

**The Rainbow World Fund Cuba 2023 Journey** is an educational experience. We will learn from Cubans about the realities in their country by visiting projects that serve the Cuban people and engaging in social and cultural education in the context of the LGBTQ+ community. The trip includes visits to diverse communities, meeting with leaders from a variety of fields, experiencing time on one of the top ten beaches in the world, great Cuban hospitality, and opportunities to practice your Spanish. The program strives to connect participants with the realities, struggles and hopes that Cubans experience each day. We also hope to bridge connections with Americans and Cubans in order to build understanding and partnerships. This will be RWF's ninth trip to Cuba.



*RWF with Mariela Castro in Havana at CENESEX (2012)*



**Rainbow flag at LGBTQ Pride in Havana, Cuba (2015)**



*View from Revolutionary Square*

**Overview: CUBA May 11-21, 2023**

**Please note: The information in this handbook may change. We will be providing informational updates by email as we near our travel dates.**

We will travel to Cuba from Miami, Florida. We are planning to spend the first 5 nights of the trip in Havana. We will be staying in beautiful "Old Havana". We will be there for the Havana LGBTQ Pride celebration and our group will have the opportunity to march in the parade (about 5-6 blocks).

On May 16, we will leave Havana and travel 2.5 hours to Varadero Beach. We will use that as our base and explore nearby areas. On May 21 we will fly home back to the United States from Varadero Airport (VAR).

\*\* Please coordinate your flights with Jeff Cotter before you book them. Our goal is to have everyone arrive at Havana Airport (HAV) between 9:30 am and 12 p.m. on May 11 so we can start our journey as a group. Our guides will meet us at the airport. Jeff will send you information on the recommended flights. If you can not do those flights/times please talk with Jeff re your timing in order to make arrangements with our Cuban guides.





***RWF participating in a ceremony to open the Cuban AIDS quilt (2019)***

As we are in Cuba for only a short time and wish to show you many aspects of Cuban culture our days will be full. We will have some free time during the trip to spend at the beach or whatever else you'd like to do. Participation in all our scheduled activities is required as a guideline of our license and visa. We will also have mandatory group check-in gatherings throughout the trip. With a small group the check-ins may occur during meals. We want to stress that this is an experience of communal travel. Travel with a group is different than travel alone. We are accountable to one another and every action of each member can affect the whole group. If we strive to understand one another and engage in the experience with an open heart to each other and the people we will be meeting the experience will be positive for us all.

**\*\*Our host in Cuba is the Cuba Council of Churches – they are able to provide us with a special multi-access VISA – we have worked with them for many years. The church occupies a unique position in Cuba society and the Council is able to provide us with amazing connections.**

**\*\* Please remember that although conditions in Cuba have greatly improved over the last several years, the country is still in an economic crisis due to the US embargo and scarcity of resources. Our plans and schedule will require us to be very flexible. Our itinerary may change during the course of the trip. The event that you had hoped would happen could be canceled at short notice due to many factors. Jeff will work with our hosts to produce a program that will encompass all our goals, it may just not be in the way we had initially laid out. Be assured that you will have amazing experiences, meet people you never thought you'd know, and come to learn something about your own choices and way of life in the context of those who have a very different life than you.**



***At the LGBTQ Pride Party in Havana (2019)***

Please prepare to leave behind all your assumptions and luxuries...be prepared to embrace a simpler way of living for 11 days/10 nights.

Please note that each trip is unique. We are in the process of creating the itinerary for this years trip. Here are a few highlights of previous years trips – to give you an idea of some of the things we may do on our trip.

