



***Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in Cuba/
XIII International Cuba Solar Conference***

May 16 – 26, 2018

In Havana, Camaguey and Las Tunas, Cuba

Orientation Packet for Cuba Travelers

***ECO CUBA NETWORK
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Eco Cuba Network is a project of the Green Cities Fund, Oakland, CA.

***Travel arranged by licensed Cuba Travel Service Provider:
Marazul Charters
1 Marine Plaza, Suite 302, North Bergen NJ 07047
Contact: Mayra Alonso
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This Orientation Packet contains the most up-to-date information regarding your Cuba travel that is available to us at this time. If there are any changes to this information, you will be informed in a timely manner. You will also receive, between now and departure, your final program, educational materials, updated emergency contacts, as well as your tickets, visas and health insurance vouchers.

Your program is being organized by **Eco Cuba Network** in coordination with our Cuban host organizations, the **Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ)**, **Cuba Solar** and the **Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People (ICAP)**. Your licensed Cuba Travel Service Provider for this tour is **Marazul Charters**.

DOCUMENTS TO CARRY WITH YOU WHILE TRAVELING

Before you Travel: Be sure you have with you:

* **Your current and valid passport:** Ideally, passports should be valid for a period extending at least 6 months beyond your tour departure date. *If your passport is not valid, you will not be allowed to leave the United States.*

* **Certificate of Cuba Travel:** a copy of the page in your registration form where you have checked off and signed the legal category under which you are traveling to Cuba

* **Tour program:** (You will have the final program prior to departure.)

* **Emergency contact information for the US and Cuba:** *(There is some information at the end of this document and you will receive updated information prior to departure.)*

* **Tickets for your Miami – Havana - Holguin flight, Cuban visa, and voucher stamp for Cuban health insurance:** *(These will be fedexed to you one week before departure.)*

You will need some combination of these documents when leaving the US, some upon arrival in Cuba, some when leaving Cuba, and some when arriving back in the US. (You will be informed at your final meeting in Cuba, regarding which of the documents you will need to carry with you when you return to the US.)

For simplicity's sake, we ask participants to carry all the documentation with them during all legs of the journey.

Keep copies of each document in your carry-on luggage and in your check-in luggage.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN MIAMI, FLORIDA

You should arrive in Miami by the evening before departure, May 15, for an early morning flight on May 16. The group will stay at the **Miami Airport North Best Western Hotel**. The rate is around \$120.00 with continental breakfast provided prior to our departure for the airport. Call **800-780-7234** or **786-515-1880** to make your reservation. There is a free shuttle that circles the airport to take you to the hotel when you arrive in Miami.

You will fly to Cuba on American Airlines, a regular commercial flight. You can consult the AA website for information on baggage size and weight requirements. (<https://www.aa.com/i18n/travel-info/baggage/checked-baggage-policy.jsp>). There is a \$25 checked bag fee for travel to Cuba on AA,

however, that fee is just for the flight to Cuba and is not required on the return flight. The flight from Miami to Havana lasts about one hour. Your tour leaders will facilitate check-in for your flights when you arrive at the airport together from the hotel.

Your US-Cuba flight schedule:

May 16	MIAMI/HAVANA	AA 1447	9:30a-10:45a	Check in 6:30 am
May 26	HOLGUIN/MIAMI	AA 1482	1:05p-2:40p	Check in 10:00 am

At check-in, you will be given a health form to complete that you will later hand in to an official in the airport in Havana.

Once you pass through TSA security in the Miami Airport, please purchase a bottle of water for your flight and for the Immigration and Customs procedure when you arrive in Havana. The latter can take over an hour and you will not be able to purchase water in that section of the Jose Marti International Airport.

IF YOU MISS THE MIAMI-HAVANA FLIGHT

If you miss the flight, you will need to book the next available flight to Havana from Miami, hopefully later in the day, but possibly, the next day. Our colleagues at Marazul Charters may be able to help you with your re-booking, but it might also be simpler and more efficient to arrange this directly with American Airlines yourself. Please also call or email Pam Montanaro at Eco Cuba Network to let us know you will arrive late.

When you arrive in Havana, if you are not with the group, you will take a taxi to the Hotel. The cost for the taxi will be \$25 dollars or so. You will need to convert at least this much cash to Cuban CUCs in the airport to pay the taxi driver.

