

Sarah Lawrence College in Cuba

Fall 2008 Handbook

Introduction

This handbook has been designed to help you prepare for Havana. You will find information that we've pulled together from a number of different sources. Be sure to bring this handbook with you.

Try to find the time to read about Cuba and the Cuban culture: the better you are prepared for the 'culture shock,' the easier your adjustment will be. Do not overlook this aspect of your trip. It is hoped that this book will answer most of your questions between now and your arrival in Havana.

If it does not, please do not hesitate to contact me over the summer with any of your questions. You can reach me at the numbers or email listed below and should you need to reach Matilde or Shanti, they can be reached via email at **mzimmermann@slc.edu** and **spillai@slc.edu**. All of us at the College will be anxious to hear how your semester is progressing, so do keep in touch with us in Bronxville from time to time! I look forward to hearing from you (via email will probably be best once you're in Cuba).

Warm regards,

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Cuba Calendar Fall 2008

Saturday, August 16	Arrive in Miami All students must arrive by 5:00 p.m. <i>(Shanti Pillai will meet you at the hotel)</i>
Sunday, August 17	Fly to Havana
Monday, August 18	Orientation and Language classes begin in Havana
Friday, August 22	Begin Trip to Santa Clara, Trinidad, and Cienfuegos
Tuesday, August 26	Return to Havana
Wednesday, August 27- Thursday, August 28	Academic Advising with Shanti and orientation at University of Havana
Friday, August 29	Begin classes CEDEM
Monday, September 1	Begin classes at the University of Havana
Friday, December 12	Semester ends
Sunday, December 14	Students must vacate housing and depart for Miami

NOTE: You **must** arrive in Miami on Saturday, August 16 by 5:00 pm. If you can only find a flight that arrives after 5:00 pm, please plan to arrive the day before. With respect to your return flight from Miami to your final destination, we strongly recommend that you try to find a flight that leaves Miami no earlier than 8 or 9 pm. Holidays are peak travel times and one must allow for delays out of Havana or in customs in Miami.

PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

Visa and Passport

All students must have a valid passport to obtain a visa to enter Cuba. Your passport should be valid for a minimum of six months beyond your stay in Cuba. Please check the expiration date to make sure that it satisfies this requirement. Also, be sure the passport, especially the photo, is in good physical condition—that is, does not look in any way as if it has been tampered with. Please have at least 4 photocopies of your passport (the inside page with personal information) with you. Upon entry Shanti will collect your passports for additional visa processing. **Always have a copy of your passport with you; never carry the original unless you need it for something specific.**

Cuba and the United States have no formal diplomatic relations. Therefore, in order to study in Cuba, students have to travel under the Academic License issued by the US Department of Treasury to Sarah Lawrence College. We will process your visa application. **Do not apply for a visa on your own.**

Please note that there is a \$25 CUC (approx. US \$27) exit fee when you leave Cuba, which the program will pay for.

LUGGAGE

BE PRACTICAL. You have to carry your own luggage, and the weight limit on flights to and from Cuba is **44 pounds per person** of checked luggage. You will be charged by the airline if your luggage weighs more than the allotted amount. If you are significantly over, you may have to leave things behind. Overweight luggage may also result in additional charges from your connecting flights. **Please weigh your luggage before leaving.** Remember to label your luggage. Do not put valuables in checked luggage: you can lock your bags, but the lock may be broken off by security en route.

The residence is equipped with both 110V and 220V electrical outlets. American plugs work in the 110V sockets. However there are **not** many outlets available, so if you are buying or bringing any equipment with you (laptops, hairdryers, etc.), bring an adapter (especially for three-pronged plugs). A surge protector is an absolute necessity (expect power failures and fluctuations periodically). Keep in mind that your roommate will also have electronic devices that s/he will want to use, so please be accommodating.

What to Pack

All sorts of toiletries are available at about the same price as in the US but you may not find the same variety or the brands you are familiar with at home. So if you are picky about your brands or if there are certain products you must have, don't leave home without them. Film is about the same price as in the US. We *do* recommend you pack the following:

- Alarm clock – while not a daily occurrence, you will experience some blackouts in Cuba, so a battery-operated clock is preferable to one that plugs in.
- Special Batteries—AA and AAA batteries are sometimes readily available but a battery for your camera or watch might not be, so bring a spare.
- Swiss army knife (be sure to pack this in your checked luggage).
- Small flashlight
- Blank PC formatted diskettes, blank writable CDs and flash drive
- A small Spanish/English dictionary
- A small first-aid kit
- Tampons/maxi-pads - try to bring a semester's worth. The former are hard to find and the latter aren't very high quality
- Handi-packs of tissue to use in public bathrooms for toilet paper
- Insect repellent
- Sun screen
- Water bottle/nalgene
- Umbrella
- Prescription medicines - try to bring enough for the semester. **However, if your insurance does not allow for vacation or any extra supplies, have your doctor write out your prescription with the generic and chemical name of any medication you use.** Most prescription drugs are available through pharmacies that cater to international clients, but it may take up to two weeks to fill the prescription, so don't wait until you have run out to renew your prescription. (Please refer to *Health Care and Prescriptions*)
- Vitamins
- Contact lenses and contact lens solution – A 2004 student suggests bringing enough disposable lenses to last the semester; the tap water destroyed her permanent lenses.
- Calendar/day planner
- Sheet music if you are planning to take any kind of music class, either for credit or privately.
- Cuba/Havana travel guide/guidebook (Moon is the best for logistics but the worst in terms of understanding Cuba)

- Condoms- if you are sexually active, it is a good idea to bring condoms with you. While easily available in Cuba they are not always of the best quality.
- CDs, DVDs, and MP3s
- Backpacks make you very sweaty; a smaller shoulder bag is better, especially one that is waterproof.
- If you love your spices, bring some dried spices to ‘spice’ up your food. Cuban food is tasty and nutritious but tends to be a bit, well, bland.

