

# Cuba

## Pre-Arrival:

As soon as Cuban territorial waters are entered 12 miles off the Cuban coast a yacht must contact the port authorities or coastguard (Guarda Frontera) on VHF Channel 16 or HF 2128KHz. As most officials use hand held radios, you may not be able to do this until closer inshore.

Cuba has only eight ports of entry and your landfall must be at one of these designated ports. Under no circumstances should one attempt to arrive unannounced or anchor in a bay.

The various authorities operate as follows: –

1. HF (SSB) 2760KHz Red Costera Nacional (coastguard net) 2790KHz Red Turistica (tourist net)
2. VHF Channel 68 port authorities
3. Channel 19 tourist services.

In most ports the harbour master will answer in English. The following details should be communicated: name of yacht, flag, port of registry, last port of call, intended port of arrival in Cuba with approximate ETA, type of yacht and number of people on board. The captain will then be given instructions to proceed. Channel 16 is also monitored by the marinas and they will also provide assistance and instructions where to anchor or tie up.

# Arrival:

Clearance can only be obtained at ports which have a marina. The main port of entry for yachts is Hemingway Marina immediately to the west of Havana. All ports with marinas have tourist facilities and are used to clearing in yachts.

The commercial port of Havana should not be entered, as it has no provision for clearing yachts.

Once moored in port, wait for the officials to arrive and no one must go ashore until clearance is completed. You may be asked to anchor out for clearance. How many officials come on board will depend on the port, anywhere between 2 and 12 and possibly a sniffer dog as well.

Clearance must first be obtained from Quarantine health officials, after which are the visits by immigration, customs, agriculture department officials and Guarda Frontera (Coast Guard). These officials are based in the marina and clearance is usually completed promptly (2-3 hours), unless you have firearms aboard.

Officials are usually good-natured and whilst there is substantial paperwork to complete it all adds up to the excitement of visiting this country, which for so long has been off limits. Sometimes a small gift (such as a coke or pen) or a tip is requested. You are not obliged to tip and in many ports a handout is frowned upon by the ranking official.

## Cruising:

Once initial clearance is completed, a coastwise cruising permit (despacho de navegacion – costera) can be obtained from the Coast Guard (Guarda Frontera) on departure. Be sure to advise the harbour master that you intend to cruise Cuba so the Guarda can be prepared. No pre-planned list of ports is required, but the Guarda must be advised of your next stop. This permit currently allows you to cruise the waters of Cuba, it does not allow you to go ashore, except at a designated marina.

If any of the ports of entry mentioned above are entered, one has to go through the clearance procedure again.

When cruising along the coast, one must report to the Guarda Frontera office in every port. All papers are usually inspected and the cruising permit is kept until departure. Officially yachts may only visit harbours and anchorages where there are marinas – except for the offshore cays. No other anchorage or harbour may be visited and if it is, the captain and crew may not go ashore.

## Departure:

Twenty-four hours' notice of departure should be given, if possible, even if sailing to another port in Cuba. Before departure one must clear out with the Guarda Frontera at an official port of entry/exit. They will retain the despacho and issue a new exit despacho (clearance

certificate) along with the cruising permit. One must also clear out with customs and immigration.

Foreign and US yachts should take care if departing Cuba directly for Key West, USA. To avoid problems with immigration here, it is advisable to leave Cuba for another country, such as the Bahamas, and make one's entry into the United States from there. Alternatively, make your entry into the USA further north. Cruisers continue to report being denied a cruising permit for the US when trying to clear into Florida having come directly from Cuba. See USA Clearance for further details. Last updated July 2015.

## Immigration:

Passports must be valid for 6 months beyond your planned stay. Most nationals are issued with a Tourist Card on arrival. These are valid for one month and can be renewed for one additional month for \$25. Canadians however will be issued with a Tourist Card for three months, renewable for three additional months.

Extensions can be arranged at the Cuban immigration offices, with a stamp that must be purchased at an international bank before going to the immigration office. This process is speeded up if some six copies of the crew list are prepared with all crew passport details. Cruising forums comment that Key Largo is a good place to get your visa extended via the marina. Cienfuegos is reported to be difficult.

For longer stays it is advisable to arrive with a visa obtained in advance.

Some Latin American countries will not admit someone with a passport stamped in Cuba, but if asked, Cuban officials will not stamp passports.

For the time being it may be advisable for US citizens not to have their passport stamped in Cuba. The Cuban Interests Section and the Swiss embassy in Washington DC deal with visa applications.

If heading to the US after Cuba, foreign nationals can get a visa to enter the US at the American Interests Section in Havana before leaving there. Last updated July 2015.

## Customs:

### Length of Stay

As of November 21, 2013, visiting yachts can now stay up to 5 years in Cuba (previously the limit was 365 days), and even longer with the marina's approval. The boat, regardless where it is flagged, is permitted to stay in Cuba while the owners return home. The import tax on the value of the boat is no longer charged.

