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Cuba Background and History

Cuba Formal name:

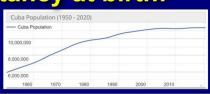
Republic of Cuba.
Republica de Cuba.
Westernmost Island
in the Caribbean.





Cuba population:
11,300,000 (2022 est.).
Median age (2020):
42 (US 39).
Life expectancy at birth:

78 (US 77).



Capital Havana La Habana Havana pop: 2.4 million. Havana Metro: 3.9 million.



Cuba land area:

41,097 sq. miles.
Slightly smaller than
Pennsylvania.

Coastline:

2,321 miles.

Altitude: Average 354 feet.

Havana: Avg 23 feet (up to 305 feet). Highest: 6,476 feet (Pico Turquino)

in Southeast Cuba.



Climate: Tropical moderated by trade winds. Average temps:
January: High 80. Low 62.
July: High 90. Low 73.

Dry season: November to April. Rainy season: May to October. Time: UTC-5 (same US East

Coast).

Daylight savings time: Yes.

National holiday: January 1 Triumph of the Revolution (Liberation Day).

Jan 2 also holiday: Victory Day.
Unlike most of Latin America,
national holiday does not
celebrate independence from
Spain: 10 Dec 1898.

Drive: On right.

Country phone code: 53.

Internet code: .CU

Cell phones per 100 ppl: 59.

Cuba is not a major consumer, producer, or transit point of illicit drugs.

Government: One-party

communist state.

Head of State:
President Miguel
Diaz-Canel.

Head of Gov't:
Prime Minister
Manuel Marrero Cruz.



Legislature

Unicameral: National Assembly

of People's Power.

Seats: 474 (effective 2023).

Communist Party is the only party. Nominates candidates, who run unopposed.

Assembly elects President and Prime Minister. No public vote.

Cubans in USA

Est. 2 million. 60% in Florida.

Cuban-born: Around 57%.

Politics: Heavily Republican.

Strongly anti-Communist.

Successful: In establishing businesses and developing political influence in US.

Don't confuse the Cuba flag (adopted 1902)

with the Puerto Rico flag (adopted 1895).——



Ethnic Groups (2012 self-identification in census)

White: 64.1%.

Mulatto or mixed: 26.6%.

Black: 9.3%.

Voting: 16 years of age.

Official Language: Spanish.

Cuba Religions (2020 est.)

Christian: 59%.

Folk religion: 18%. No Religion: 23%.

Christianity is mainly Roman Catholic modified by African

folk customs.

Cuban Money Cuban Peso:

CUP. Symbol \$.

Units: \$1, \$3, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50,

\$100, \$200, \$500 Some coins too.

Official Rate: Pegged with US dollar at 25 CUP = US\$1. BUT...

283399 DE CERNICAL DE CUDA
AGUARDA DE COMPANION DE COMPAN



But market rate is very different! 110 to 130 to US\$1. If you pay with US dollars cash in restaurants, hotels, stores, you will get this market rate.

US dollars cash accepted – preferred – by most merchants.

But NO credit cards. NO ATMs.

Cuba's Economy State-run enterprises dominate.

72% of workers state employed. Most others are self-employed.

Private property and foreign direct investment are allowed.

But economic activity is tightly controlled by the government.

Heritage Foundation rates Cuba among the "least free economies".

CIA: "Still largely state-run planned economy".

"Widespread corruption".

"Widespread protests due to lack of basic necessities and electricity".

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$137 billion (2017 est).

GDP per capita (PPP):

\$12,300 (2016 est).

GDP per capita nominal (NOT PPP):

\$7,156 (2020 est).

Based on limited World Bank data.

Food rationing system since 1962. Family ration books. Must buy certain low-price items at Bodegas.

Typical monthly rations:

5 eggs 6 lbs white rice

1 liter cooking oil 20 oz beans

1 lb spaghetti 2 bags coffee 3 lb white sugar Dinner rolls

3 lb dark sugar 2 lbs chicken

Problems: Availability. Long lines.

Exports: \$2.6 bn (2017 est).