NOTE: Anything you haven't used by the end of the semester can be useful to someone else in Havana. Leave any items with friends or at CEDEM.

Clothing

Bring practical, light and presentable clothing. Lighter clothing includes cotton pants, skirts, short sleeve shirts, and tank tops. Lycra-cotton blends seem to hold their shape a little better. Cubans tend to dress informally but don't confuse this with indifference. Bring one or two nice summer dresses for parties and the theater. There are many venues where short shorts are not acceptable although short skirts generally are. Bring a pair of comfortable sandals. You are likely to wear them most of the time. Bring a waterproof jacket and umbrella for the rainy season, and a hooded sweatshirt for the “cold” weather of November and December. Bring at least one long-sleeve shirt and one pair of jeans. The sweatshirt and long-sleeve shirt will also be useful in dealing with the occasional over-air-conditioned theater or classroom.

We will also be doing some hiking over rough and wet terrain—sturdy running shoes will be OK but if you have a pair of lightweight waterproof hiking boots, bring them. And of course you will need a bathing suit.

There is a washing machine in the residence available for your use. Be advised, however, that your clothes will be hung to dry on a line and are prone to stretch and fade slightly.

Climate

Cuba has a tropical climate with a rainy season from May to October and a dry season from November to April. Temperatures vary little across the island, ranging from around 61 degrees in January to over 90 degrees in August. It will be very hot and humid when you arrive in August, and the heat will last into October. However, it cools off towards the end of the year, and you will definitely need a light jacket.

Computers

There is a computer room for your use in the residence with two PC desktop computers and a printer, which belong to the program. **You are also encouraged to bring your own laptop. Be sure to bring one or two flash memory sticks.** Many computers in Cuba still use floppy disks. It is unlikely your laptop will have a floppy disk drive, but the desktop computers do, so you can transfer your file to the desktop with a memory stick and then transfer it to a floppy disk. The network card in your laptop can also be used to connect to the desktop computer and printer – not to the internet.

There is no internet access at the residence. However, there are several internet cafes in Havana, mainly located within large hotels. As of 2006, fairly dependable wireless service became available at a major hotel near the student residence, so bringing a laptop with wireless capability makes accessing the internet and email much easier. If you want to try using Skype for making international phone calls, you should bring a headset with you. You should also download the program before leaving the U.S. Please be aware, however, that tropical conditions do take a toll on electronic equipment. Mysterious computer malfunctions are within the realm of possibility and there is almost no possibility for reliably fixing equipment in Havana. Additionally, while the residence is located in a safe neighborhood, carrying expensive equipment around (e.g. laptops and iPods) carries an inherent risk. Sarah Lawrence is not liable for items that are lost or stolen.

If you have any questions, contact Matilde.

SPECIAL NOTE TO MAC USERS:

There are virtually no Macintosh computers in Cuba, including in the residence. Unless you have Mac OS X installed you won't be able to print your files or transfer them to other computers. With OS X you will at least be able to print on the house computer.

ARRIVAL

Housing

You will be housed in a guesthouse (hotelito) run by the small farmers' organization, ANAP. It is centrally located on Calle C e/ 13 y 15 in Vedado, near the University and the Malecón. The guesthouse has double rooms, a computer room/library, a small kitchenette with refrigerator and sink, and a big beautiful terrace. Each double room has its own bathroom. Bed linens and towels are provided and are changed once a week. You will be provided with breakfast and dinner every day. There are common rooms on the ground floor where you will be able to entertain friends until 10 pm (later on weekends).

Guests and visitors

Please inform your family and friends that if they are United States citizens or residents, they cannot legally enter Cuba as a visitor. ONLY the students on the program are in Cuba legally under the Sarah Lawrence College Academic License. Our license does not extend to friends and family. We are not responsible for any of your guests who enter Cuba and they are not permitted to reside with you in Sarah Lawrence College housing.

PROGRAM POLICIES

The SLC in Cuba program has an excellent safety record. We believe this is primarily the result of students and staff acting responsibly towards themselves, each other, and the Cuban community at large. To ensure the continued well-being of all generations of students and staff and the program itself, we require that students adhere to the following policies for the duration of their stay in Cuba. Please read through this and make sure that you are clear about the

parameters. Failure to comply with these policies and guidelines is grounds for immediate dismissal from the program and departure from Cuba with no credit.

