

TRIP INFORMATION SHEET 2025 CUBA

Updated 10/6/25

Colorful Cuba

November 1–9, 2025

Led by Hannah Ryan, Associate Professor of Art and Art History

Welcome

Hello Study Travelers! We are grateful you have chosen to participate in Travel with St. Olaf College and are working to prepare a trip worthy of your high expectations.

The mission of this tour is to:

- get to know a bit of Cuban history, culture, and contemporary life
- tour Havana in a classic American car, a nod to the city's colorful vintage past
- learn some salsa steps in slow-paced Vinales
- enjoy a home cooked dinner in the home of a local family in Trinidad
- admire the colors of Soroa while visiting a vibrant orchid garden with a local expert and take a private tour to learn about the region's diverse array of flora and fauna
- learn the story of the Cuban Revolution, and visit the memorials dedicated to revolutionary hero Ernesto Che Guevara in Santa Clara
- directly support Eden Reforestation Projects, the local partner of our tour operator, Intrepid Travel
- encounter other perspectives while deepening your understanding of your own viewpoints
- engage in stimulating conversations with like-minded travelers

To achieve these goals, we will visit many sites and enjoy conversations throughout the tour. Most days are quite full, with a little free time so that you may explore your own interests, reflect on what you are seeing and learning, sit amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, and decompress. Time to process new ideas is integral to grasping the accuracy and implications of those ideas. Simply savoring the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of another culture can deepen your learning experience.

Equally important to reaching the tour's goals is getting to know the others in your group. A rapport with those sharing your encounters can strongly enhance your learning experience. Connecting to and discussing issues raised by this trip with your fellow travelers can augment your encounters and strengthen your new feelings, perspectives and knowledge. Your faculty leaders will strive to create a relaxed, safe environment in which discussion flows easily and all perspectives are welcome.

In fact, we hope to take you "from curious to courageous." Many of us are eager to see the world and encounter different perspectives, but we find it challenging to take the next step and have difficult conversations. I encourage you to keep these things in mind as you travel:

1. Curiosity is a human condition *and* a skill set. It requires a level of mindfulness and awareness of surroundings. In being curious, we seek to understand both commonalities and differences.

2. Place matters. Travel is as much about creating immersion into an environment as it is about escape from a mindset that is enabled by one's regular environment. When we move into new places we are grasping an opportunity to break a mindset.
3. Voice matters. The speaker's perspective has the power to change the narrative. Pay attention to who is talking, whether it be a local or a fellow group member.
4. Transformation requires reflection, as I mentioned above. Knowledge alone isn't going to generate transformation, we need to engage in further discussion and reflection.
5. The burden of courage is on us. Lifelong learning is a verb – it's an active endeavor. You're going to be processing new information and that's OK, we'll do it together.

Finally, I also want to share our commitment to **Building Community at St. Olaf: Aspirational values to guide us through difficult discussions** from the Office of the President. I believe they apply as much to our travels together as they do on campus.

Broadening our Perspectives with Curiosity

At St. Olaf, we believe that curiosity opens us up to growth and new opportunities. We encourage perspective-taking, imagination, agility, and adaptability in all facets of the college experience. We believe free inquiry and openness are essential habits of mind for all solution-seekers.

Cultivating Belonging in an Inclusive Community

At St. Olaf, we embrace difference and authenticity as a source of strength. We believe in fostering meaningful connections, caring for each other, and deepening our empathy. We strive for an inclusive community that belongs to every student, faculty member, staff member and alum, and it is our shared responsibility to cultivate it.

Finding Courage in Challenging Moments

At St. Olaf, we believe that courage is being bold in the face of discomfort and vulnerable to critique. Courageous conversations must strike a balance between affirming our deeply held convictions while also acknowledging our perspectives might be limited. We aspire for truth, care, humility, and accountability in all our community interactions.

