

## Pre-trip Preparation CUBA

---

### Topics Covered:

1. Payments, Cancellation & Insurance
2. Passport, Visa & Entry Requirements
3. Air Travel Arrangements & Time Zone
4. Packing List & Luggage
5. Weather
6. Money
7. Accommodations & Electrical Current
8. Health & Safety Information
9. Do's and Don'ts
10. Policy on Controlled Substances
11. Gift Giving
12. Diversity
13. Contact Information

### 1. PAYMENTS, CANCELLATION & INSURANCE

#### Payments

Payment Schedule:

Payment 1: \$1000.00 non-refundable down payment due January 31, 2016

Payment 2: \$600.00 due February 29, 2016

Payment 3: \$600.00 due March 31, 2016

Payment can be made in one of two ways: one payment for the full amount of **\$ 2200** due **January 31, 2016**, or in three installments of \$1000 (due January 31, 2016), \$600 (due February 29, 2016), and \$600 (due March 31, 2016). Emergency cancellations will be handled on a case-by-case basis but will only be considered if the student has experienced a severe issue such as a health problem that prevents them from participating on the trip or death of a close relative. No refunds for students who change their minds or decide not to participate on the trip for any other reason. All payments are to be made by check, which should be made out to FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY UNION and mailed in care of Br. Paul O'Keeffe at his address provided at the last page of this document.

#### Cancellation

Br. Paul O'Keeffe must receive cancellation notices in writing as soon as possible. Your \$1000 deposit is non-refundable.

In the event that a Travel Warning is issued by the US State Department regarding travel to Cuba, we will do our best to either change our itinerary in Cuba to avoid the conflict areas or if need be to cancel the trip. Participants will be refunded any recoverable expenses.

All participants are encouraged to purchase trip cancellation or interruption insurance in the event of a personal or family illness or other unforeseen events. This insurance may not be provided by your schools and is not part of the fee charged for this trip.

## **Cancellation Insurance**

We recommend you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against emergencies that might prevent you from traveling. Some examples of unforeseen disruptions that could require you to cancel your trip are: you or a family member becomes sick or dies; bad weather or natural disasters that results in closed airports, roads, or hotels; calls to serve on jury duty; terrorist attacks/civil unrest in-country or at home; health epidemics (such as H1N1 virus, more commonly known as the swine flu).

Most travel insurance companies have specific policies in relation to the H1N1 virus. Please check with your provider on their policies for H1N1 coverage. Some companies may offer "Cancel for Any Reason" clauses at an additional cost that will allow you to cancel for any reason. When purchasing these products, we recommend you call the company to discuss any exclusion.

NOTE: For many types of cancellation insurance, you must purchase the insurance within 14 days of your first payment towards any trip related costs (i.e.: deposit on program, airline ticket, final payment, etc.)

## **Cancellation Insurance We Recommend**

You are free to use any insurance company. Make sure the company you work with offers cancellation and trip interruption coverage as a part of the package. Check with your college or university to see if they have coverage for student travel.

## **Medical Insurance**

This insurance is part of the fees paid for this trip and is a requirement for entering Cuba. It provides primary coverage for international emergencies and accidents. Once purchased, you do not need any other type of health insurance for the program.

## **2. PASSPORT, VISA AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**

### **Passport**

The information below addresses passport requirements for U.S. and Canadian citizens. Citizens of other countries living in the U.S. should contact Br. Paul O'Keeffe for further information. You will need a passport with at least six (6) months validity after your travel dates. Passports should have enough blank space to allow for Cuban entry and exit stamps.

When you apply and receive your new or renewed passport, sign it on the designated page opposite your picture to validate it. Please send us a photocopy of this page after signing. Make sure you also have a photocopy for yourself to keep with you during the trip separately from where you keep your passport. It is also a good idea to leave a photocopy with a family member or friend at home.

Keep any documents inserted into your passport or given to you by immigration officials upon arriving in Cuba. You will need to present them upon departure. Please provide two copies of your passport to your chaperone and Br. Paul BEFORE DEPARTURE.