Consumption of Drugs

Drugs (namely the same substances assigned illegal status in the United States) are illegal in Cuba. Their consumption, purchase and sale are severely punished under the Cuban penal code, by which foreign nationals must also abide. The SLC Program has a no tolerance policy with respect to the consumption, buying or selling of illegal substances on the part of students or staff anywhere in Cuba.

Consumption of Alcohol

The legal drinking age in Cuba is 18. The SLC program permits drinking in moderation. By “moderate” it is understood that your drinking should not affect your behavior in such a way as to impinge upon your safety or that of the group. Furthermore, it should not affect your active participation in your academic classes or any group activities at the scheduled times.

Travel Outside of Cuba

Given the extremely complicated situation with visas and air travel to and from Cuba, except in cases of medical or family emergency, students are not allowed to travel outside of Cuba for the duration of the program.

Independent Travel

Independent travel is permitted during the semester once students have had experience traveling through Cuba as a group, and as long as the student’s travel plans do not conflict with academic obligations or required group activities. Permission from the Director must be granted at all times and students should seek approval at least 3 days in advance of proposed departure. Students must provide their dates, mode and timings of travel, the address and phone numbers of lodging, the names of people accompanying them and the activities they plan to do. The program strongly urges that you travel in groups of at least two people. The Director reserves the right to veto any travel plans.

Rules to be Observed at the Residence

The SLC program is happy to be able to provide students with a comfortable, clean, safe and well-located living situation in Havana. The residential facility has some rules of its own which it is imperative for students to follow. An important rule is related to guests at the facility. Students are allowed to entertain friends in the public areas on the first floor of the residence, generally until 10pm. As is common in guesthouses and hotels in Cuba, guests (whether Cubans or foreign nationals) are not permitted in the student rooms.

Natural Disaster Procedures

The SLC program takes place during the hurricane season in Cuba. Such storms are a common annual occurrence and Cuba is highly organized to effectively protect the safety of citizens and foreign nationals alike. In the event a hurricane is imminent, Cuban authorities will publicize a series of procedures to be followed. It is of utmost importance that all SLC program students and staff comply with these procedures 100%. Failure to do

so can result in serious risk to one's health and well being, as well as create obstacles for Cuban authorities trying to ensure safety for everyone in affected areas.

ACADEMICS

The Sarah Lawrence College Program in Cuba is affiliated with CEDEM (Centro de Estudios Demográficos), one of the research centers at the University of Havana. Students are required to enroll in **four** courses: the core course at CEDEM + at least two electives + generally a Spanish language course.

Program of Study

- 1) **Students choose two courses from a broad range of offerings at the University of Havana (UH) and the other institutions with which we are affiliated, including the Instituto Superior Des Artes (ISA), the Fundación de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, and the Ludwig Foundation.**
- 2) **An advanced Spanish course for students who are not already bilingual.**
- 3) **Our most distinctive feature is our affiliation with CEDEM. At CEDEM our students will meet with experts whose research and professional expertise focuses on developments in contemporary Cuban society. Topics of discussion will include gender and society, family, the environment and public policy. Field visits to schools, neighborhood clinics, women's organizations and community projects.**
- 4) **Each student writes a medium-length research paper as part of their CEDEM course, supervised by a member of the CEDEM faculty. This faculty member will meet with the student and oversee her research project.**

Attendance, credit, and evaluation

Shanti must be notified of all absences since attendance is part of the student's evaluation. Every academic course must be taken for full credit. Students will receive grades for all courses. For the CEDEM course, students will also receive a written evaluation.

Students are required to participate in **all** field trips associated with the CEDEM course and **all** excursions organized by the program. They are an integral part of the course and program and are designed to expose students to the practical aspects of issues under discussion in class.

Grading scale: 5(A) 4(B) 3(C) 2-1(F)

There is no official add/drop period at the University of Havana. However, you will be allowed to make changes during the first few weeks.

Spanish Placement Test and classes

Students will be placed in intensive Spanish classes (4 hours a day) from August 18-21. These four days of classes will be useful for all students, including those who are fluent in Spanish, because it will introduce you to the way Spanish is spoken in Cuba. Once the semester begins September 1, students who need to continue with formal language instruction will continue to do so at the University of Havana.

Libraries

Do not expect to be able to buy the books for your courses and research projects or to take them home from the library. Photocopying is extremely expensive. Expect to do most of your academic reading in libraries. In addition to the libraries in each of the *facultades* and the main campus library, there are libraries outside of campus with important collections, depending on your interests. Students will need to be *acreditado*, which involves getting a student ID from the Facultad de Artes y Letras or other departments at the University of Havana; this provides access not only to the university libraries but also to other collections such as those at the *Casa de las Américas*. For all cards you will need small carnet-sized photos (which will be taken in Cuba); for some libraries you will need to wait until you get your temporary residency carnet in early September.

Biblioteca Nacional José Martí:

Located on Boyeros at Plaza de la Revolución. This library has a good selection of materials on all subjects, a gallery, and a screening room. Exhibits and events change regularly. Books cannot be signed out of the library and students need a library card. Bring two photos, the resident ID card, and \$1 Cuban peso to get a library card. Hours: 8:30am to 9pm, Monday through Friday; and 8:30am to 6pm on Saturdays.