All appropriate parties will be informed of your new arrival time and every effort will be made to include you in the program from the moment you arrive at the hotel and check in.



WHAT TO EXPECT IN HAVANA, CUBA

Havana Immigration and Customs: Upon your arrival in Havana, you will first go through Immigration and Customs. The Immigration officer will ask you to present your passport and Cuban visa. The officer will either stamp your passport, or stamp an entry approval on the visa, and give it back to you. You may be asked the purpose of your trip and where you are staying (**Hotel Copacabana in Havana**).

(Cuban Immigration and Customs officials occasionally ask non-routine questions of a certain number of tourists entering the country each day. This should not be a cause for alarm. It may take a few more minutes but it's merely a formality and you will soon rejoin your group.)

In between Immigration and Customs, you will be asked to hand in the completed health form that you will have been given in Miami at check-in, before proceeding to collect your luggage.

Once the group has collected all its belongings, you will all go through the basic Customs procedure, which rarely involves a luggage search. After going through Customs, and exiting the secure section of the airport, your Cuban tour guide will be waiting to take you to your bus, operated by our Cuban travel agency, **Amistur**. He or she will be holding a sign that says, "**Eco Cuba Network/Amistur**."

Spending Money in Cuba: Under current U.S. regulations, you are legally permitted to spend as much money as you would like while in Cuba. ECN participants can spend as little as \$50 per day, depending on whether you are in Havana or in the provinces and on your personal spending habits, but *we recommend bringing a larger amount (as much as \$100 per day) as, once you are in Cuba, you will not be able to access more cash.* You can always bring any unspent funds back with you when you return to the US. Better to err on the side of too much than too little!

Money changing: *You will bring US dollars to Cuba and exchange them for the Cuban Convertible Currency (CUC's)* upon your arrival at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, and during the week at your hotel in Cuba. Your Amistur tour guide will assist you with this in both locations.

Your hotel room will have a safety deposit box, usually costing about 2 CUCs per day per room, where you can keep the bulk of your money and your passport and visa, but **we recommend that you purchase a money belt (the kind worn under your clothing)** so that you can keep some money with you at all times and a photocopy of your passport.

What you may bring back to the US: US citizens, authorized to travel to Cuba, may purchase unlimited amounts of educational and artistic materials, which will be brought back to the U.S. in accompanied luggage. These include: books, periodicals, paintings, sculpture, records, tapes, CD's, films, video cassettes, photographs, posters, lithographs, microfilm and other informational, artistic and educational materials.

Under current regulations, you may bring back \$400 worth of other types of Cuban goods to the US, including Cuban cigars, rum, and coffee. We advise against your attempting to bring back more than this amount as you run the risk of having them confiscated by U.S. Customs officials upon your re-entry to the U.S. This can also subject you to a level of scrutiny of your luggage that could cause you to miss your next flight.

Travel insurance: The Cuban health insurance that is included as part of the airfare, is available for use while in Cuba for any medical emergencies. Marazul has recommended to clients the following travel insurance agencies: Travelex, Travel Guard or Starr. This insurance should cover you for

reimbursement, even up to the point of departure, if you decide not to travel for any reason.

YOUR RETURN TO THE US

Your tour guide will ensure that you arrive at the airport at least three hours prior to departure on your last day in Cuba. Your airport exit tax is included with the price of your round trip ticket. The same baggage restrictions apply. If you have purchased a number of items in Cuba, be prepared to pay the AA overweight charge.



HOTEL AND MEALS

At the hotel, you will have a buffet-style breakfast each day, including: eggs, bread, fruit, yogurt, some meat, cereals, and pastries. Lunch and dinners may be at the hotel (buffet) or at a restaurant, cafe or *paladar*. Cuban-style cuisine of meat, chicken or fish, rice and beans, root vegetables, salad, fruit, bread and dessert is the norm. Cafes and fast food restaurants offer sandwiches and pizza.

Your program fee includes two meals per day. The non-included meal can be either lunch or dinner and this information will be included in your final program. You will visit various kinds of restaurants and cafes while in Cuba, including those run by private families, the *paladares*.