- March in the LGBTQ Pride Parade in Havana
- Meet with Mariela Castro and human rights activists
- Meet with members of Parliament as well as political dissidents
- Visit schools, medical clinics, and the Institute of Tropical Medicine
- Spend time at the Martin Luther King Center
- Experience an amazing LGBTQ extravaganza at the Karl Marx Theater
- Learn about communism, socialism and Cuba's unique capitalism

Meet members of the Cuba 5 - former US political prisoners  
Learn how the Christian, Jewish and Yoruba religions survived  
Visit ecological areas and learn about the Cuban organic movement  
Learn how Cuba has survived post USSR and under the US embargo  
Visit non tourist communities in Cardenas and San Nicholas

Spending time with members of the Cuban LGBTQ community  
Cruise Havana in a 1950s American Car  
Explore historic Old Havana  
Attend a concert by Buena Vista Social Club  
Visit the Bay of Pigs  
Snorkel the reefs of Varadero  
Visit the Revolutionary Museum in Havana  
See the amazing modern art at the National Museum of Fine Arts  
Stroll the Malecón, Havana's evocative 8 km long sea drive  
Explore La Necrópolis de Cristóbal Colón Cemetery  
Experience Fusterlandia - the home and neighborhood of artist Jose Fuster  
See Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabaña colloquially aka "La Cabaña"

**Accommodations:**

In Havana we have reserved rooms at the Santa Brigida Hotel (run by the Sisters of St. Bridget ) for our group. The hotel is air conditioned and ideally located near the Plaza Vieja in the Old Havana neighborhood.

In Varadero, we usually stay near Varadero Beach, on of the top 10 beaches in the world...white sand and clear blue water....pretty much a dream. Participants need to be prepared for a group experience of communal living.

**Transportation:**

Our transportation will be with a mini-bus or vans.

You will be welcomed so warmly,  
You will be perplexed at having your questions unanswered,  
You will be asked just to accept Cuba as she is.  
You will be full of gratitude and questions.  
You will be moved at how people can do so much with so little.  
You will be full of images of joy in living.  
You will be asked to open your heart to this country and it's people.

**Contact information to leave at home:**

Our hosts are Nacyra Gomez ([nalegom45@gmail.com](mailto:nalegom45@gmail.com)) and Yahami Mederos ([ymmoronta@gmail.com](mailto:ymmoronta@gmail.com))

Emergency telephones numbers:

11-53-45 612423 (Nacyra's home)

11-53-45 667219 (Nacyra's office)

11-53-5-2397245 (Nacyra's cell phone) - best number to reach our group with.

Please use these phone number and email for emergencies only.



Telephone/email contact from Cuba is difficult and expensive, please tell your family and friends to assume that if they have not heard from us that everything is going well and running smoothly. We will contact you as soon as we can if there is a problem or an emergency. Email service is sporadic but improving. You can purchase Internet cards and use them at internet cafes.

Important Numbers in case of emergency:

US Interest Section in Havana

Telephone: 537 834 4400 or 537 833 3552

After hours numbers: 537 833 2326 or 537 833 5280

---

### **Spending Money:**

The US dollar has an almost 13-15% devaluation against the Cuban Convertible Peso Currency aka "CUC" (another result of the embargo). Our guides can exchange US currency for CUC throughout the trip. For \$100 USD you get about 87 CUC that is a standard rate.

**Do not exchange any US money for Cuba before you get to Cuba.** Our hosts can take care of that when we get to Cuba.

The Cuban Peso is the money that average Cuban's use. The CUC is for use primarily by the tourist economy.

You may have heard that US credit cards are now accepted in Cuba. This is true but most places of business are not set up for US credit cards year. The only the most fancy hotels and restaurants will allow US credit cards at this time. Do not plan on being able to use a credit card in Cuba.

We are planning on having 12-16 people on the trip. If we have less than 12 participants then the costs will go up a little due to the economies of scale for our hosts. An additional \$125 may be added to the trip price. Historically, we have always had full trips.

Generally everything is covered on the trip except one meal and alcohol; however, if the group or individuals decide to do something that is not on our regular itinerary then you will be asked to cover that cost – usually a small amount. Additionally the snorkeling trip we have planned (weather and time permitting) costs an additional \$10 for equipment rental. If enough people want to go to the Bay of Pigs there is usually a \$30 cost.

### **What to bring to cuba...**

Spending \$200-\$400 should be enough for buying water and drinks, snacks, souvenirs, things to bring home from the market, rum, etc. There are tourist markets in Varadero that will be fun places to shop. There is an art markets in Havana and Varadero where you can buy original artwork from Cuban artists...**BRING MORE \$ if you are interested. There are lots of good deals.**

Money Belt or Money Pouch (optional).