Biblioteca Nacional Plaza de Armas:

Located on the south side of the Plaza de Armas, in Habana Vieja. Students will find a good selection of books on all subjects. It has been recently renovated, so it is a nice air-conditioned place to study. Books cannot be signed out of the library and students need a library card. Bring two photos, the resident ID card, and \$1 Cuban peso to get the library card. Hours: 8:30am to 6pm, Monday through Friday.

Casa de las Américas Periodicals Library:

Located on Linea and Ave. de los Presidentes. This library has a very good selection of periodicals published in Cuba and abroad. A good resource for literature, film, and the social sciences. Books cannot be signed out. No library card is needed. Hours: 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

Casa de las Américas Library:

Located on 3ra Avenida and Ave. de los Presidentes. This library has a great selection of Latin-American literature, novels, poetry, and critical texts. Here students will find a selection of materials relating to the social sciences. For library access a library card and two photos are required. Special arrangements can be made for borrowing books. Hours: 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

Centro de Estudios Martianos:

Located on Calle 4 between Linea and Calzada. Specializes in texts by and about José Martí. Also houses a good selection of Cuban history and biographical materials. For in-library use; no library card is needed.

Hours: 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

Cinemateca del ICAIC:

Located on Avenida 23 and Calle 12 in Vedado.

Has an extensive collection of film related materials (Cuban and foreign films).

Hours: 9am to 2pm, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

Instituto Superior Des Artes(ISA)

The library located at ISA has good resources on arts related subjects. Also audio library for music students.

TRANSPORTATION

The residence is a short walk from the main University of Havana campus. A van will take you to and from the CEDEM classes (which meet all day Friday); you can also walk there (about 30 minutes) or take a guagua (P1 or P4) or a máquina.

The most affordable way to travel within the city of Havana is by bus (*guagua*) or by peso cabs (*colectivos, máquinas*).

Máquinas (Peso Cabs/Collective Taxis):

By and large, Máquinas are the old American cars, and have taxi signs. However, any car might be a cab. They follow set routes, generally up and down one of the major roads (i.e. Linea, Calle 23) and they generally begin/end at Capitolio and emanate to the outskirts of the city. You can take a Máquina from any point on its route to any other point on the route for a flat rate of 10 Cuban pesos (50 cents US). Never ask the price, otherwise you'll be charged more than 10 pesos. Stand on the corner of a major street, hail a car and ask the driver if he passes your destination, he will either drive off or tell you to get in. To get to the university yell "Universidad—la escalinata" or "23 y L." To get to Habana Vieja yell "Capitolio," to get to CEDEM yell "Línea—después del túnel" or "23 hasta el puente." Máquinas are off-limits to tourists, so bring your *Carnet* and they have to let you ride. Máquinas are your best bet to get to Centro Habana or Habana Vieja, and they are much faster and more comfortable than the guagua.

The best way to get to ISA (according to a 2005 student) is by máquina: "To get to ISA, simply go to Linea or 23rd and tell the cab [máquina] "Playa." He'll probably say "por tercera" which is the right way. Never once did I get in a cab that said yes to playa and end up in the wrong place. ISA is the last stop for the p1 and the p4 if people want to take the guagua but I highly recommend the taxi, it's a great deal and so fast. The stop where you get off is the last stop and they call it "el paradero." Super easy. That's it!!"

La Guagua (the bus):

Bus fare is 40 centavos of a Cuban peso. The buses get VERY full, you will have to work your way to the back of the bus before your stop if you want to get off in the right place.

The P1 goes down Linea, stops at Habana Libre (near the University), and goes into Centro Habana. The 190 stops at the same stop and goes to the University via Linea. Another useful bus is the P4. Its first/last stop is at ISA and passes near CEDEM on the corner of Avenida 41. This route passes the Habana Libre and into Havana Vieja. It's easy to catch the P4 home in front of Coppelia on 23. The P1 is good for travel to and from ISA.

Camello:

Very large public buses that cost 20 centavos and follow much longer routes. They stop at the same places as the guagua.

Bicycles:

You can buy a new bike for about US \$125. You can also purchase or rent a used bike for the semester. The minimum price for a used bike is \$25, although bikes at the low end of the price spectrum generally don't survive the semester. It is a good idea to ask at *poncheras* (bike repair shops) or *parqueos* (bike parking lots).

'If you really want to see the city via bike, invest in a good one.
Otherwise, stick with the guaguas and máquinas.'

- Fall 2003 students

Dollar Cabs:

There are two types of taxis that only accept CUCs (Cuban convertible pesos). The new cars (1990s) with taxi company logos (for example: Panataxi) are the most expensive, they have meters that do work (no matter what the driver says), but you can always argue a flat rate – just be sure you know what is fair. (\$4-5 from Vedado to Miramar, \$5-6 from Habana Vieja to Miramar.) You can also call for a taxi—55-5555 for Panataxi, 204-0000 for OK Taxi, though it's invariably faster to hail one on the street.

“Bumblebee” cabs are the 1970s Soviet cars that are painted yellow and black, they are a dollar or two cheaper than the fancier cabs, and you always have to bargain a price. People in front of Habana Libre may offer you illegal taxi services, in CUC, about the same price as a bumblebee.