## **Visa & Entry Requirements**

This information addresses entry requirements for U.S. citizens residing in the United States. U.S. citizens living outside the U.S. should contact Br. Paul O’Keeffe for further information. If you are a citizen of a country other than the U.S., check with your country’s consulate for visa and entry requirements. Br. Paul O’Keeffe will assist you in reviewing information, but the responsibility for obtaining and paying for proper documentation is yours.

Visas will be issued by the Cuban Consular in Washington DC. The designated travel agency will handle the visa procurement directly. Br. Paul will update you on the specific processes needed for visa procurement, as Cuba is an exceptional case.

### **3. AIR TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS & TIME ZONE**

Your air travel is included in the cost of the program and will be arranged out of the city closed to your school. We will use the most convenient connections, efficient routing, and lowest fares possible. Some cities have limited service that may result in multiple connections or long layovers. If you have special travel needs please contact Br. Paul O’Keeffe.

It is essential that the name on your travel documents be identical to your name as it appears on your passport. If there is a discrepancy, you could be delayed or required to purchase another ticket on your own. Please check your ticket as soon as you receive it and contact Br. Paul directly if there is any discrepancy. In the event that changes need to be made to the itinerary due to illness, strikes, terrorism, weather, or other causes, these changes will be made to ensure the well being of all participants. Additional expenses, if any, will be the responsibility of the mission trip participant, although Br. Paul will make every effort to minimize such expenses.

#### **Time Zone**

There is **NO** time difference between Eastern Standard Time and Cuba.

### **4. PACKING LIST & LUGGAGE**

**Packing Tips:** Pack comfortable, modest clothing. Cotton slacks, neat blue jeans, t-shirts **without logos** and button-down shirts are appropriate – sweat suits, athletic gear, and tank tops or any other revealing clothing are not encouraged for this mission trip.

**Church visits:** Bring an outfit for church visits and appropriate clothing for all other occasions.

**When visiting rural areas:** Wear more conservative clothing outside of large, touristy cities. short sleeves are acceptable as are maxi dresses although anything showing cleavage (women) or tight fitting cloths (like spandex) are not recommended.

- Plan to bring items that are lightweight for the tropical weather you will experience. Shorts or permissible to wear in our guest houses but not in public.
- Hotels usually have laundry facilities although they may not be cheap. Research indicates that some hotels charge up to \$5 for a single wash load. Prepare to hand wash your clothes.
- Do not bring anything with a camouflage pattern or of a military style.

### **Suggested Packing List**

- Comfortable walking shoes
- Sweater, sweatshirt or a light jacket for use on the plane
- Rain jacket, poncho, or umbrella
- Conservative outfit for church visit
- Toiletries – items such as tampons, mouthwash, and disposable razors are relatively easy to obtain in Cuba; however, you may find it more convenient to bring your own.
- Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
- Medications – most common over-the-counter medications such as Dramamine, Monistat, and Pepto-Bismol are available in Cuba
- Sun protection – hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent.
- Photography supplies – camera, extra batteries, and electricity converters to charge batteries, iPhones etc.
- Small flashlight & extra batteries (for dark streets, rural areas).
- A refillable water bottle.
- Power bars or other high protein snacks, especially for vegetarians.
- Small backpack for items you will need for everyday use.
- Notebook or a journal.
- Reading material or deck of cards etc. (for waiting times or just for fun)
- Travel clock, watch, or other timepiece.
- Money belt or neck pouch to hold valuables.
- Moist towelettes and/or hand sanitizer.
- Plug adapter and converter, in case you are bringing electrical appliances (Cuba operates on 220 volts, 50 Hz, with round-prong European-style plugs that fit into recessed wall sockets/points. Adaptors are easily accessible at electronic shops).
- Passport and photocopy of the photo page (packed separately).

### **Luggage**

We will be using the cheapest airline possible to get the best value for travel arrangements to Cuba. We urge you to follow the standards of the airline that you will be traveling on. Carry-on and other guidelines can be found on the website once we know which airline we will be using.