Responding with Grace to Each Other

At St Olaf, we recognize that many — often those in positions of power — have appealed to grace to exempt themselves from personal responsibility. The value of grace should be extended to all as often as it is expected, and grounded in the tenets of mutual respect and ethical care. The notion of grace is at the heart of many of our traditions and encourages us to respond to others with gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, and respect. For these reasons, we aspire to treat ourselves and each other with grace.

I wish you an enriching and enlightening tour.



Heidi Quiram
Director of Alumni & Family Travel

Resources

Please familiarize yourself with the many resources we have online at stolaf.edu/travel > Menu > Prepare for your Adventure, including the overseas travel insurance coverage, how to be an independent group traveler, safety overview, and much more.

Also, your faculty leader put together a Resource List, if you're interested in doing some pre-departure learning, or continuing the learning after the tour. It is linked within Action Items on the trip web page.

Finally, we recommend checking out the BBC country profile for your destination. Get started at news.bbc.co.uk.

Entry Visa

An e-visa and online customs and immigration form are required for this tour. Please see the comprehensive information in the [Visa and Entry Requirements](#) document.

Connecting to the Group

The address of the group hotel and the timing of the first gathering will be provided in an email with the subject line "Get Ready for Departure" about three weeks prior to departure. Airport transfers are included on this tour and details about those will be provided in the same email.

A Typical Day

A typical day will normally start with breakfast at the hotel and a departure time on our bus or on foot at approximately 8-9 a.m. On most days, we will set out to see several sites and connect with residents and local initiatives, making for a full day. We will typically return to the hotel in time to freshen up for dinner. On every tour we try to strike a balance between scheduled activities and time on your own. This tour is a bit more scheduled due to regulations set by the U.S. government.

NEW INFORMATION

The "Support for the Cuban People" general license aims to encourage individuals and non-governmental organizations to promote independent activity intended to strengthen civil society in Cuba. This license requires travelers to maintain a full schedule (considered 6-8 hours daily) of meaningful interactions, use privately-owned businesses, and stay in privately-owned accommodations. Intrepid US's itinerary has been carefully planned to provide engaging, intimate experiences with Cuba's dynamic residents, immersing you in everyday life, and allowing you to interact with locals and foster a better understanding of what makes Cuba such a fascinating place. This trip allows for very little free time, as your time will be spent experiencing Cuba at its most authentic by interacting with the community directly; staying in rented accommodation in private Cuban guesthouses (casa particular), eat at privately-owned Cuban restaurants (paladares), and shop at privately-owned stores run by self-employed Cubans (cuentapropista).

NEW INFORMATION

Under the requirements set forth by OFAC, you must participate in all scheduled activities on your itinerary. You are travelling to Cuba under OFAC's 'Support for the Cuban People' general license, and the U.S. government requires you to engage in a full-time schedule of activities resulting in meaningful interaction with individuals in Cuba. Hence, unlike other Intrepid US trips, you cannot opt out of activities. By not participating in any scheduled activities, you may be individually liable for criminal or civil penalties.

Activity Level

Movement between cities will be by private, air-conditioned motor coach. We will often move around within cities on foot, or a combination of bussing to a site and then walking. One philosophy of St. Olaf Travel is that any destination is more fully experienced on foot. You should be able to walk fair distances in one shot — at times it could be a mile or more. Make sure to have an already-broken-in pair of walking shoes along; on certain days, these will be your best friends. This itinerary is full of site visits, and we will spend time on our private bus moving from site to site.

As a reminder, the physical requirements listed in the Terms & Conditions that you agreed to when you registered are:

Alumni & Family Travel tours vary in pace, but in general, they require you, the participant, to be capable, without assistance, of walking a minimum of five miles per day, standing for 2 to 3 hours at a time, of climbing stairs that may not have handrails, of climbing in and out of a variety of transportation vehicles, of keeping pace with an active group of travelers on long days of traveling, of dealing with the emotional highs and lows that can occur when experiencing a different culture, and of being capable of traveling with a group for several hours each day. St. Olaf has published specific requirements for each Alumni & Family Travel trip. You are responsible for reviewing the specific requirements for your tour and judging the appropriateness of these travel activities to your physical, mental and behavioral capabilities. Any participant who is unable to fulfill the tour requirements may have their registration cancelled. Any participant who has demonstrated an inability, in the opinion of the tour leader, of keeping up with the group or of safely participating in tour activities may be prohibited from participating in certain activities.