Another option is the Cocotaxi, a coconut-shaped, open vehicle, mounted on a motorbike. They cost 50 cents (CUC) per kilometer, but it is a good idea to get a price before you ride.

Capitolio, Centro Habana:

The area around the Capitolio is where peso cab routes begin and end. The cabs are parked along the front of the Capitolio. The drivers will announce their routes, so listen

for your destination. The trip will cost 10 pesos anywhere on that route if you can find a peso cab to take you. Around the Capitolio there are buses (*camellos*) that will take you to most parts of the city.

Vedado:

Vedado is the area around the University and Copelia. Here, buses as well as peso cabs will take you just about everywhere in the city. In Vedado the buses and peso cabs run generally along Línea and along Avenida 23. Buses # 190, 20, 232, 198, 298, P1, 222 and 37 run the entire length of Línea in Vedado and continue on to Playa.

To the beaches (Playas del Este):

Take the P4 to the Capitolio and then the 400, in front of the Capitolio or the 20 pesos máquinas that leave from the train station in Havana Vieja.

NOTE: The Cubans have a different way of forming lines. When you first approach a bus stop, you will likely see a mob of people, apparently not forming any sort of line. However, Cuba has a very organized way of making lines. Query as to the *ÚLTIMO* or *ÚLTIMA PERSONA* for the bus you want to catch. Note who answers: you are behind them. You are now the *última persona*, and when the next person approaches and calls out *ÚLTIMO*, you raise your hand. That is the only way you can mark your place in line. This applies to almost all lines (from the bank to pizza stands).

Travel out of Havana to the provinces:

You should be aware that there are prices in Cuban pesos for transportation and prices in CUC. As a student, if you show your ID card you are entitled to Cuban peso prices for the buses and trains. **However, whether you are traveling by bus or train, you must make reservations far in advance (two weeks or so before your travel date) in order to guarantee a seat for Cuban peso prices.**

If you are willing to pay CUC prices to travel, no reservations are usually needed as a number of spots are reserved for those paying in convertible pesos. If you are planning to pay CUC prices, *Viazul* buses (for tourist use only) are a far better way to go, since they are more reliable and comfortable than the *Astro* buses (the regular Cuban buses) and cost only slightly more. The bus station is located on Boyeros in Plaza de la Revolución, within walking distance from the University.

Bus station Tel: 703397, 792456, 709401

Astro Tel: 815652, 811108

Viazul Tel: 811413

The train station, Estación Central, is located on Egido and Desamparados, in Habana Vieja, within walking distance of the Capitolio. You **cannot** make reservations by phone.

MONEY, BANKS AND CURRENCY EXCHANGE **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!!!**

There are two types of currency in Cuba, both called the peso. The regular Cuban peso (=US\$.05) is referred to as “moneda nacional” or “pesos cubanos” and identified on signs as MN. The Cuban Convertible Peso or CUC (=US\$1.10) must be used everywhere US dollars used to be required—all tourist places, restaurants, many stores and supermarkets. It is legal to bring US dollars or other foreign currencies into the country and to hold them, but you cannot actually spend anything except CUC and, where allowed, MN.

You will need money for lunches, entertainment, trips you do on your own, gifts to take home, and other purchases. The average amount past students have spent of their own money in the course of the semester has been USD \$1200 - \$1500, although there has been considerable variation. Because of the peculiarities of US-Cuba relations, you must give some thought ahead of time as to how you are going to have this money available to you in Cuba.

Cadecas

Cadecas are the official currency exchange houses. The exchange rate is the same at all cadecas, so don't worry about getting a better rate in a different part of town. There are many Cadecas scattered around the city. There are two located at Coppelia near the University, on Calle 23 between K and L, and others at the following locations: Focsa tower on Calle N and 17, Linea and A, Calle 24 and Avenida 13 at the agro-mercado. In Habana Vieja there is a Cadeca on Obispo. The rate of exchange is about 24 Cuban pesos to the CUC. (\$1 CUC = \$1.10 US). There are also a number of banks near the University campus. **Don't forget to bring a photocopy of your passport and your ID card anytime you want to change money or engage in any kind of bank transaction.**

Cash

There is a safe for your use in the residence. If you bring cash in US dollars, you will pay a 10 percent commission, in addition to a normal change fee of 1-2 percent to change US dollars into CUC. In the past we've recommended that you bring money in euros or Canadian dollars, but with falling dollar exchange rates this is no longer much of an advantage. The only currencies you can actually spend in Cuba are CUC and Cuban pesos. When you change money into CUC or withdraw them with your Amigo card, be sure to get small bills. Using bills larger than 20 CUC will generally require identification in Cuba and often small vendors do not have change.

Travelers Checks

Travelers checks (American Express, Thomas Cook, and Citibank) can be cashed at banks and at some hotels. The highest denomination travelers check that can be cashed in Cuba is \$100; anything up to and including \$100 is OK. However, you will have to pay the 10 percent commission as well as a fee of between 2.5 and 3 percent when you change travelers checks, so this is an expensive way to take your money. If you can get

travelers checks in euros or pounds sterling rather than dollars, you could probably avoid the 10 percent commission, but we have not tried this yet.

Credit cards and Transcards

Due to the embargo, US issued credit cards **cannot** be used in Cuba. There are also no ATMs; you cannot use any bank cards from US banks.