**** If you have very strong dietary restrictions, we recommend that you bring along packaged trail mix, power bars, or whatever packaged foods meet your particular dietary needs to supplement your daily nutritional needs. Although they do their best to accommodate vegetarians, Cubans are not used to serving meals with no gluten; dairy products and eggs are often a main source of protein in the Cuban diet. If you are vegan or have other food allergies, please take the necessary precautions to ensure that your dietary needs will be met each day.***

PREPARATIONS AND WHAT TO EXPECT

Baggage: Please travel as lightly as possible. You, and the group as a whole, will have a much easier time if you keep your baggage to a minimum. Again, please consult the American Airlines website for baggage requirements.

Donations: When we visit agencies that directly serve people, we often bring donations to help support their work and to thank them for the time that they spend with us. We pool the donations that participants bring from the US and distribute them to the various places that we visit. Generally needed items include over the counter medications (pain, allergy cold and flu), vitamins (especially children's), school supplies, soap, shampoo, reading glasses, and other small items useful to children or elders. No expired medications can be accepted. If you have purchased a large number of donations, we can try to distribute them among the bags of our group so as to avoid any one participant having to pay overweight charges.

Clothing: When packing, please keep these things in mind: versatility, modesty, and ease for washing and drying. In general, Cubans wear quite casual attire, but there may be occasions in which it is more appropriate to wear pants and skirts, rather than shorts. Wear comfortable walking shoes. A lightweight jacket is necessary for cool evenings and air-conditioned rooms and bus. If you want to go biking, bring sneakers.

Please do not bring along expensive clothing or jewelry or anything that, if lost, would upset you.

Electrical: Voltage is usually 110 V, the same as in the U.S., but occasionally is 220 V, which, for those with US appliances, requires a converter. Plugs are either US-style or the type with 2 round narrow prongs.

Internet: Most hotels have WiFi in their lobbies and there are local hot spots in many places now. WiFi is accessed with a card that can be purchased at hotel desks and from local vendors. They are about \$2 and give you an hour of use time.

Climate: Cuba has an average temperature of 85 degrees F in May.

Time: Cuba will be on Eastern Daylight Time in May.

Communication/Correspondence: International calls can be made from most hotels in Havana, but it can cost as much as \$2.50 per minute to call from Cuba. Your cellphone service will not work in Cuba. However, if you have an unlocked phone, you can purchase a Cubacell SIM card. It will probably cost your family and friends 75 cents to \$1.00 per minute to call you in Cuba.

Your Cuban guide will have a cellphone at all times.

The best emergency phone number for your families will be that of Dr. Michele Frank, Eco Cuba Network coordinator in Cuba: cell phone: (53 - 5) 263 – 6243. (To reach Michele in Cuba, dial 05-263-6243 from a landline, 5-263-6243 from a cellphone.)

Postal service between the US and Cuba takes 5 to 6 weeks, sometimes longer, and is not reliable.

Theft: With the austerity and hard times in Cuba, there has been an increase in petty crime. It is nowhere near the level it is in the U.S., or in many other low-income countries, and violent crime is extremely rare. Please take extra precautions, as you would during international travel anywhere.

Again, a money belt, worn under clothing, is the recommended option for carrying your valuables during travel.

Tippling: Individuals who manage to find jobs in the tourism industry in Cuba are usually supporting a large extended family with their salaries and tips. Especially in the current global economic recession, and despite their professional and cheerful manner and expertise, many of our Cuban guides, translators, drivers and service workers are living in extremely difficult economic circumstances and **depend on tips to survive, as do workers in most countries.**

Please remember to save money to tip the Cuban guide/translator and driver at the end of the trip. We pool our tips for the guide and driver and will suggest an appropriate amount for the guide and for the driver. **You are welcome to give more or less depending on your ability and desire.** *You will find that our guides and drivers always go above and beyond the call of duty in the service of our participants, as a group and as individuals. Our participants generally find this "end of the tour" gift to be an important and meaningful way of showing their gratitude.*

Tipping at restaurants and the hotel is also appropriate. This generally means leaving 1-2 CUCs per participant per "served" meal, .5 CUC for breakfast and buffet-style meals and a few CUCs for the hotel room cleaning staff at the end of your stay.