When it is possible to do so, St. Olaf strives to make reasonable efforts to accommodate disabilities and other special needs of tour participants if we are notified at the time of registration. If you have a special need regarding your participation in the tour or will need an accommodation, you should contact the Alumni & Family Travel Director as soon as possible. Unfortunately, St. Olaf may not be able to accommodate all special needs. Facilities, resources, accommodations and protections for disabled and special needs individuals can be sharply limited outside the U.S. St. Olaf reserves the right to refuse to make an accommodation when not required to do so by law.

You are expected to behave in a reasonable manner toward other travelers, tour leaders, staff and other persons with whom you come into contact during the tour. If you behave, in the opinion of the tour leader, in a way likely to disrupt the enjoyment or endanger the safety of other travelers, you will be expelled from the group and will have to make your own arrangements to return home. No refunds for the unused portion of the tour will be given.

If you have any concerns about these requirements, please give me a call. (My contact information is at the bottom of this document.)

NEW INFORMATION

Internet

Wi-Fi access in guesthouses and hotels is becoming more common throughout Cuba. Connections are typically slow where it is available. There are Wi-Fi hotspots located at larger hotels and at major public squares in most cities. To use the internet at public hotspots you will need to purchase an ETECSA internet card from an ETECSA shop or larger hotel. Usually these come in 1-hour blocks at a price of USD/EUR1-2 per hour. After partial use,

ensure you log out correctly or turn your Wi-Fi off so that your time is not used up. If the login page does not open when you select the Wi-Fi, type this into your browser: <http://www.portal-wi-temas.nauta.cu> Many websites and apps will not work in Cuba, so we recommend using WhatsApp to communicate with friends and family.

NEW INFORMATION

SIM Cards

Cuba's only mobile phone operator, Cubacel, provides a tourist SIM package that you can purchase online prior to arrival for pickup at Jose Marti Airport in Terminal 3. The SIM costs around USD30 and includes 6GB mobile data, 100 min of calls, and 100 SMS messages, top ups are only for mobile data, not calls or SMS. It is good for 30 days after activation. Purchase the card on this site <http://cubacelur.com/#providers>. You can pick up the SIM from the kiosk before passing through passport control or at any ETECSA ofce. To rent a handset costs USD6 per day. If you are using your own handset, for this to work in Cuba it needs to be unlocked, and function on the 900MHz band. You can get data on some foreign lines (including US) using global roaming although the costs are very expensive. Sending SMS from Cuba to another country depends on the receiver's operator so you will need to check with yours. Most major US mobile phone providers allow texting to/from US numbers.

Weather

Be sure to check your favorite app or web site for forecasts in each city shortly before departure, keeping in mind that the forecast could change. Temperatures could fluctuate by 5 or 10 degrees warmer or cooler. We recommend bringing multiple light layers that you can add or remove as necessary to stay comfortable.

Hurricane season runs from May to November, when landslides, mudslides, flooding and disruptions to essential services can occur. We monitor these situations as they arise and amend itineraries or activities as necessary.

Clothing Suggestions

Plan to dress comfortably; we will be out and about for several hours each day. Shorts and short-sleeves are perfectly acceptable attire. Women especially should be prepared to cover knees and shoulders at religious sites, and men may possibly also need to cover their knees. As mentioned above, we recommend bringing multiple light layers so that you can add or remove as necessary to stay comfortable.

Meals

Breakfast will be at the hotel and generally one other group meal is included each day. Menus will be pre-chosen and will include a variety of local dishes.

It's imperative that you have informed us of your dietary restrictions so that we can take these into account when ordering group meals.