A safe way to access funds in Cuba is to obtain an *Amigo Card* from *Transcard* (similar to a debit card with virtually 24-hour access to your account.) You can set up an account before you depart by calling 1-905 305-7703 or visit their site online at <http://www.transcardinter.com>. There is a fee of \$20 for setting up the account. You should take care of this well ahead of time, as they need time to send you your card before you leave the States. You can withdraw funds from your Transcard account at any bank and many CADECA branches (see below). The only fee is for depositing money into the account. Your parents or others can send money to your account while you are in Cuba, but these deposits can take up to a week to show up in Havana so plan ahead. Please note, however, that in the past students have experienced problems with the Amigo card. These have included funds not arriving in a timely fashion, inability to access remaining funds upon return to the U.S. after the program, difficulty communicating by phone with the Amigo card office in Canada, etc.

Western Union

It is also possible to wire money into Cuba via Western Union. However, you are limited to \$300 every four months and there is a \$30.00 service charge in addition to the 10 percent commission. **USE THIS FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY.**

COMMUNICATIONS, E-MAIL AND INTERNET ACCESS

Phone service between the US and Cuba is difficult. Calls from Cuba to the US are more likely to go through, but calls from the US to Cuba are cheaper, and some phone services have special rates. In Cuba you can purchase a phone card to make international calls from a pay phone in the residence (about \$2.70 CUC per minute to the US). You may also call collect and ask the person to call you back. **US-based calling cards do not work in Cuba.** Shanti will loan you a cell phone to call your parents to tell them you have arrived safely as soon as you arrive in the afternoon of Aug 17, but sometimes phone calls do not go through. Tell your parents not to worry if they don't hear from you for a few days; Prema will send an email to your parents letting them know that you have arrived safely.

E-mail is the most effective way to communicate with family and friends. The following are some of the ways to get internet access in Havana.

- There are two computers available for your use at CEDEM that have internet access. This is free, available when CEDEM is open (9-5 M-F). Sometimes the connections don't go through and it is MUCH slower than anything you are accustomed to.

- The big hotels have business centers with internet access: e.g. the Havana Libre, which is near the University, and the Meliá on Linea. Cost is 8-12 CUC (US\$9-\$14) per hour.
- Wireless service is available at Melia Cohiba, which is about a 10 minute walk from the residence. Cost is 6 CUC (\$7) per hour.
- Correos de Cuba: You can set up a Telnet account at the office on Linea in Vedado. Cost is 5 CUC for a card that lasts 3 hours. There isn't usually a line and centers are located throughout the city. Floppy disks and flash memories don't work here.

Reminder: There is no internet access at the residence—neither from the desktop computers nor from your own laptop. You can save money by composing your emails at the residence and taking them to the internet facility on a floppy or flash drive. This is what most students have done in the past. If you do not have a floppy disk drive and use an internet facility that needs one, you can transfer files to the desktops with a flash memory and then download them onto a floppy disk.

NOTE: You should be prepared for the fact that this will be the most un-wired four months of your lives. You may be able to find something positive in not being able to go on-line ten times a day, but then again, you may not. Be flexible!

HEALTH CARE AND MEDICATIONS

Health insurance while in Cuba will be provided by the program. You will be issued a card that will cover hospitalization, tests, emergencies and most routine visits. Dentistry is not covered. A separate policy is being purchased for each student to cover emergency care outside of Cuba in the extremely unlikely event of Medical Evacuation. This inexpensive emergency coverage is billed to the student's account.

If you take prescription medication it is best to bring what you will need for the semester. If this is not possible, have your doctor write a prescription indicating the *chemical name* of your medication. Be sure to take this prescription to the pharmacy in Cuba well in advance of needing the medication.

The Cira García clinic and pharmacy is located on Avenida 41 and 20 in Miramar, across the street from CEDEM. The clinic and pharmacy caters to tourists and foreign residents, has a good selection of medications, and offers excellent service. We recommend this facility for any medical and/or prescription needs. There is also a very good pharmacy across the street from the clinic.

WARNING: DRUGS

Cuban law does not tolerate the possession or use of any illegal drugs whatsoever. This law is strictly enforced and punishable by imprisonment. There is nothing we can do to help you once you've been arrested.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Gyms

If you are interested in joining a gym, memberships are available at various hotels:

- Meliá Cohiba: located on Paseo and Malecón, in Vedado (very well equipped and you have access to the pool) \$60/month
- Sephardic Temple, 17th and C, Vedado- A good gym that offers yoga classes. No pool. Costs approximately \$12 a month.
- Museo de Artes Decorativas (17th and D, Vedado) has offered yoga classes, 50 pesos for 8 weeks.
- Dance classes—modern, salsa, afro-cuban—at the Teatro Nacional, in pesos.

Cultural Events

La Cartelera de La Habana, a tourist publication, is (theoretically) available free of charge on Thursdays in most of the larger hotels in Vedado or Habana Vieja and a fuller edition is available for 1 Cuban peso at newstands, but both are nearly impossible to find. However, it's available online at <http://www.creart.cult.cu/pub/cartelera/index.php>

Granma and *Juventud Rebelde*, the main daily newspapers, also carry cultural news and listings. We will try to arrange for a subscription to both to be delivered to the residence for students' use.

