



## THE Belizean Grove Adventures in CUBA FAQs

**Q: Where is our hotel located?**

**A:** The Parque Centrale and the Saratoga Hotels are located very near Old Havana and some of the most important museums in Havana. They are facing Central Park, (Parque Centrale) the Capital Building and the National Theater, an architectural beauty. Both hotels are just a couple of blocks away from one another.

**Q: Is it safe to leave things in the hotel room?**

**A:** All of hotel rooms are equipped with Safes. We recommend that all valuables are placed there; passports, tickets, jewelry, phones etc. It is safe to leave your computer in your room, should you have one.

**Q: What are the hotel's amenities? Do we need to take hair dryers, shampoo, etc.?**

**A:** Over the years this has improved dramatically. There is soap, shampoo and lotions. There is also a hair dryer connected to the wall but it is not very powerful. All of the rooms are air-conditioned. Hair dressers are also available to come to your room.

**Q: How much spending money should I bring?**

**A:** There will be opportunities to shop at the craft market and possibly buy art, for those taking the Art Track. There is not much else to buy in Cuba except cigars, and coffee. I usually say \$1000 for a 1 week visit. You will be required to pay for dinners when we go to private restaurants. That is usually \$50/person. Remember, no US credit cards can be used in Cuba.

**Q: Where do I change money?**

**A:** Although one can change money at the airport, we recommend doing it at the hotel.

**Q: What is the rate of exchange?**

**A:** The money exchange rate is the same everywhere. They will take 13 % commission from every transaction, if changing US dollars. If you have Euros, or any other currency there will be a slightly less 10% exchange rate. It is not recommended to change your money in advance to foreign currency, it is not cost effective.

**Q: Is it safe in Cuba overall**

**A:** Yes, Cuba is one of the safest places in the world right now. Cubans love Americans and are welcoming and happy to see you. There are police everywhere to protect tourists. They do not carry guns they are a deterrent only.



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**Q: Do I need to get a visa?**

**A:** Yes, every visitor needs a visa. We will be supplying it to you with the information you have provided in your application. You will receive it at the airport.

**Q: What should I bring for my own use?**

**A:** Anything you could possibly want. It is very hard to buy anything in Cuba. You will need to bring any medicines you would want and need; Band-Aids, Alka Seltzer, Sun Tan Lotion, Imodium, pain relievers, batteries, toothpaste, anything you typically use. It is hard, if not impossible to find anything you can easily get here.

It is not at all like the US, or anywhere else. That is changing but is not at a place you might expect so be proactive and be prepared.

**Q: What is there to buy?**

**A:** Arts and crafts (things made out of paper mache), coffee, cigars and cigarettes, humidors, music and the usual souvenirs (t-shirts, Che Guevara hats, crocheted items, etc.) There is no high fashion here, yet, in the stores. What is there is a little dated, yet you might find something you like.

**Q: Will there be internet available?**

**A:** Yes, at the hotel only. You will need to buy a card from the Business Center at the Parque Centrale. You can buy them for an hour or more. Plan that in your budget, they cost \$ 2.30/hr.

**Q: What clothes should we pack for our trip?**

**A:** Havana is becoming a more and more metropolitan city but keep in mind that it is very warm. Dress in comfortable cloths and good walking shoes for walking around cobble stoned Old Havana. Of course we will be going to the Ambassador's residence and other nice dinners so nothing different than anywhere else in terms of what to wear on a typical BG trip. Best not to wear a lot of jewelry and not temp people who have so little. They are not aggressive but there is no point in flaunting what we have. Simple is better.

**Q: Can I use my cell phone?**

**A:** Verizon, T-Mobile and Sprint are now available in Cuba but please check with your provider in advance and make arrangements before you leave. The cost is very high. You can use them for phone, texting and emails. Only people with an international phone can get a Sim card there. You can rent phones in advance through [www.TravelCell.com](http://www.TravelCell.com) before going to Cuba. My advice is to enjoy the quiet and a little distance from all of the electronic devices but if you are not able to, there are solutions.



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**Q: Is Zika a problem in Cuba?**

**A:** Bring bug spray if concerned but there does not seem to be a major issue there. Cubans are very concerned about public health and fumigate regularly.

**Q: How do I know what afternoon Track to select?**

**A:** Although the Tracks are still being planned, select a Track that appeals to your interests and curiosities. They will all be fascinating and fun. Our primary Guide there is identifying the right venues and people to see. I have been traveling with Batia and her guides for over 10 years and I have NEVER been disappointed.

**Q: Are the tour buses air-conditioned?**

**A:** Yes, the tour buses are new and modern, most likely Chinese. They will all be carrying cold bottled water throughout the time you will be riding on them.

**Q: Is the water safe to drink/ice cubes?**

**A:** No, never from the tap! Bottled water will be provided on the buses and in your rooms. The ice is safe as it is from a filtered water system within our hotel and in the restaurants we will visit. Because of the warm temperatures, it is very important to stay hydrated and drink water constantly.

**Q: If I want to bring items to donate, what should I bring? Where will it go?**

**A:** You can bring unused medicines as long as they have not expired. They can be dropped off at a synagogue that has a pharmacy for the public. You can bring clothes that you no longer want. Some people bring their “B” clothes and leave them behind. The housekeeping staff will distribute it in the community. We will also be visiting a school so if you have children’s clothes for children of all and any ages they will be welcomed and appreciated.

**Q: What can I expect and not expect in Cuba?**

**A:** Cuba is a curious and complex society and place. The people are sophisticated and educated yet the resources there have are slim because of the politics on both sides. You will find happy people who are loyal to their country and government. That does not mean they are all happy. They are ready for change but fearful of what that means to them and what they will lose. Havana is largely clean and architecturally beautiful as you will see. It is on the verge of one of the biggest changes in its history and everyone seems cautiously ready for it. They are way behind us, by 50 years, so their infrastructure is poor and inadequate and we may experience power outages, internet going down, and certain foods not available. We all that need to take such happenings in stride. Expect the

unexpected. You may not find the resources you have in US hotels in Havana, yet the hotel is a 5-Star “Cuban” hotel. It is important for us to be patient and respectful of where



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the country is. The staff will do everything possible to make you feel comfortable. Should you need it you will be able to have your clothing washed and pressed by hotel housekeeping staff. There is also a spa in the Hotel Parque Centrale. The massages are very inexpensive. They are not the best in the world but for \$25/30 you will have a pleasant experience. There is also a lovely pool on the roof. And great bar and often live music in the evenings. Tipping as usual is expected and appreciated.

To be happy in Cuba you need to be in the moment and go with the flow. It is one of the most creative places I have been to, other than Detroit, which is much like Havana. The artists thrive here and there is always something new being created and invented. It is vibrant and exciting.

If your questions have not been answered, please forward them to Batia or Jaye Smith and they will be addressed immediately. We want to help you plan and be ready for another fabulous BG Adventure of the Mind.