*Due to space restrictions on our vehicles in Cuba, you are allowed to pack only one large, soft-covered bag and one carry-on, plus a purse, camera case or backpack. Pack as lightly as you can. In general, if you cannot comfortably walk five city blocks with all of your gear, you have packed too much. You may want to pack a small tote bag or collapsible suitcase in your luggage for souvenirs you will acquire during your trip. The suitcases designed to double as large backpacks are especially good for travel in Cuba.*

## **5. WEATHER**

**Cuba:** Cuba's climate is moderately subtropical and predominantly warm throughout the year. Temperatures average 78 degrees, with 78 percent relative humidity and an average of 330 days of sunshine per year. Cuba has only two seasons: a dry season from November through April and a rainy season from May through October. March is one of the best months to visit Cuba. The weather should be warm with **plenty of sunshine** and the

chances of rainfall are low. The average high temperatures are around 30°C (85°F) whereas the average minimum temperatures are around 19°C (67°F.)

## **6. MONEY**

Most participants find that US \$200 to \$300 is sufficient spending money for a two-week mission trip. Of course, how much you bring will depend on your personal spending habits. Remember that all meals and program expenses are included in your mission trip cost with the exception of **one meal out which students will be responsible for paying**. \$25 should be more than enough to cover the cost of this meal.

The major legal currency for Cuba is the Cuban Convertible **Peso (CUC)**. The Convertible Peso is a closed currency, which means it cannot be purchased outside of Cuba. Most tourists will only ever deal with **CUC**. For international exchange purposes **1.00 Cuban Convertible Peso = \$1.00 USD.** Note that there is a 13% penalty charged when exchanging USA dollars cash, so, you will only receive 87 centavos CUC for one USA dollar when changing the money, allowing for the 13% penalty and a 3% currency exchange fee. Note that many people in Cuba will not accept large bills or notes for small payments so carry some smaller amounts with you.

**Credit and Debit Cards:** With regard to the use of Credit or Debit cards in Cuba the following applies: No card issued by a bank that has any connection with the United States will be accepted in Cuba, although MasterCard now say said it will lift a block on U.S. bank-card transactions in Cuba after March 1st 2015.

**Important:** call your credit card company to let them know that you will be using you card outside of the country for a set time. Some people encounter trouble using a credit card abroad because the credit card company assumes the card is stolen. We strongly encourage you to bring a money belt.

## **7. ACCOMMODATIONS & ELECTRICAL GADGETS**

### **Accommodations**

In keeping with the style and philosophy of the mission trip, you will stay at a modest Franciscan Friary at *El Santuario San Antonio*. Rooms may be semi-dormitory style with shared bathrooms.

### **Electrical Current**

Although the power supply in Cuba is mainly 110 volts, most of the modern hotels have dual voltage with all the sockets in the room being 220 volts. Usually in the bathroom there is a 110 volt socket suitable for shavers and charging batteries. The sockets in the rooms are cleverly designed so they will take the North American flat 2 pin. If you intend to use your appliances, purchase a plug that will fit between your appliance and the adapter once you arrive in Cuba, although it is best that you do without appliances if possible.

## **8. HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION**

Review your vaccinations: Check with your doctor or the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) regarding recommended vaccinations for travel to Cuba. Make sure you are up-to-date on routine vaccines before every trip. These vaccines include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot. You may call the CDC at 404/332-4559 or visit their Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>

1. *Bring enough medical/health supplies.* If you take a prescription or medication, make sure you bring enough to last your entire mission trip, including a possible day or two of delay. Be prepared, and bring medical and health supplies for potential problems.
2. *Drink lots of water:* A warm tropical climate will dehydrate you fast.
3. *Wash hands:* Wash your hands with soap whenever possible or use hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available.
4. *Watch your food:* Eat meat, fish and vegetables only if they are well cooked, and avoid salads unless the greens have been washed with purified water. Fruit that you peel is the safest. Br. Paul will give you more information on safe eating and drinking habits in country.
5. *Pace yourself:* While strenuous walking is not a regular part of any mission trip, there may be an occasion when a long walk is necessary to reach a certain location. If a particular health condition makes strenuous walking a concern, please be prepared to communicate your limitations with your group leader and the chaperones.
6. *Sickness:* If you get sick while traveling, please let Br. Paul know right away. This will help to pinpoint problems with food and water, and help you to get better and arrange a visit to a doctor or medical clinic if necessary.