China 38%, Spain 11%, Netherlands 5%, Germany 5%.

Imports: \$11.1 bn (2017 est).

Spain 19%, China 15%, Italy 6%, Canada 5%, USA 5%, Russia 5%, Brazil 5%.

Cuba History – 1

1492 Navigator Christopher Columbus arrives. Claims Cuba for Spain.

1511 Spanish settlements.

1526 Importing slaves from Africa.

1762 British capture Cuba.

1763 Cuba returned to Spain.

Cuba History – 2

1868-1878 Ten-Years War of Independence. Spain won. Promised reforms and autonomy – never happened.

1886 Slavery abolished.
1895-98 José Martí
leads a second war
of independence.



Cuba History – 3

1898 Spain sinks USS Maine battleship in Havana harbor. US declares war on Spain.
1898 US defeats Spain. Spain cedes Cuba to the US.
1902 Cuba becomes

1902 Cuba becomes independent. US ends military occupation.

Cuba History – 4

1933 Government overthrown in coup led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. Batista led Cuba by dictatorship until overthrown by Fidel Castro in 1959.

1953 Fidel Castro leads an unsuccessful revolt against the Batista regime.

Cuba History – 5

1956 Castro lands in Cuba. Leads guerilla war against government.



1958 US aid to Batista ends.
1959 Castro army takes Havana.
Batista flees. Castro becomes prime minister; brother, Raul, becomes his deputy.

Cuba History – 6

1960 All US businesses in Cuba nationalised. No compensation.
1960 US trade embargo (except medicine and food). All business with Cuba prohibited. Continues to today.

1961 US breaks off all diplomatic relations with Havana.

Cuba History – 7

1961 US sponsors failed Bay of Pigs invasion by Cuban exiles.

1962 Cuban missile crisis.

1991 USSR collapses. Their aid to Cuba ends.

1993 Cuba introduces some market reforms to stem the deterioration of its economy.

Cuba History – 8

2008 Fidel retires. Raul takes over as president.



2008 Bans end on people owning mobile phones and computers.
2009 US President Barack
Obama says he wants a new

Obama says he wants a new beginning with Cuba. Relaxes travel restrictions.

Cuba History – 9

2014-2016 Some US-Cuba trade and banking restrictions eased. Embassies reopened. Travel resumes. President Obama visits Cuba. Cuba allows small private businesses.

2016 Fidel Castro dies, age 90.

Cuba History - 10

2017-2020 President Trump overturns many Obama reforms. Declares Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism.

2021 Anti-government demonstrations protest lack of food, fuel, medicine and freedom.

Cuba History – 11



October 2022 US Customs and Border Protection reports that 224,607 unauthorized citizens of Cuba had been apprehended and/or expelled trying to enter the United States during fiscal year 2022 ending Sept 30, 2022.

9 UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- Old Havana. 🗸
- Trinidad & Valley of Sugar Mills.
- Viñales Valley.
- First Coffee Plantations.
- Historic Cienfuegos.
- San Pedro Castle, Santiago.
- Fidel Castro's Landing Site, 1956.
- Humboldt National Park.
- Historic Camagüey.

Legal Travel to Cuba by Americans

US Rules Starting 2019

- US tourist \$ must support Cuban micro-entrepreneurs rather than government-run entities.
- Stay in casas particulares (private homes).
- Eat in paladares (private restaurants).
- Use private guides.
- 8h/day of small cultural activities that directly benefit people.

Best to use tour company. I used

discovercorps.com.

Need Cuban visa.
Buy online. \$85+ship.



Book flight with visa number and state purpose of visit is "Support for Cuban People".

Complete Traveler Info Form online.

Proof of medical insurance.

Non-stop flights to Havana from US: JFK, Newark, Tampa, Miami, Fort Lauderdale. 45 min flight MIA & FLL. Vaccinations required? None. **US mobile phones: Won't work –** maybe just text messages only.

Can use: US\$ cash or Cuban Pesos.

Cannot use: ATMs or credit cards.

Tips for guide/driver: US\$ cash best.







First we will head east from Havana. Then back to Havana and go west.