Hotel Notes

Our group hotels are likely to have laundry services available. Such service is sometimes expensive. We recommend bringing some laundry soap and doing small batches of laundry in your hotel sink/bathtub.

Some hotels will not provide shampoo or soap; this is often in support of green initiatives. Consider packing a travel sized version of hygiene products. Hair dryers are available at most hotels, either in the room or from the reception desk, but cannot be guaranteed, so if this is something that's important to you, you should plan to bring one along. Washcloths are not always supplied at hotels around the world, but may be available at the

reception desk. Many showers in overseas hotels share a floor with the rest of the bathroom or will not have a shower curtain.

Money

How much money you budget for this program depends on what you plan on doing during your free time, and what kind of meals you like to eat. (A quick dish from a sidewalk vendor will cost less than a three-course meal with wine at a more upscale restaurant).

U.S.-issued credit cards are not accepted in Cuba, so you will need to bring cash. You should still bring your debit/credit cards, as you may need them for large expenses, e.g., a medical emergency, at which time it may be possible to use them, but do not rely on them for day-to-day expenses.

The U.S. Dollar is accepted (and preferred) by restaurants, local shops, taxi drivers, and almost any other business or service in Cuba that you might come across. While you can exchange U.S. dollars for Cuban Pesos and use those, you are better off keeping your money in dollars.

Since you're not paying for lodging, you can likely get by on \$50 a day or less. However, the amount you bring will depend on what you'll do with any free time, how you'll get around, and whether you want to buy art or high-fashion souvenirs.

Remember that *most* gratuities are included in your trip price: to the tour manager, guides, drivers, group meal servers, and at group activities (e.g. salsa teachers and classic car drivers). No tips are due to the individuals who provide these services to the group. (St. Olaf faculty leaders do not expect tips.)

But be sure to bring small denominations of bills and plan on some tipping. Due to the low, government-set wages in Cuba, tipping is heavily relied upon. Hold on to your smaller notes and coins to make tipping easier. You can expect to tip during meals on your own, and small tips are recommended to the following individuals at these amounts:

- Housekeeping: USD 1-2 per night

- Musicians in restaurants: USD 1-2

- Restaurant service staff: 10% of your bill

- Toilet attendants: USD 1-2

Many restaurants and shops show prices only in Cuban Pesos (CUP), but will happily provide a conversion if you ask them for the USD prices. For any meals not included as part of your trip, you can expect to spend the following at mid-range restaurants:

- Breakfast: USD 5-10

- Lunch: USD 6-15

- Dinner: USD 12-20, more at higher end restaurants

Pickpocketing is prevalent around the world; we recommend you carry your money and credit cards in a buttoned pocket or money belt — i.e., someplace secure. You should consider bringing only the amount of cash you think you'll need for the day and leaving the remainder in the hotel safe.

UPDATED INFORMATION

Avoid transactions with Cuban Government entities on the US State Department's Prohibited List. This trip is designed to avoid these businesses. During your free time you should avoid the hotels and shops listed. Your leader will be able to advise you on which businesses to avoid locally if you are in doubt.

<https://www.state.gov/division-forcounter-threat-nance-and-sanctions/cuba-restricted-list>

UPDATED INFORMATION

This information was updated in May 2025: **Bringing in Cuban goods and/or cigars into the United States**

Effective September 24, 2020, authorized travelers may no longer return to the United States with alcohol and/or tobacco products acquired in Cuba as accompanied baggage for personal use.

Individuals authorized to travel to Cuba can consume alcohol and tobacco products for personal consumption during their stay in Cuba. Persons subject to United States jurisdiction may purchase or acquire goods of Cuban origin, including alcohol and tobacco products, while they are in a third country for personal consumption outside the United States.

