



# Cuba 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Cuba at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution.

## Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Havana does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit cannot recommend a particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

Please review OSAC's [Cuba-specific page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

### Crime Threats

There is moderate risk from crime in Havana. While there are no reliable crime statistics from the Government of Cuba, the U.S. Embassy continues to receive several reports per month of crimes against U.S. tourists and other foreign nationals. As the number of U.S. travelers increases, so does the number of reported incidents. These proportional increases are consistent with reporting from other diplomatic missions. Most crime can be associated with pickpocketing, purse snatching, fraud schemes, and thefts from unoccupied cars, hotel rooms, and dwellings. U.S. travelers are generally perceived to be more affluent than Cubans and other tourists, presenting them as attractive targets. Most offenses take place in areas frequented by foreigners.

Although most tourist hotels are relatively safe in Havana, pickpockets, prostitutes, and other criminals may congregate there. Cuba has an active commercial sex trade.

Travelers should ensure that someone other than those traveling with them has a schedule of their proposed events and local contact information for them.

There were a small number of violent crimes involving U.S. citizens reported in 2018. Those crimes typically occur outside of tourist areas.

### Areas of Concern

Due to travel restrictions placed on U.S. government officials by the Cuban government, consular services outside of Havana can face delays.

Travel to Cuba for tourist activities remains prohibited by statute. The Department of Treasury's [Office of Foreign Assets Control \(OFAC\)](#) has issued general licenses for 12 categories of travel. Individuals who meet the regulatory conditions of the general license they seek to travel under do not need to apply for a specific license from OFAC to travel to Cuba. For travel-specific questions, see [31 C.F.R. 515.560](#) and OFAC's [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Available data suggests that accidents involving motor vehicles are the leading cause of accidental deaths in Cuba. Roads are often dangerous due to lack of maintenance. Potholes and a lack of proper lighting make driving at night particularly dangerous. Cuban drivers tend to place large sticks or rocks in the road to indicate a hazard or broken down vehicle ahead. It is often difficult to see these accident markers until one has hit them. Although traffic is relatively light, the combination of old vehicles, motorcycles, horse carts, buses, and pedestrians on narrow roads can create traffic hazards.

Cuban law can have severe implications for drivers involved in accidents, and, regardless of fault, accidents can result in the detention of foreign drivers, particularly if someone is injured.

Cuba requires a Cuban-issued driver's license, and has a system in place for issuing licenses and insuring drivers. All tourists should check with their travel provider if they intend to drive.

Police posted on street corners of all major cities enforce traffic laws and inspect vehicles. Generally, police hand out small fines to stopped individuals. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

As there is no direct commercial air service to the United States by Cuban carriers, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government of Cuba's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards.

The FAA has not assessed Cuba's state-run airline, Cubana de Aviación (CUBANA), for its compliance, though it is generally known to have an ageing fleet and relatively poor safety record.

## **Terrorism Threat**

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Havana. On May 29, 2015, the Secretary of State removed Cuba from the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

### Civil Unrest

There is minimal risk from civil unrest in Havana. Government-organized actions (*actos de repudio*) against domestic civil society and opposition groups can turn violent, and tourists should avoid demonstrations. There have been sporadic citizen protests; however, these generally have been short-lived and elicited a rapid government clampdown.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### **Targeting of U.S. Embassy Havana Employees**

Starting in late 2016, numerous U.S. Embassy Havana employees appeared to have been the targets of specific attacks. Many of the employees suffered a range of physical symptoms including ear complaints and hearing loss, dizziness, headaches, fatigue, cognitive issues, visual problems, and difficulty sleeping. Attacks occurred in U.S. diplomatic residences (including a long-term apartment at the Atlantic) and at Hotel Nacional and Hotel Capri in Havana.

As a result, the U.S. Embassy in Havana is operating with reduced staffing.

### **Environmental Hazards**

Cuba is prone to hurricanes and associated flooding. The government's civil defense system is organized, and usually imposes a mandatory evacuation order to potentially affected areas. The ability of the government to respond to large-scale damage is limited due to a lack of resources.

In addition to the threat of hurricanes, heavy summer rainstorms and poor drainage can cause flash flooding in many areas.