Luis Miguel **Outstanding Guide!** Univ Grad English Lit. Knowledgeable in history, culture, politics. Honest. Candid. Wants to emigrate to Spain. Mother in Miami.

Girlfriend in N.Y.





We had two random police stops in 10 days. Examine Boris's papers.

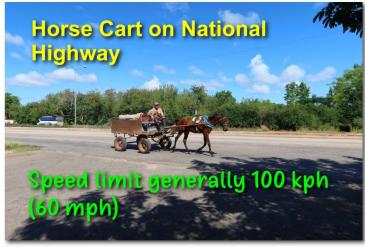
Boris has 4 driver's licenses:

- License to drive a car.
- License to drive a taxi.
- License to drive tourists.
- License for vehicle with more

than 2 rows of seats. Also 2 insurance cards.

Paper, not electronic.









Ciénaga de Zapata National Park UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Around 1,800 sq miles. Largest protected area in Cuba (and whole Caribbean).

Similar to the Florida Everglades, with mangroves, swamps, and marshes.

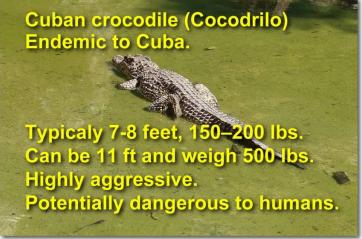
Ciénaga de Zapata National Park

- 900 species of plants.
- 171 species of birds.
- 31 species of reptiles.
- 1000 species of invertebrates.

Manatees, crocodiles, caimans.

Crocodile Sanctuary – more than 10,000 of them!







Alligators and Crocodiles: Differences Big differences in:

- Physical appearance (snout, teeth).
- Location (US vs global).
- Quantity.
- Habitat.



Alligator's Snout: Rounded U-Shaped

Alligator's Color: Dark Grey

Crocodile's Snout:
Pointy
V-Shaped
Croc's Color:
Light Brownish
Grey





Alligator Jaw
Closed: Only Two
Downward Teeth
Protrude

Crocodile Jaw
Closed: Many
Teeth Protrude
Both Upward and
Downward





■ Gavialidae Chinese Alligator



Playa Girón - Bay of Pigs April 17, 1961

About 1,500 armed Cuban exiles invaded Cuba by sea to overthrow the new Cuban government of Fidel Castro.

Landed at Playa Girón. Sponsored by US CIA.

72 hours of fighting in Cienaga de Zapata.

Invaders failed.

Cuba refers to them as mercenaries.

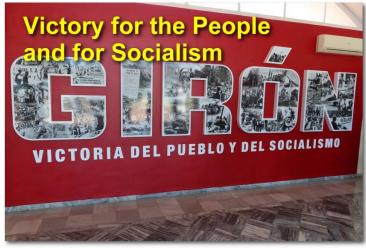
Has affected US relations with Cuba and Soviet Union ever since.





























Cienfuegos 160 mi southeast of Havana. UNESCO Heritage Site. Settled by French immigrants starting 1819. Sugar, Tobacco,

Downtown: Coffee

- 6 buildings from 1819-50.
- 327 buildings from 1851-1900.







Trinidad 200 miles S.E. of Havana. UNESCO World Heritage site.

One of the most beautiful and authentic colonial cities in Cuba.

Historical importance as a center of the sugar trade in the 18th and 19th centuries.

First settled by Spanish 1527.

Prospered during the colonial era and for some time was Cuba's wealthiest city.
50 historic mansions survive. Industries today include sugar refineries, dairies, sawmills, cigar and cigarette factories.









Romantic Museum 1808

Romantic period: 1Q of 19th c. Palace of the Count of Brunet. Still owned by the family today. 14 rooms of 19th century decorative art works: silverware, furniture, china, etc.

















Water in Cuba: Univ of Miami Study
"Water scarcity affects Cuban
citizens almost daily."
Corroded pipes contaminate water.
Running water a few hours a day.
Low pressure.
Trash gets into water system.

Many businesses and residents pay for delivered water.