For a full description of what the general license authorizes and the restrictions that apply, see [31 CFR § 515.585\(c\) and \(d\)](#). For additional information on Cuba, visit the [Office of Foreign Assets Control](#) (OFAC) website and [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

[The following information was provided in the previous draft of this document and is now OLD and should be disregarded: You may acquire in Cuba and import as accompanied baggage into the United States merchandise with a value not to exceed \$400 per person, provided that the merchandise is imported for personal use only. Currently, there are no monetary limits on acquisition in Cuba and import into the U.S. of informational materials, such as books, paintings, posters, photographs, lms and music CDs. You may now bring alcohol (up to 1 liter) or tobacco products (up to 50 cigars or 200 cigarettes) from Cuba into the US for personal use in accompanied baggage if they are purchased from a private non-government entity. More information can be found here: <https://www.cbp.gov/trade/basic-import-export/cbp-public-notice-process-imports-cuba>]

UPDATED INFORMATION

There is no limit on personal consumption spending (e.g., food, beverage, etc.) while in Cuba.

Health Matters: Pre-Departure and On-Site

It's highly recommended to bring your own toilet paper when traveling to Cuba. Public restrooms, and even some private ones, may not always have it available. It's a common practice to carry your own, along with hand sanitizer and wipes, as these can be scarce as well. Cubans often don't flush toilet paper due to plumbing limitations.

Be aware that U.S. Medicare does not apply overseas, but some travel medical insurance is included in your tour price, including emergency medical expenses, emergency medical evacuation, medical repatriation, accidental death and dismemberment, security evacuation, natural disaster evacuation, and some trip cancellation and trip interruption coverage. You can find a flyer and ID card on our insurer's website: [EIIA International Travel Protection](#).

For emergency services in Cuba, dial:

104 for an ambulance

105 for fire

106 for police

Ambulance services are not present throughout the country and are unreliable where available, not equipped with state-of-the-art medical equipment, not usually staffed with trained paramedics, and often have little or no medical equipment. Injured or seriously ill travelers may prefer to take a taxi or private vehicle to the nearest major hospital rather than wait for an ambulance.

You should visit the Centers for Disease Control website to learn about recommendations for your destination. Get started at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/> and use the Destinations box on the right side of the page to learn more.

We also recommend that you consider visiting a travel clinic or your own doctor on how to handle common travel-related illnesses and possibly to obtain prescriptions in case of illness overseas. Your doctor or a travel doctor can also talk through the CDC recommendations and provide further guidance.

An Extra Health Note: Dealing with Covid Now That It's Endemic

We now commonly speak of the pandemic in the past tense, but, in fact, covid has become a permanent component in our lives, like seasonal flu, or like other endemic diseases that we encounter in certain destinations, like malaria. Therefore we're wise to continue to have a plan to deal with covid and other respiratory viruses.

- If you start to feel unwell during the program, we ask you to follow the College's Infectious Diseases guidelines for Covid, which are to stay home/in your room for five days. You can return to activities on the 6th day after symptoms started or you tested positive, wearing a mask until Day 11.
- Note that if you miss a substantial portion of the tour or incur additional costs due to illness, in order to be eligible for the travel insurance coverage from EIIA that is included in your trip price, you need medical confirmation of covid. EIIA's FAQ says, "For expenses to be reimbursed, the policy requires that the participant receive (and submit) written confirmation of a positive result from a local medical official." (You can see the [full FAQ here](#).)

Fellow travelers will not be required to quarantine. Regretfully, we will not be able to ask the national guide nor the tour operator to assist individuals with revised hotel, airport transfer, or flight arrangements, as their attention must continue to be focused on the group logistics. Thank you for your understanding.

And finally, this plan may be amended on-site based on the unique circumstances of this group or destination.

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

The U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) has amended their procedures and we can no longer upload traveler lists for our tours. Instead, we will ask your group leader to register with STEP and they will receive alerts and information for your destination.

According to the State Department's web site, the benefits of enrolling in STEP are:

- Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.

- Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
- Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

There are no current unusual travel concerns for your destination. Enrollment is a standard step we take for each of our study travel trips. You may also wish to enroll yourself and receive alerts. Visit <https://mytravel.state.gov/s/step> to get started.