### **Possible Ailments**

- *Typhoid:* You can get typhoid through contaminated food or water in Cuba. CDC recommends this vaccine for most travelers, especially if you are staying with friends or relatives, visiting smaller cities or rural areas, or if you are an adventurous eater.
- *Hepatitis A:* According to the CDC, travelers to Cuba must guard against Hepatitis A because you can get hepatitis A through contaminated food or water in Cuba, regardless of where you are eating or staying.
- *Hepatitis B:* You can get hepatitis B through sexual contact, contaminated needles, and blood products, so CDC recommends this vaccine if you might have sex with a new partner, get a tattoo or piercing, or have any medical procedures.

### **Safety and Safety Guidelines**

We will not hesitate to cancel or end a trip should something occur that would make it appear to be unsafe to travel to a specific part of Cuba.

Apart from protecting you, the safety guidelines also enhance the group's educational experience and foster long-term relationships of trust, which the Center seeks to develop in the region.

If all participants follow these guidelines, it means less inconvenience for you and the group and less work for our staff. Please read these guidelines carefully and be familiar with them before your departure.

### **General Safety Concern**

Fortunately, Cuba is a very safe place in many ways. Due to the nature of Cuba's government, there are a few more ominous safety issues that travelers should be aware of. Crime is nearly unheard of; they don't have a concept of crime as it exists in other countries. Most resorts are built in partnership with foreign investors and with tourism in mind, so fire alarms, fire extinguishers and other safety devices and procedures are in place on the resorts. Cuba is well policed, with road safety enforced as well or better than many of the home countries of visitors. Because ownership of a vehicle is not a common thing, those that do own them take very good care, and drive carefully to avoid accidents and problems. Petty crime does occur infrequently in major cities. Pickpockets are not uncommon so be sure that all of your zippers are closed

Note however that in recent years, the Cuban government has detained U.S. citizens it suspects of engaging in activities perceived to undermine state security.

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada, or for other callers, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

Follow the U.S. Embassy in Cuba on [Twitter](#) and visit the Embassy's [website](#).

### **Other security concerns**

- It is against the law in Cuba to take photographs of military, police, airport or other transportation facilities, although enforcement of this law is understandably erratic.
- Military clothing and military style hats could be mistaken for military apparel and should not be taken on the trip.
- Apparel with U.S. patriotic messages or symbols (such as conspicuously displayed flags) could provoke aggressive responses and should be left at home.
- Bring a small lock for your bag. You should also bring a money belt that can be hidden under your clothes in which to keep your money and important documents.
- Please do not bring flashy jewelry. Any expensive jewelry or watches, or any that looks expensive, should be left at home.
- Be aware of crowds as violence can erupt very quickly and the police may respond immediately or they may not -- motives in Cuba vary situation to situation especially since pay for government jobs is dropping.

### **When you arrive at the airport in Cuba**

The officials may ask you what your itinerary and schedule is. Simply respond, "I don't know what your schedule is" (You will receive a tentative schedule of appointments from Br. Paul O'Keeffe upon arrival.) Identify yourself as a tourist if asked; the official purpose of your trip is tourism.

## **9. DOS AND DON'TS WHILE ON THIS MISSION TRIP**

### **Dos:**

- Listen carefully to all safety information during your in-country orientation.
- Keep a copy of your passport with you at all times, inside your clothing if possible; you may leave your passport at our accommodations while out on tour.
- Stay close together as a group when you are out in public and always travel in groups of two or more.
- Ask for permission before taping/photographing others.
- Be careful about what you say in public, as many people will understand English.
- Speak at a moderate volume; North Americans tend to speak in louder voices so be mindful of this fact.
- Be respectful of others—especially those you disagree with; don't be afraid to ask difficult questions, but do it in a non-confrontational manner.
- Be respectful of other group members. Before asking multiple questions of resource people, look around to see if other people have questions and remember that people have varied learning styles and may need more time before asking questions. Remember that you are part of a mission group and not simply an independent traveler.
- Drink a lot of purified water to maintain good health and wash your hands frequently. Because Cuba is an arid climate you may not notice you are thirsty as easily as at home.