Theatres

- Gran Teatro de La Habana: Located on the Prado in Centro Habana, in front of Parque Central, by the Capitolio. This theatre houses the Cuban Ballet and also hosts many theatre events. You will find the events posted outside the theater or in the *Cartelera de La Habana*. Tickets for events go on sale the Tuesday before opening night.
- Amadeo Roldán: Located on Calzada and Calle D, in Vedado. The national orchestra plays here regularly. It is also where most of the special music festivals will be held.
- Teatro Nacional: Located on Paseo de la Revolución in Plaza de la Revolución. Larger music events (festivals, guest orchestras etc.) take place in this theater.
- Teatro Mella near the residence on Linea and several other smaller theaters that participate in theater, dance, and film festivals. Events are always posted on the front of the theater.

NOTE: Be aware that prices are posted in CUC as well as in Cuban pesos for most large-scale ballet, music and theatre shows. As a temporary resident you are entitled to Cuban peso prices. However, you will have to buy tickets in advance. **BRING YOUR CARNET!**

Cultural Spaces

- UNEAC: Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos. Located on the corner of Avenida 17 and Calle H. UNEAC hosts cultural events of various kinds, contains a bookstore and a screening room and offers classes (film, writing, etc.)

On Wednesday afternoons there is a regular Rumba show. Saturday is Noche de Boleros.

- Centro cultural Juan Marinello: Located on Boyeros (between the University and the main bus terminal). This center hosts book openings, lectures, round table discussions, and often has guest speakers from Cuba and abroad. The Center also offers classes (often in the social sciences) for a nominal fee.
- Casa de las Américas: Located on 3ra and Ave. de los Presidentes. It contains a gallery, bookstore, hosts art exhibits, round table discussions and guest lecturers.
- Casa de la Cultura: Located in every neighborhood, you will find a regular fare of music, dance and parties. On occasion they offer courses (music, percussion and dance). The centers in the Vedado and Habana Vieja areas are particularly active. Habana Vieja has an outdoor art and poetry space and holds readings, music concerts and art exhibits on a regular basis.

Clubs, Music Venues

There are a variety of clubs and music venues all over the city. Ask around. The locations vary but you can find everything from salsa to techno, hip-hop to trova and r&b, jungle, son and boleros. Many clubs have a matinee in the afternoon, where the cover charge is much lower or even free. Most of the clubs/discos are in the Vedado area not far from the University.

- La Zorra y el Cuervo: Located at 23 and O in Vedado, is a jazz club with good music. Cover charge is \$10 CUC, which includes at least two drinks. Main sets for this and the Jazz Club start about midnight.
- El Jazz Club, Galeria del Paseo, opposite the Melia Cohiba, same deal as Zorra y Cuervo. Atmosphere is a little heavy on hustlers and cigarette smoke but the music is wonderful.
- La Casa de la Música: Located in Miramar across the park from CEDEM, hosts live bands covering a broad range of genres for modest prices. It also has a good record store for Cuban music and an outdoor restaurant/bar.
- Casa de la Trova: Free, traditional trova.
- Café Cantante: Located in Teatro Nacional through a rear entrance, it is the main venue for Cuban hip-hop with matinees in Cuban pesos (bring your Carnet) every other Saturday afternoon.
- Outdoor concerts are held regularly. Locations and performers will be announced in the weekly *Cartelera de La Habana*.

Music and Dance Classes

If you are interested in taking music or dance classes (not for credit), you have many options:

- Teatro Nacional and the Casa de la Cultura offer very affordable dance and music classes. However, the schedule of courses varies. Call ahead or visit for precise information.
- Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) and the Escuela Nacional del Arte (ENA) offer music classes for international visitors but can be quite expensive. Check with students and faculty at ISA.

- Private dance and music classes are available. You can contact the ISA or the ENA for professors or students at the school who offer private classes. It is a good idea to go in person and ask around, look at their bulletin boards, and talk with students.
- Further information is also available at the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC).

Restaurants

Finding good cheap food can be a challenge in Cuba, but here are some suggestions.

- **El Monguito:** Located across the street from Habana Libre on K, this paladar serves huge plates of food with rice and beans, platanos, and salad (note: Cuban salad consists of one vegetable, often cabbage, sliced or shredded), and meat, fish or eggs of your choice. Any egg meal is \$3 CUC; meat and fish are \$5-8. Highly recommended is the \$2 vegetarian plate—congris, veggies, chips. So good!
- **23 y 12:** There is a vegetarian restaurant here that serves cafeteria style and the prices are in pesos! The food is OK and cheap. There are 7 locations throughout the city.
- **Paladares:** Small restaurants owned by individuals, located in their home. There are lots in Miramar and any touristy area. Food is usually better and costs more, anywhere from \$7-\$20 CUC.
- **Pollo, and El Rapido:** These are all basically the same fast food restaurants. Food is premade and the menu is limited to soda, Cristal (Cuban beer), water, French fries, fried chicken, and some combination of ham, cheese, and bread. Sometimes they have spaghetti. Cost is \$2-\$3 CUC.
- **Food in Cuban pesos (MN)** is generally limited to cajita or pizza stands. A cajita is a small cardboard box filled with rice and beans and pork, a potato-like vegetable (boniato, yucca, but rarely potato), and usually with a small amount of fresh vegetable. They cost about 20-25 pesos (\$1), a little less if you get them without meat (rice and beans are always cooked with pork fat). Individual size cheese pizzas are 6-10 pesos. You can also find ham or pork or sandwiches for 5-10 pesos. These types of stands are everywhere. Several 2007 students recommend the cajitas at the agro near the residence.