Cuba is located along several active fault systems. While the majority of seismic activity goes unnoticed, the potential for larger earthquakes exists, mostly in eastern Cuba. This potential, combined with the deteriorated infrastructure, is cause for concern. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers general guidance on [earthquake preparedness](#).

### **Critical Infrastructure**

The limited access to the internet, the government's tight control of media, and its particular sensitivity to any news that reflects poorly on Cuba results in a lack of reliable information.

### **Economic Concerns**

The Cuban economy is cash based. There are no businesses in Cuba that accept U.S. credit cards, and there are no ATMs in Cuba. The U.S. Embassy in Havana has no ability to provide cash to U.S. persons.

While state-run media does not report intellectual property crimes, there is a significant market dealing in fraudulent items.

### **Privacy/Counterintelligence Concerns**

The Cuban government closely monitors activities, including contacts with Cuban citizens, and could use private activity to compromise them.

The Government of Cuba maintains tight control of information through ownership of the communications networks and restricted internet access, meaning that there is very little privacy for organizations or individuals.

## Drug-Related Crimes

Although Cuba's location is ideal for the transshipment of drugs, such activity is infrequent due to the heavy police/military presence. The government is strict in its enforcement of laws against the illegal use, sale, and smuggling of narcotics, with strong punishment for traffickers.

## Police Response

Cuba's government relies on a robust internal security apparatus. Most police officers are in uniform, though some investigators or officials may be plain clothed. Police carry identification. Although police are present on most street corners in major cities, the overall police response to crimes involving foreigners is not adequate. Police do take reports of crimes and generally respond to emergency calls.

U.S. visitors are subject to U.S. law. Since 2016, Cuban authorities have been willing to assist and collaborate with U.S. criminal prosecutions. If police apprehend you, be cooperative with all orders.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If detained, advise the police of your nationality and show them your passport or a copy. Ask the police if you may contact your diplomatic mission as soon as possible. U.S. citizens needing assistance should contact the U.S. Embassy at (53)7-839-4100. For after-hours requests you may also call (53)5-280-5713.

## Crime Victim Assistance

Police: 106

Fire: 105

## Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Interior (MININT) is in charge of police.

## Medical Emergencies

Medical care is below U.S. standards. Most hospitals and clinics do not possess equipment for proper diagnoses or medication for treatment. Ambulances operate in many cities, but response times vary, and not all ambulances carry medical personnel.

## Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

U.S. citizens generally use the Cira Garcia Hospital, which operates specifically for foreigners and provides better quality care, although still below U.S. standards.

Cira Garcia Hospital  
41<sup>st</sup> Ave & 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Miramar  
(53)7-204-2811  
Ambulance Service - (53)7-204-4300

CIMEQ Hospital (Military Hospital) \*Only used in extreme emergency, and with special permission of the Cuban government.  
216 & 11B, Siboney  
(53)7-858-1000

#### Available Air Ambulance Services

National Air Ambulance  
Fort Lauderdale Airport  
3495 SW 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33315  
(954) 327-3710 (24 hours) or (954)359-9900  
[inquiry@nationaljets.com](mailto:inquiry@nationaljets.com)

#### Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Dengue and cholera are increasingly common, with cases presumed to be underreported. Chikungunya is also present. Zika outbreaks have been reported, and the CDC issued an [Alert Level 2](#) in August, 2018.

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Cuba](#).

#### **OSAC Country Council Information**

There is no active Country Council in Cuba. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Americas team](#) with any questions.

#### **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

##### U.S. Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in Havana at Calzada between L and M Streets, Vedado.  
Hours: Monday-Thursday, 0800-1630; Friday, 0800-1530

Tel: (53)7-839-4100

For emergency assistance after hours and on weekends, individuals should call (53)7-839-4100 and press 0 or (53)5-280-5791 and request to speak with the duty officer.

Website: <https://cu.usembassy.gov/>

##### Embassy Guidance

The U.S. Embassy asks all American travelers to register for the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive updated information on travel and security in the country.

##### Additional Resources

[Cuba](#) Country Information Sheet

The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security administers the Export Administration Regulations ([15 CFR Parts 730-774](#)), which regulate exports to Cuba.