### **Dont:**

- Leave suitcases, bags, or purses unattended—even for a minute!
- Handle large amounts of money in public. Know how much you have and where it is.
- Wear anything expensive looking- watches, jewelry, sunglasses etc. Pickpocketing is rare but err on the side of caution.
- Disclose the tentative schedule or names of resource persons and groups of which you may be aware. This information should not be given either to "friendly strangers," to other resource persons on the program, or to anyone outside of your group. If you want to ask someone about information provided by another resource person/organization, find a way to do this without mentioning the other person/organization (e.g. "I read before I came that . . .")
- Photograph military personnel or installations- this may be considered threatening behavior!

Your group will have an orientation session upon arrival in Cuba. You will receive additional information and have the opportunity to ask questions at that time. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the information above, call Br. Paul.

*NOTE:* It's likely you will hear the above guidelines again at various points during your mission trip. We ask for and appreciate your patience with this fact in advance of your trip.

## **10. POLICY ON CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES**

The use, possession, transport, or purchase of “controlled substances” (i.e., illegal drugs) by a mission trip participant carries significant risks and penalties for the participant, the entire group, and the reputation of your school and your trip leaders and chaperones.

A participant who uses illegal drugs while on this mission trip will be sent home at his or her own expense. If the participant is detained or arrested, legal officials in the site of the arrest (U.S. or foreign country) likely will not permit travel leaders or chaperones to contact or assist the detained person in any way. Your school and Br. Paul’s responsibility for the participant ends at the time of detention or arrest for drug violations.

United States law prohibits the transport of illegal drugs across its borders. Also, U.S. law does not protect U.S. citizens, U.S. residents, or others traveling abroad who violate foreign drug laws. The laws that prevail are those of the country in which the law was broken.

Please reference the U.S. State Department’s Travel Warning on Drugs Abroad for more information [http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/drugs/drugs\\_1237.html/](http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/drugs/drugs_1237.html/)

The police and customs officials have the right to search your luggage for drugs. In many countries local laws make no distinction between hard and soft drugs. United States laws DO NOT apply to Americans abroad who violate foreign laws. Once you are overseas, you are subject to the same penalties for drug violations as the nationals of the country you are visiting.

## **11. GIFT GIVING**

As participants on this short-term mission trip we are committed to building long-lasting relationships with the communities in our host countries. As part of that commitment we have a policy of not giving gifts, no matter how small or inexpensive, to people on the streets, including not giving candy to children. Regardless of the intentions, the practice of gift giving can lead to ill feelings among both givers and receivers. It also reinforces the stereotype of North Americans as patronizing, wealthy foreigners. If you wish to share something with the people you meet, we suggest you bring postcards, photos or mementoes from your home community and family and that you have enough to give to everyone in a group you may encounter.

Some groups may decide to make a monetary donation to one or more of the organizations with which they meet. This is always done in coordination with Br. Paul and the local resource person, and the donation is given to a responsible individual within the organization to ensure that it goes for the intended purpose. This type of gift giving is always voluntary.

## **12. DIVERSITY**

Siena College, Bonaventure University, the University of St. Francis, and The University of Georgia all strive to create for its participants an intentionally diverse group of travelers where a variety of cultures and backgrounds are represented. Students, faculty, and staff help each other respond to issues of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia, economic inequality, xenophobia, and classism, in an environment where diversity expands the participants' thinking and worldview.

## **14. CONTACT INFORMATION**

Due to the relatively short duration of your mission trip, friends and family should not expect to have regular contact with you either through post, email, or phone calls. Be prepared to purchase Cuban calling cards upon arrival for calling the U.S. International calling cards purchased in the U.S. as well as 800 numbers do not function when calling from of Cuba. None of our accommodations have phones in the rooms; if you need to make a phone call you will need to do so from a calling center.

### **Br. Paul's contact information:**

- Br. Paul O'Keeffe, OFM  
St. Anthony Shrine  
100 Arch Street  
Boston, MA 02110
- Cell: 240-393-0532