Power Blackouts

Starting 2022 rolling blackouts (mainly 6 hours, up to 12 hours) throughout Cuba, including Havana. Electric grid collapsed totally for several days after lan. Whole island. But Cuba has had electric shortages long before lan.

Why?

- Insufficient capacity.
- Poor maintenance.
- Lack of fuel.
- Poor quality fuel (high sulfur) which damages electric plants.

After lan, unprecedented antigovernment protests throughout Cuba about electricity.

80% of Cuba's electricity is generated by oil:

- 30% of this is Cuban oil. Low quality. Damages generators.
- 70% had been Russian and then Venezuelan imported oil. But these have dried up.

Cuba spends 14% of GDP on energy – one of highest % in the world.









Santería

African diasporic religion.

Developed in Cuba late 19th c.

Mix of traditional Yoruba West

African religion, Roman

Catholic, and Spiritism.

No central controlling authority.

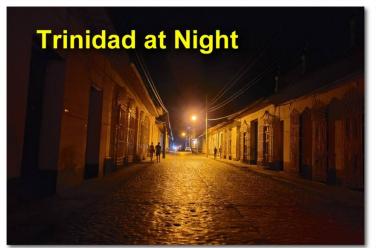
Each human has a personal link to a particular oricha (deity) who influences their personality.

Estimates 1,000,000 Cubans currently are initiates, and many others practice some aspects.

Among other things, they practice animal sacrifice.

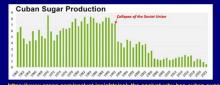






Cuba's sugar cane industry
Cuban economy relied heavily on
sugar exports for 150 years.
From 19th c to 1960s, Cuba was
world's largest sugar producer.
Then Soviet Union, Brazil, and India
increased their own production,
reducing demand for Cuban sugar.
And US purchases of Cuban sugar
ended after 1959 Revolution.

After Castro, 2/3rds of Cuban sugar exported to Soviet Union. End with 1991 Soviet collapse.



- Around 6 to 8 million tons a year 1960-1990.
- Dramatic decline after 1991 Soviet collapse.
- Now tanking: No diesel, herbicides, market.
 - 2022 400,000 tons.
 - 2023 295,000 tons.

Valle de los Ingenios Valley of the Sugar Mills North of Trinidad

Center of Cuba's sugar industry 19th c.

- Over 70 sugar cane mills.
- 30,000 slaves working in the mills.
- Most mills in ruins today.

Two – including Manaca Iznaga – remain as tourist attractions.
UNESCO World Heritage Site.











West of Havana









Las Terrazas Commune Rural sustainable development community.

Lush hills, exotic birds, fishing lakes.

Area was 44 former coffee plantations whose land was ruined by overcultivation.

Las Terrazas is a selfsupporting community. Money earned from tourism. Includes a community of artists. Ruins of several plantations are preserved and can be toured.





























Coffee has been grown in Cuba since mid-18th century.

Boosted by French farmers fleeing the revolution in Haiti 1791-1804.

1940s: Cuba was world's leading exporter of coffee.

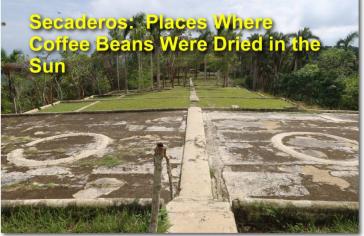
1960: Production peaked 60,000 tons.
But revolution nationalized farms, which devastated the coffee industry.

Most plantations closed.

Still some production in eastern Cuba.







Soroa

"Support for Cuban People" visa program includes visiting (and staying at) farms.

Farm meals are home-grown products.

I stayed at a farm in Soroa – tiny rural farming town.

Natural beauty. Waterfalls. Hiking.

Of course, just as dinner was served, a blackout began. Lasted all night. Dinner was great anyway.

Plus I had a wonderful encounter...

I had the whole afternoon free.
I went hiking (on roads) in the area.
After a while I sat at a small concrete bus shelter.

A group of local kids came over. I ended up spending 2.5 hours with them using my terrible Spanish.

A rainstorm brought some adults into the bus shelter as well.