READING AND INTERNET RESOURCES

The list below is intended to prepare you for your semester in Cuba. Advance reading is a great way to enhance your Cuban experience. We encourage you to select readings that provide general information as well as those more specific to your academic and cultural interests. There is a short list of required books and pamphlets that every student should read over the summer and a longer list of recommended readings for you to select those that meet your own interests.

REQUIRED READING

Jose Martí, “Nuestra America/Our America”

Available in various anthologies of Martí’s writings

Fidel Castro, “Second Declaration of Havana”

and

Ernesto Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba”

These two important documents can be found in various anthologies and are also available in pamphlet format in English or Spanish from www.pathfinderpress.com

Isaac Saney, *Cuba in Motion*. An excellent answer to some common misconceptions about Cuba, in a historical framework. One big advantage it has over other general books on Cuba is that it was published in 2002 and thus contains very up-to-date information.

DOCUMENTARIES AND FILMS

There are many documentary films that can give you a picture of different aspects of Cuban life and culture. A few recommended ones are: “Revolution: Five Visions” (stories of five Cuban photographers); “Tuning with the Enemy” (about piano donations to Cuba, with scenes of ISA); “The Grass is Greener” (about Cuban baseball); “Montaña de Luz” (Cuban doctors in Central America and Africa); “Gay Cuba”; “Comandante,” by Oliver Stone (or “Fidel” by Estela Bravo); “Balseros” (follows group of rafters as they leave Cuba and then in US)

There are many wonderful feature films made in Cuba, sometimes available at a good video rental place here. See a few. Among those other students have recommended are: *Suite Habana* (2003), *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, *Fresa y Chocolate*, *Un Hombre de Exito*, *Lucia*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Muerte de un Burócrata*, *La Ultima Cena*, *Guantanamo*, *El Benny*, *Nada +*, *Miel Para Oshun*—and the list goes on.

RECOMMENDED READING

Depending on your particular interests and background, you will find various of the following books useful. The ones with an * are in the SLC student library in the residence in Havana, along with various other books of history and fiction in English and Spanish.

*Jacqueline Loss and Esther Whitfield, *New Short Fiction from Cuba* (Northwestern University Press, 2008)

*Louis A. Perez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*. A prize-winning historical examination of the formation of the Cuban identity, on and off the island. He has many other interesting books on the history of Cuba.

*Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui and Moises Sio Wong, *Our History is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution* (NY, Pathfinder, 2006)

Fernando Funes et al, *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance: Transforming Food Production in Cuba* (Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2002)

Christina García, *Dreaming in Cuba* (Random House, 1992). A novel, available in English or Spanish. Her latest book, *Monkey Hunting*, is also recommended.

*Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (UNC Press, 2002). A fascinating history of Cuban foreign policy toward Africa.

*Ernesto Che Guevara, *Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956-58* (Pathfinder, 1996) Guevara's classic war diary. Also available in Spanish: *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria*

Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba* (Miami, 2000)

Miren Uriarte, *Cuba: Social Policy at the Crossroads* (Oxfam America, 2002).

A report on the impact of the economic crisis of the 1990s on Cuba's social programs and safety net. This pamphlet can be ordered from Oxfam America or downloaded from their web site, www.oxfamamerica.org.

GENERAL HISTORIES – REFERENCE

Aviva Chomsky et al, *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Duke UP, 2003)

Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform & Revolution* (Oxford UP)

Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (Oxford UP)

Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (Yale UP, 2004)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Your internet time will be limited and expensive in Cuba, so take a look at these sites before you go.

<http://www.creat.cult.cu/pub/cartelera/index.php>

A weekly listing of cultural events. Even though the actual events listed now will be over by the time you arrive, this will give you a sense of the tremendous variety of cultural events and the venues. Virtually all the events listed here will be in Cuban pesos once you get your carnet.

LANIC-University of Texas: www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/

Many links to wide-ranging Cuba related topics

www.granma.cu

www.juventudrebelde.cu

The two daily newspapers in Cuba. Take advantage of your internet access before you go to check them occasionally on line – the online editions are now available in English as well as Spanish.

<http://www.lajiribilla.cu/>

Revista de Cultura Cubana – weekly

<http://renincuba.blogspot.com/>

Ren Rossini's blog (Fall 2007)

www.lonelyplanet.com/dest/car/cub.htm

Tourist information

www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/cuba/

U.S. State Department site about US relations with Cuba

<http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/miami5/index.html>

Spanish-language site on the case of the “Cuban 5”

<http://www.cinelatinoamericano.org/>

site of the Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano

Center for Cuban Studies: www.cubaupdate.org/index.htm

Information and activities in NYC related to contemporary Cuba

Universidad de La Habana: www.uh.cu

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