A FEW RESOURCES ON CUBA TRAVEL

Web Resources:

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Cuba>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/cuba>

www.cdc.gov/travel

[Or simply google "Cuba, \(your interest goes here\)"](#)

Travel Books on Cuba:

The Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba

Eyewitness Guide to Cuba

OTHER RESOURCES ON CUBA

Articles, videos, blogs on Environmental Protection & Sustainable Development in Cuba on the Eco Cuba Network web site: <http://www.ecocubanetwork.net/cuba/resources>

Articles on Social Welfare and Public Health in Cuba: <http://www.ecocubanetwork.net/resources-social-welfare/>

Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana by Marc Frank (highly recommended!)

http://www.amazon.com/Cuban-Revelations-Behind-Scenes-Contemporary/dp/0813061814/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1437157099&sr=8-1&keywords=cuban+revelations

The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics essays edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff

For a brief overview of Cuban history and culture, we recommend the first few chapters in **The Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba**. Also Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba>

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

- * Passport and a photocopy of the vital statistics (front page) of your passport.
- * Extra passport-sized photos (2 or more in case you lose your passport)
- * Money
- * Some form of identification other than your passport
- * Money belt to carry money, plane ticket and passport
- * Any medication you use, packaged in the original containers
- * Shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, toothbrush/tooth paste
- * Sun-hat, visor, sunglasses and sunscreen
- * Mini-travel alarm clock
- * Flashlight and batteries (important for occasional unexpected blackouts)
- * Laundry Detergent
- * Travel sewing kit
- * Tissue packets or Handkerchiefs
- * Moist toilettes
- * Pepto Bismol/Imodium), stool softener, antacid, aspirin or Tylenol, etc.
- * Notebook and pens
- * Camera, memory cards
- * Possibly a digital tape recorder (bring all the batteries you may need)
- * Contact lenses kit, glasses and repair kit
- * Tampons or sanitary napkins
- * Washcloth (if you use one)
- * Book to read during flight, Spanish-English dictionary
- * Mosquito repellent
- * Bag for soiled clothes
- * Day pack (large, open shoulder bags or open totes NOT recommended)
- * Bathing Suit
- * Poster tube (if you want to buy posters or prints)
- * Ear plugs (in case you are a light sleeper and your roommate snores)
- * Luggage locks
- * Sweater or light jacket for air conditioning / evening mosquitoes
- * Gifts for new friends (please see "Tourism and Gift giving")
- * Your preferred electronic devices

HEALTH AND INNOCULATION INFORMATION

Health care is free to residents in Cuba. Health insurance is required for all for tourists to Cuba. US citizens are required to purchase Cuban health insurance because the trade embargo precludes US health insurance agencies from having a financial relationship with the Cuban health care system. The fee for this is included with your flight package fee. The health care system in Cuba is good, so you will be well taken care of in case of an emergency. No inoculations are required for travel to Cuba.

Mosquito repellent is highly recommended. The most effective repellent should contain at least 90% of DEET (N,N-diethyl meta-toluamide), an ingredient in most insect repellents. Mosquito repellents like OFF! (which can at times contain 90% of DEET) are the most effective. (Please be aware that continued use of DEET over a long period can be harmful to your health.) Citronella, a natural repellent that does not contain DEET, is an alternative, although not as effective. Taking B-12 vitamins and garlic pills have also been recommended to help ward off mosquitoes. DEET containing repellents can be purchased in drugstores, hardware, backpacking or military surplus stores. Citronella can be found in health food stores.

Please take good care of yourself. This is probably the best protection against getting sick. Please try to get enough rest. We hope that you get a reasonable amount of sleep before our trip. And remember that you do not have to attend all planned events. If you are exhausted, you may rest for an afternoon. The most common afflictions for visitors are mild diarrhea and heat/sun problems. Be sure to use sunscreen and drink lots of non-alcoholic beverages during the day.

Water: We recommend that you drink bottled water during your stay in Cuba. It is available in stores throughout the island and there will be water provided to you daily on your tour bus.



GROUP PROCESS & SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

There are advantages to traveling with a group. First, as a group you will have access to individuals and organizations that you would not normally meet on your own. Secondly, you will benefit from questions

and input from your fellow travelers and have the opportunity to discuss issues with people from various backgrounds and experiences. Finally, upon your return home, you will have a network of people to communicate with, as they are the ones who will have shared in this unique experience with you.

Please remember that throughout your visit in Cuba, you will be viewed as a representative of your group, Eco Cuba Network, your organization or university, as well as your country of origin. Therefore, your words and actions can reflect on the group.