## Firearms:

If a yacht is staying a long time in one of the marinas, firearms will be impounded by the Coast Guard (Guarda Frontera). If the yacht is cruising along the coast, firearms

must be declared every time the boat checks in at a new port and may be confiscated until departure or alternatively sealed on board, placed under the responsibility of the captain. The seals and arms will be inspected when clearing out. Other items such as portable GPS, radios, flares and telephones may be sealed onboard by Customs until departure.

All plant, animal and meat products that are not canned must be declared to the health authorities on arrival. Fresh meat products may not be imported. Reasonable quantities of canned meat, eggs, dairy or vegetable produce can be imported for the crew's own consumption.

Due to the increasing use of Cuba as a staging post for drugs, a sniffer dog may be used to search the boat on arrival. Last updated September 2014.

## Health:

In a medical emergency you will be taken to a tourist-only hospital which are reported to be good. Prescription drugs are not available in Cuba so be sure to have sufficient in supply. Herbal tinctures and remedies are commonly used and are inexpensive.

## Documents:

Documents required on entry are: – Clearance from your last port, ships papers, crew list showing full name, date of birth, passport number, date of issue, position on board.

A cruising permit – required if planning on visiting subsequent ports after the port of entry – can be obtained from the Coast Guard prior to departure.

## Fees:

Clearance and cruising permit charges have been regulated to \$55 CuC to be paid when clearing in.

A Tourist Card costs \$20 CuC per person. Extensions cost \$25. \$25 CuC per person departure tax. Last updated May 2015.

## Restrictions:

### U.S Yachts

For U.S captains interested in taking their boats to Cuba with an OK from the U.S. Government, the place to start is here:

<https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/licensing/simplified-network-application-process-redesign-snap-r>

That URL will lead you to the Department of Commerce's SNAP-R (Simplified Network Application Program-Redesign), a simplified process for getting the paperwork you need for permission to go to Cuba. There are a lot of wickets to navigate, but applications are typically approved or turned down 3-4 weeks after a SNAP-R form is submitted to Commerce. This apparently replaces the old requirements

for getting a license to visit Cuba, something that took months.

It is understood that U.S. insurance companies are prohibited from writing insurance to cover U.S. flagged yachts in Cuba.

It is forbidden to land at unauthorized places along the coast and also to take any other person on board the yacht apart from those on the crew list.

## Medical Insurance:

You must have medical insurance to cruise in Cuba. Bring your proof with you unless you have an American insurance policy which is not acceptable, because the company cannot make payment to Cuba under current USA law. However, Cuban authorities have an agreement with an international insurance company to provide coverage at a cost of \$25 CUC per person per week.

## Currency:

The Cuban Convertible Peso is the non-resident currency of Cuba. Our currency rankings show that the most popular Cuba Convertible Peso exchange rate is the CUC to CAD (Canadian Dollar) rate. The currency code for Convertible Pesos is CUC, and the currency symbol is CUC\$.

***US currency no longer circulates in Cuba.*** As an international currency, it is accepted for exchange for CUC in financial institutions, but with a 10% penalty on top of the ~

1.12 banking exchange rate (CUC-USD). To avoid the penalty, it is recommended to exchange your USD for any other internationally accepted currency (such as Canadian Dollars, Euros, Swiss Francs, etc.) prior to arrival in Cuba. The reason there is a 10% penalty is Cuba can't use these dollars, they have to change the dollars somehow into other currencies, and that costs money. Cuba's government is moving U.S. dollars, to somewhere on the planet where a bank has agreed to process the bills for percentage points above normal exchange rates. If legislation in Congress allowing all Americans to travel to Cuba becomes law, the dollar tax no doubt will become even more of an issue.

## Fishing:

Cruising boats are not allowed to fish in Cuban waters. Scuba diving can only be done through the Tourist Office with an official instructor. Spearfishing is prohibited and no marine life, flora, fauna or any other object may be taken from the sea.

Cuba Tide Tables <http://www.tides4fishing.com/ci/cuba>

Cuba Fishing <http://www.tides4fishing.com/ci/cuba#fishing-map>.

## Other Restrictions:

No archaeological objects should be removed or defaced. Cuban citizens are prohibited from visiting foreign flagged yachts and in some marinas even foreign crews are not allowed to go on board other yachts.

Wider Caribbean's Marine Protected Areas (CaMPAM) it looks that in Generals that information should be seen as well

<http://campam.gcfi.org/CaribbeanMPA/CaribbeanMPA.php>

A useful database of MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean region. All Marine Parks are MPAs, and therefore if wanting to find out about any marine parks in the islands you are visiting, details and location can be sourced via this website.

## Pets:

Animals must have health certificates and anti-rabies vaccinations. No animal may be landed without a permit from the health authority (Filosanitario) which requires a minimum two-week quarantine period and costs US \$25. Yachts with animals onboard are usually required to stay at anchor and not tie to a dock.