



Best Way to Visit Cuba? Go In Style on a Cruise For Worry-Free Travel

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MIAMI, July 6, 2017 -- Once a forbidden place, Cuba is a jewel in the Caribbean that should be on every traveler's bucket list. And now there's a way to confidently travel to Cuba – by cruise ship.



Two of the most popular and well-known cruise lines recently received approval for sailings to Cuba – Carnival Cruise Line and Holland America Line, two of the 10 cruise brands that are part of Carnival Corporation, the world's largest cruise company.

Carnival Corporation made history in May 2016 when its Fathom brand became the first cruise line to sail from the U.S. to Cuba in more than 40 years. So the company has had plenty of recent experience in sailing guests to Cuba – and fine-tuning how to provide their guests with a great experience.

And on June 29, history was again made as Carnival Cruise Line's 2,052-passenger Carnival Paradise set sail from Tampa to Havana, becoming the largest U.S. cruise ship ever to sail from the U.S. to Cuba.

Carnival Cruise Line – recently named America's Most Trusted cruise line by Reader's Digest for the third consecutive year – is currently offering four- and five- day cruises starting this summer and fall that will overnight in Havana, giving guests the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the city's rich culture and history, as well as its vibrant nightlife. Five-day sailings also call at Key West or Cozumel.

On December 22, Holland America Line – widely recognized as a leader in the premium segment of the cruise industry – will become Carnival Corporation's third cruise line to sail to Cuba.

Holland America Line's 1,350-passenger ms Veendam will sail on seven-, 11- and 12-day itineraries during the 2017-2018 winter and spring seasons from Fort Lauderdale. The ship's itineraries will visit Havana and some also call at Cienfuegos, known as Cuba's "Pearl of the South," which will include shore excursions to the stunningly preserved colonial city of Trinidad. Depending on the itinerary, passengers will also have opportunity to explore other ports of call in the Caribbean, including the Bahamas and Mexico.

The opening of Cuba gives travelers a new, must-see destination to visit and explore in the Caribbean, the world's most popular cruising region. The Spanish-speaking country is like no other place, filled with legendary history, culture and architecture, with people known for their work ethic, entrepreneurship and vibrant spirit for life.

Only 90 miles from the U.S., Cuba was for generations a place that U.S. travelers could only dream about visiting on a cruise ship. While the country is more accessible than ever by sea, it still feels like another world.

The opportunity to learn more about the Cuban culture directly from the Cuban people only enhances the experience of visiting Cuba. People-to-people exchanges, which meet U.S. guidelines for travel to Cuba, are arranged by the cruise lines on half-day and full-day shore excursions. After a complete day of exploration and immersion, guests can also experience nighttime shore excursions.

"Guests will get the chance to participate in culturally enriching experiences such as visiting historical sites and engaging directly with the Cuban people, which ultimately will expand horizons," said Terry Thornton, Carnival Cruise Line's senior vice president of Port Operations. "Our team has created a variety of great shore excursions that we are excited about and believe will create special memories for our guests."

Global cruise travelers and enrichment seekers are naturally curious about new destinations and places that are not easily visited. Cuba is one of these places, and Carnival Cruise Line and Holland America Line guests will find opportunities to learn about a country that most have only seen in photos and news reports.

"Many of the tours are designed in order to have our guests interact with small family-run operations to give them an authentic Cuban experience,"

said Beth Bodensteiner, senior vice president of Revenue Management and Global Deployment for Holland America Line. "We have done all the legwork in creating meaningful experiences that meet all U.S. regulatory requirements. In our view, cruising is the best and most worry-free way to travel to Cuba, even more so going forward."

"The history, culture, amazing sites, art, music and interactions with the Cuban people are unique to this special destination," added Thornton. "A cruise to Cuba will provide lasting memories from being one of the first U.S. guests to visit this fascinating island nation."

Arriving in Havana

Do not miss the sail-in through the narrow channel into Old Havana, with the beautiful, historically significant Morro Castle watching over your cruise ship as it sails into the harbor. Among the city's stately buildings, keep an eye out for the Hotel Nacional, a landmark on the waterfront since 1930.

Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is a jaw-dropping place to explore, a history-rich capital city with cobblestone streets, examples of baroque and neoclassical architecture, broad plazas and the impressive Malecón seawall on the Straits of Florida.

Your ship will dock right in Old Havana, an easy walk to museums and other historical landmarks, such as La Bodeguita del Medio, where a scribble on the wall is attributed to Ernest Hemingway.

It's hard to believe this time capsule of a city is a metropolis that is home to two million people. It feels like a living breathing slice of history.

Cienfuegos and Trinidad

On Holland America Line cruises, guests will have the additional opportunity to see the sophisticated neoclassical buildings of Cienfuegos, a port city carefully planned out by French settlers in the 19th century. Book an excursion to Trinidad and you will drive about 60 miles through the countryside to a beautifully preserved Spanish colonial city of cobblestone streets, palaces and plazas, founded in 1514 by the conquistador Diego Velázquez and located on a hilltop overlooking the Caribbean. Both Cienfuegos and Trinidad were significant trading capitals that like Old Havana are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Tips for Cuba cruise travel

While U.S. residents are free to travel to Cuba, you need to do so under regulations established by the U.S. government. Here are some things to know about traveling to Cuba:

1. **Required paperwork.** All U.S. citizens and most international travelers must have a valid passport. All guests are required to obtain a visa in order to enter Cuba. The type of visa that a guest will need will depend on certain factors, including the reason for travel to Cuba. Most guests will be able to enter Cuba utilizing a "Tarjeta Turistica" (or tourist card) visa. Guests will be able to purchase the "Tarjeta Turistica" from the cruise line at a cost of \$75 per person. The visa is distributed at the time of boarding your ship. You can alternatively obtain a visa from the Cuban consulate or a visa service, but going through your cruise line is a major benefit.
2. **Health fee.** The Cuban government requires all guests to purchase health insurance, which will be automatically included in your port charges.
3. **Shore excursions.** Shore excursions offered by Carnival Cruise Line and Holland America Line meet the people-to-people educational activities requirement. Both lines offer a wide range of shore excursions.
4. **Money matters.** Your ATM and credit cards may not work in Cuba. You should plan on bringing cash for any purchases. Pending any updated U.S. Department of Treasury rules, U.S. dollars can be exchanged for Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUCs). There is an exchange office at the Havana cruise terminal. The transaction fee for converting U.S. dollars to CUCs is approximately 10%.
5. **Staying in touch.** Wi-Fi in Cuba requires the use of cards with codes. You are best off sharing experiences with your friends using your ship's Internet access. If you are planning to use your cellphone, check with your provider regarding service and fees.

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