Please be courteous to your fellow participants, our country hosts, guides, translators, waiters and hotel staff and those Cubans who choose to make presentations to our group. If a difficult situation should arise, try to think in terms of how you, as a member of the group, can contribute to a solution.

For reasons of safety or for the interest of the group, there may also be times when the group leaders will advise against a particular action. Please respect their request.

Traveling to Cuba will require a degree of patience and flexibility on everyone's part. Cuba is struggling, these days, with the same economic hardships that other poor countries, and poor sectors of wealthy countries, are struggling with. The itinerary is subject to change due to the busy schedules of individuals and organizations with whom we hope to meet and to other unforeseeable events, but we all do our best to ensure a quality experience for our groups!

Please remember that we are guests in Cuba, a different culture from that of the US, with a different (although intertwined) history. It is best to approach each new situation with an open mind. US citizens have not always been well educated on the history of US - Cuba relations but you can be sure that Cuban citizens are well aware of this history. They also tend to be quite informed on current international events and welcome the opportunity to discuss them with people from the US.

PUNCTUALITY & FLEXIBILITY

Please try to be at our agreed upon meeting places on time. Being mindful about punctuality will ensure that the group isn't late and/or you won't be inadvertently left behind. Your group leader will remind everyone daily of the time you should begin boarding the bus for the next meeting. If you do choose to engage in a separate activity, be sure that the group leader knows where you are.

TOURISM & GIFT GIVING

One negative aspect of tourism is the creation of an economic state dependent on tourists. Giving money or gifts sporadically to individuals on the street does not help solve overall economic problems. For example, in a case where you might feel moved to give a child on the street a trinket or treat, you may then find yourself immediately surrounded by other children asking for a similar thing. It is impossible to fulfill each person's needs in this manner.

However, there ARE ways you can be helpful and supportive. We encourage you to give donations to organizations rather than individuals. These institutions will distribute items equitably. If you are interested in giving money or gifts to a specific place, please speak to your tour leader. In cases where we visit day care centers, hospitals, or schools, we may give donations directly to the directors. Cuban drivers, translators and tour guides. We suggest that you rather give such gifts that you bring with you to your tour leader, who can then arrange a way to distribute them equally among the Cuban staff.

GIFT SUGGESTIONS

You may also want to give personal gifts to Cuban friends you make, on private visits with them, during the tour. This is a different matter and perfectly fine. Some good gift ideas are:

- Games, jump ropes, building blocks, jacks, crayons, and stuffed animals for small children; small solar calculators are great for teens
- Pens, pencils and paper, briefcases and bags and other office supplies
- Aspirin, multivitamins, cologne, scented soaps, toothpaste, shampoo, candles
- Tapes, books, or magazines
- Mementos from your state or community such as T-shirts, etc.
- Tote bags, back packs
- Small computer-related devices (flash drives, etc.)

SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH ECO CUBA NETWORK

Please consider taking some photos to contribute to our Eco Cuba Network website – photos that capture the essence of your experience as a promoter of educational and people-to-people exchanges. These photos can accompany any articles or report backs we have in our newsletter and our website. It also helps to build enthusiasm for future delegations and may spark interest in issues about Cuba and Eco Cuba Network. We are always interested in the written and audio-visual material you produce as a result of your tour: articles, reports, journal entries, blogs, essays, dissertations, videos. Please share with us your impressions and experiences.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Eco Cuba Network coordinators available by cell phone 24/7, both in the US and in Cuba during your Cuba tour. Please give to family and friends who may need to reach you in the case of an emergency the cell phone number of Pam Montanaro, US Coordinator of Eco Cuba Network (and email address) and the international cell phone number in Cuba of Dr. Michele Frank. (*See below.*)

ECO CUBA NETWORK COORDINATOR/US:

Pam Montanaro 510-649-1052 home office line;

510-318-4910 cell phone

pam@ecocubanetwork.net

ECO CUBA NETWORK COORDINATOR /CUBA:

Dr. Michele Frank (53 - 7) 763 - 9261 or (53 - 7) 763 - 9215;

cellphone: (53 - 5) 263 - 6243.

In Cuba dial 05-263-6243 from landline; 5-263-6243 from cellphone

GROUP TOUR LEADER:

Laurie Guevara-Stone

guevarastone@gmail.com

MARAZUL CHARTERS:

Mayra Alonso (800) 223-5334, ext 11 / (201) 319-1054, ext 11

malonso@marazul.com

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