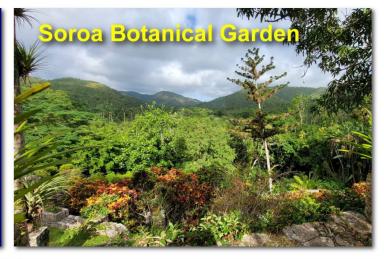






Soroa Orchid Botanical Garden Flowers, trees, ferns. 7.5 hilly acres. Begun in 1943.

Home to over 20,000 plants and 700 species, including 250 species that are native to Cuba. Also a botanic research center.













Driving from Soroa to Viñales
Beautiful farmlands where Cuba's best produce is grown in the fertile soil.
And where Cuba's tobacco is grown.
You also drive through the area hardest hit in Cuba by Hurricane lan.
lan left the entire tobacco crop and tobacco barns destroyed. And it left the whole nation without electricity for close to a week.

In Pinar del Rio province, lan damaged 63,000 homes, thousands of which were destroyed.

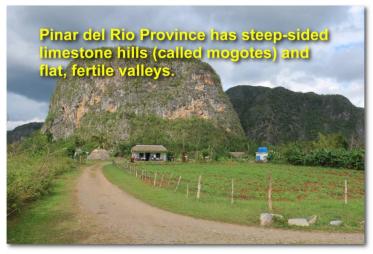
16 inches of rain. Mudslides. Flash floods. Farm fields inundated by floodwater. Roofs blown away.

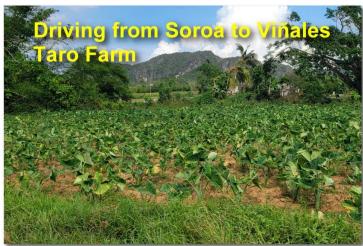
Piled onto the hardship of people who had already been suffering through scarcity and shortages in recent years.



























Indian Caves Cueva del Indio San Vicente

Caves were an ancient indigenous dwelling.

4 miles north of Viñales and near the town of San Vicente.

Discovered in 1920 by a peasant named Juan Díaz.

Ticket incudes boat trip inside cave.

Indian Caves - Cueva del Indio San Vicente

Viñales Valley – UNESCO
Karst landscape circled by
mountains and dome-like limestone
outcrops (mogotes) up to 1,000 ft.
Fertile soil. Climate conducive to
raising livestock and cultivating
fodder and food crops.

Traditional methods of agriculture are used. Fertilizers and pesticides are not used.









(Pan con Mayonesa)



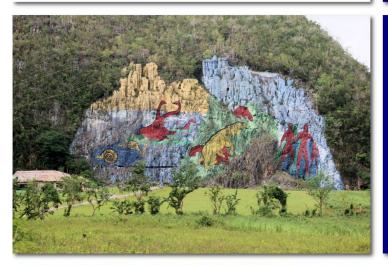


Tuna, White Sweet Potato (Atun con Batata Blanca) Black Beans and Rice (Arroz Moros y Cristianos) Yellow Rice (Arroz Amarillo)

Viñales Mural de la Prehistoria. Mural of world history on a rock wall in the Viñales Valley.

Goes from ancient sea-creatures to dinosaurs. Ends with 3 giant red human figures.

Your Praised as brilliant. view? Decried as an eyesore.



Pinar del Rio is the heart of Cuba's tobacco industry. \$500 million in exports.

Employs thousands. lan flattened nearly all of its tobacco drying barns and crops.



What I had hoped to see, but didn't.





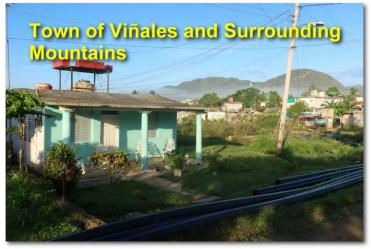
Town of Viñales
Mostly one-story wooden
houses with porches.
Surrounded by low mountains.

Town and Valley became UNESCO World Heritage in 1999 for the karst landscape, traditional agriculture, as vernacular architecture, crafts, and music.



















A Few Final Points