Time Difference

To calculate time zone differences, including Daylight Saving Time in either the U.S. or your destination, I recommend using the time zone converter at timeanddate.com.

Electricity

Most gadgets and chargers these days – for laptops, tablets, and phones, whether Apple or Android – are Dual Voltage: Dual voltage appliances are designed to work on either 110V or 220V without a converter. Be sure to check this before you leave. In any case, you will still need the proper adapter to plug into the foreign outlet. The countries in this region are of the two round pin variety (like most of Europe).

If you bring your own hair dryer or electric razors, you will likely need both a converter and an adapter. Converters and adapters can be found at regular stores such as Best Buy, Target, and Walmart.

Airport Security

Visit tsa.gov/travel for up-to-date guidelines on getting through the security lines faster, what you can bring, the liquids rule, proper identification, and more.

Customs (Going Home)

Visit U.S. Customs and Border Protection for information on what to Know Before You Visit.

Packing Tips

- Mix and match several items of clothing. Pick a scheme like black, brown or navy.
- Take an all-purpose jacket, one that is warm, can double as rain gear, and has pockets.
- Do not take anything that would upset you if you lost it, such as valuables and jewelry.
- Take only comfortable shoes. Match all or most of your wardrobe with one or two pairs.
- Roll clothing in your suitcase or use packing cubes to maximize space and cut down on wrinkling.
- A dressier outfit is appropriate for any performances or fancy dinners you may have booked on your own (i.e., not jeans).
- Small backpacks are very useful as a day pack. Many days we will be out and about for several hours and you will want to carry water, a small umbrella, and layers.

Don't forget to pack

- Credit card account numbers and toll-free phone numbers for card replacement
- Insurance contact information
- A copy of the hotel addresses and dates of stay – if your name and flight tags go missing, the airline will still know how to contact you or where to send your luggage
- Contact solution or an extra pair of glasses in case you break or lose yours, and your prescription
- Perhaps a small, battery powered alarm clock if you're not bringing your cell phone

- A wash cloth, if you regularly use this item at home. Many overseas hotels do not provide them
- Electrical plug adapters. You may also need voltage converters to go from the usual 110 volts in the U.S., to the 220 volts elsewhere in the world, though most electronics now have these converters built into the cord.

Items to carry with you

- Neck safe or money belt
- Passport and another picture ID
- COVID-19 vaccination card and a couple of high-quality masks, just in case
- Overseas or non-toll free numbers for credit card replacement
- Medical insurance card
- Information and contact numbers for any travel insurance you may have purchased on your own. (A link to ID cards and contact information for the travel insurance that is already included with your trip fee will be provided a few weeks prior to departure)
- Prescription medications in their original containers
- Small amount of over-the-counter medications (these items are readily available for purchase at reasonable prices throughout our journey)

Items to leave with someone at home

Some people leave hard copies, and others create a folder in the cloud that can be accessed by family members, no matter where those family members are.

- Copy of the identification page of your passport
- Credit card account numbers and toll-free phone numbers for card replacement
- Photocopy of your medical insurance card
- Travel insurance provider information and contact numbers
- Photocopy of your itinerary, which will include hotel contact information closer to departure
- Prescription medication information in case yours is lost or stolen; often your pharmacy can send a replacement prescription to a nearby pharmacy

Visit www.onebag.com for more packing tips, including what to pack, what to pack it in, and how to pack it.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Investigate – prior to departure – how to replace lost credit cards.
- Bring with you only those credit cards and documents you will need.
- Do not take or wear expensive jewelry. It can be stolen, even when you are wearing it.
- Print the addresses and dates of stay for our hotels (names of hotels to be provided prior to departure) and place inside your checked luggage in case it's lost.
- Make sure you receive a claim check for each piece of checked luggage.
- Read the fire safety instructions in hotels and know where the exits are located.

If you have any questions at any time, do not hesitate to contact the Travel Director:

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