuban pesos; abbreviated to MN

nueva trova – philosophical folk music popularized in the 1960s and '70s

orisha – *Santería* deity

organopónico – urban vegetable garden run by community groups; sells produce from small on-site kiosk

paladar – privately owned restaurant

parada – bus stop

PCC – Partido Comunista de Cuba; Cuba's only political party

pelota – baseball

peninsular – a Spaniard born in Spain but living in the Americas

peña – musical performance or get-together

período especial – special period; Cuba's post-1991 economic reality

piropo – flirtatious remark or commentary

reggaeton – Cuban hip-hop; mix of reggae and hip-hop

Regla de Ocha – see *Santería*

resolver – to resolve or fix a problematic situation

rumba – dance form that originated among plantation slaves during the 19th century; in Cuba today, to rumba simply means 'to party'

salsa – catchall designation used for Cuban music based on *son*

Santería – literally 'saint worship'; Afro-Cuban religion that amalgamates West African *Yoruba* beliefs with Roman Catholicism

santero – priest of *Santería*

son – Cuba's basic form of popular music that jelled from African and Spanish elements in the late 19th century

Taino – settled, Arawak-speaking tribe that inhabited much of Cuba prior to the Spanish conquest

tambores – *Santería* drumming ritual

telenovela – TV soap opera

timba – modern salsa music mixed with funk, rap and rock

trova – traditional poetic singing

Uneac – Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba; National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists

Yoruba – Afro-Cuban religion originating in Nigeria

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