PASSPORT - Please leave one photocopy at home. We recommend you also take a PIC of your passport and save it on your cell phone and also email a copy to yourself.

Information on your USA insurance (medical) give this to Jeff. Additionally, basic travel/medical insurance is included in the cost of your airplane ticket on the charter flight (the government of Cuba requires this for all visitors). There are special tourist hospitals in Havana and Varadero.

### **A water bottle to refill**

No need to bring a beach towel you can use the your towel from the Center – just do not bring sand back into the house.

### **Clothing:**

Because we are traveling in a delegation and will be visiting groups and people in an official capacity we recommend wearing clothes that reflect the respect we have for our hosts....in choosing your clothing please be aware of how you will be perceived and what image your clothing is projecting to our hosts. That said, the attire in Cuba is generally summer attire, shorts and tank tops are fine to wear.

Light summer clothing, light layers, t-shirts, skirts, pants, dresses and shorts. It is recommended that you bring clothes that will protect you from the sun, it will be very hot and the sun is much more powerful than what we are used to. The weather will probably be 70-80F.

A bathing suit and comfortable shoes (one walking, one sandal)

Light jacket (rain is possible)

Hat and sunglasses – prepare for lots of sun

Safety pins, needle and thread, extra buttons

It will be possible to take our clothes to a laundry for washing or there may be washing facilities at the Center. Bring some laundry soap with you so at least you can wash out some of your clothes by hand if you need to – bar soap or shampoo will work fine too.

As we are only there for 10 days and the trip is casual, most people are able to manage without having to do laundry.

### **Toiletries:**

Please assume that you will not be able to purchase any of these items in Cuba. You need to bring with you what you will need. You are welcome to bring bigger sizes of items that you can leave with our hosts. All the things on these lists while they seem standard to us are luxuries in Cuba.

Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, soap

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, bring contact lens solution and a copy of your prescription in case you lose your glasses. However the chance of getting new glasses would be limited.

Sunblock, depending on your skin type 30 SPF and higher is recommended, i go for 65

Lip balm with sunscreen

Other personal items you may need – tampons...

We will have a group first-aid kit but if you'd like to bring your own bandaids, polysporin, tylenol, etc that is a good idea.

Hand sanitizer – this will keep the whole group healthier – be prepared to share this item

There is no malaria in Cuba but it is recommended that you have a tetanus and

Hepatitis A up-to-date vaccine before you leave (precautions for travel any where)

**Baggage:** Packing light is the best idea. Do not carry scissors or nail clippers in your carry on luggage, they may be confiscated at the airport. Dress on the trip is casual so many people just use a carry-on suitcase.

**Your extra bag(s):** As our mission is humanitarian we ask that you collect items that we can distribute to different projects that RWF supports on the trip. There is a great need for multivitamins and basic over the counter medications. Most Cuban's cannot afford to pay for these.

We will tell you more about this.

**Medicine:**

Multivitamins (if you generally take them)

Tums or Rolaids

Pepto bismol (tablets or liquid)

Your regular prescription medicine (if you take it) in clearly marked bottles

Insect repellent with at least 30% Deet. (last year this was not needed). We are not traveling in the jungle. Bring/use at your own discretion.

**Other:**

Small day pack/bag to keep your things together when we are on day trips

Water bottle (to refill)

camera and battery charger (if you wish)

Journal or notebook to chronicle your experience

Pen and pencil

A good book

A watch

Earplugs! (for sleeping)

Flashlight

Alarm Clock

Photos of home, family and friends, and your town/country to show those you may meet

Sunglasses

Snorkeling equipment is available to rent in Varadero

Small gifts for the people we meet are appreciated: anything baseball, postcards, t-shirts, candy, computer memory sticks

## COVID-19 Precautions

Although the world of travel has opened up with advent of vaccines, continue to follow Covid-19 guidelines. We highly recommend you wear a N95 mask on the airplane trip to Cuba. Regularly wash your hands. Social distance when you can.

Bring several face masks and at home Covid-19 test kits. If someone becomes Covid-19 positive during the trip we will work to isolate that person(s) while they recover. You may have to move to different hotel room or double up with others.

Your airplane fare to Cuba includes the Cuban government required insurance which covers emergency medical treatment while in Cuba. **As we cannot offer refunds, travel insurance is recommended** and can be purchased through many on-line sites including [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com) or [aardy.com](http://aardy.com)





**Enjoying Pina Coladas at Puente de Bacunayagua on the way to Matanzas (2019)**

**Food:**

We will eat generally hearty meals during the trip. All meals are included in the trip except one. If you are a snacker, please bring some snacks with you for the trip. Healthy meal replacement foods: Power bars, nuts, crackers, peanut butter, cookies, are ideal. Do not bring anything that will melt (chocolate) or fresh food. There won't be too much pre-packaged food available for us to buy. Let our guides and Jeff know if you have special dietary needs.

You will need to take responsibility for your own needs around food and hunger and bring things to take care of yourself. There will be opportunities to purchase food, but there are no guarantees. That said, this should not be an issue on the trip – the meals served are hearty. However, please know that there may be changes to our daily schedule and we may eat a meal later than we planned.

**Do not Bring:**

- Alcohol or drugs
- Knives or weapons or any kind
- Expensive or expensive looking jewelry/Flashy or expensive looking clothing
- I suggest you leave your laptop computer at home. Bring your cell phone – to use for your camera – it will not work as a phone in Cuba.

Political t-shirts, magazines, buttons, items with the US flag on them  
Suggestive or revealing clothing

### **Conduct Guidelines:**

When our group is acting in its official capacity (meetings, tours, visits) it is important to be prompt, alert, aware, and **appear interested**. At times this will be difficult because you may be tired and translation is often a slow process.

Please know that as a requirement of our license and visa participants in the program need to attend all the planned sessions and our community meetings throughout the tour, unless of course you are sick and unable to come.

Be patient and flexible. We can expect delays and possible changes. It helps to keep in mind the situation of the economic crisis that Cuba faces. Please understand if things suddenly don't go the way we were expecting them to go. It will happen that the event that you were hoping would happen that day will be canceled or postponed. Be aware of this to avoid disappointment. "Hurry up and wait".

Plan for long and busy days. Take what you need with you when we leave our accommodation in the morning.

Underage or excessive drinking and taking non-prescription drugs is **not permitted** during the tour.

Never take a person's photograph without first asking permission. If they refuse please respect their wishes and take the photo only with your eye and heart. You may be asked for money if you try to take a picture of someone. It's up to you if you decide to pay for the photo.

Do not take pictures of police or government officials in uniform. If you are in a public place taking pictures you may be asked to not take pictures.

Never leave our accommodations or the group alone. Always go out with at least 2 or 3 people and let Jeff and our Cuban Guides know where you are going and how long you will be gone.

There will not be a lot of time for quiet or alone time, if you feel you need some personal space, let the group know so they can help you out.

Cuba is a very safe place to travel to. It is however advisable to keep good track of your money/passport. Please use a money belt and don't keep all your cash in one location. If you prefer to not travel in the country with your passport and use your photocopy instead we can arrange to have the passports locked up during the tour. If you are robbed the best thing to do is to let the person take what they take, money and valuables can be replaced, you cannot!

Traveling in a group is a different experience than traveling alone or with only a few others. We need to cooperate and seek to understand one another. We will be living closely together for 10 days. If a problem arises within the group or with another person, try to come up with a solution together or talk with Jeff for some ideas.

We will have some mandatory community meetings and reflections to evaluate the days and provide a forum for discussion and reflection. With a small group these check-ins may occur during meals or as separate meetings.

Keep in mind that Cuba has specific laws and you as a tourist are also subject to those laws... an example is that in some public areas walking on the grass is strictly prohibited and steep fines are given out. Be aware and listen for warnings and advice from our hosts.

Do not solicit any forms of prostitution while in Cuba. This is illegal, potentially dangerous and can jeopardize our Cuban hosts and RWF being able to return to Cuba. Please be aware of your impact on the lives of individual Cubans. While we have a lot of freedom in Cuba many Cubans don't have the same freedom. Please be aware of not being alone with any individual Cuban while you are there, travel in groups. Please ask for advice on asking questions about the government or political situation in Cuba. Our hosts may not be able to answer the questions at the moment but in more private settings will be able to speak more freely. Be prepared to not have your questions answered as you may like. Often I have heard: "Don't try and understand Cuba, just accept her".

### **Internet Access: Much Improved**

Computer communications are greatly easing but still controlled by the government, and access for the average citizen is limited (in the recent past Cubans logged onto the Internet illegally using borrowed or stolen log-on identities and passwords on the back market). Legal access is opening up for Cubans. Etecsa offers Internet service and has telepuntos (its' offices) in almost every provincial town, a prepaid card costs \$6 CUC for one hour (these cards are interchangeable across the country, so you don't have to use up your whole hour in one go). Most hotels have either cybercafes or business centers with online access, although the fees are often higher. \*\* Unless it is an emergency we cannot guarantee access to the Internet during the trip. That said you should be have access. I recommend that folks limit their time on the Internet. We are away for such a short journey. Ask yourself the question: How is being connected back home helping or taking away from the experience I am having in the present moment?

### **Visa:**

In Cuba you will be traveling under a Religious Visa applied for on your behalf by the Cuban Council of Churches. This special visa enables our group to visit government institutions like schools and hospitals and meet with politicians – those traveling on a tourist visa are not allow to do so.

### **Health Concerns:**

Getting sick on this trip is a possibility. Common sense, good personal hygiene and knowing your body are the best tips for staying healthy.

It is important that Jeff and our Cuban guides now if you are suffering from any medical concerns prior to the trip, please talk to Jeff before departure so we can make special arrangements if required.

Whenever possible eat a balanced diet. The food will be especially prepared for us and will be safe to eat. It will however not be your typical "North American Diet". We encourage you to try new things.

**Do not drink the water out of the tap in Cuba, use it to your brush teeth, or open your mouth in the shower. There will be filtered water available at the places we are staying. At our hotel in Havana you can purchase bottled water at the front desk. Our Varadero accommodations will have bottled/purified water for drinking. You may need to purchase the occasional bottle of water as we travel.**

In the tropics walking barefoot is a bad idea. There are parasites that are found in the ground and can be transferred to you through bare feet. Sandals are the way to go. Be aware that the sidewalks and ground will not be even like in the United States, pay special attention to where you are walking and how uneven the ground is. A twisted ankle is a terrible waste. Barefoot on the beach is okay.

Animal bites: rabies is more common in tropical countries as are stray animals, especially dogs. Please stay away from stray dogs and cats.

Sun exposure: It is important to expose yourself gradually to the sun and stay out of the sun if possible between 11 am-2 pm. The tropical sun is extreme and will burn you before you know it, even if you think you are someone who doesn't burn. Use a sunscreen or sunblock (SPF 30 or more is recommended). Wear clothing that covers your skin, hats with brims and sunglasses. The sun can make you really sick...it feels

great at the moment but...

Heat: It will be warm....temperatures between 70-85 F with high humidity. Our bedrooms are air conditioned at night.

Jet lag: Get enough sleep before the trip. Eat light meals while traveling and try to sleep on the plane. Drink a lot of water on the plane...every important not to get dehydrated. When you arrive in Cuba, eat and sleep according to local time and you will acclimatize quite quickly

### **Traveller's Diarrhea:**

Tea, coffee, soft drinks, pasteurized milk, boiled bottled water are safe to drink  
Avoid ice in drinks from places other than our host Center, our Hotel and restaurant we go to and a group.

Take your water bottle when you brush your teeth, do not use tap water to brush your teeth. Avoid getting water in your mouth in the shower.

Drink plenty of water so you don't get dehydrated.

Taking Pepto Bismol is a good idea if you have an upset stomach, it will calm and sooth your system

You should only take Imodium if you are traveling or needing to be out and you will not be able to get to a bath room if you need one. Imodium actually blocks up your system and while it helps in the short term it doesn't allow the bacteria that is causing the problem to leave your system quickly.

If you are really sick we will consult with our hosts regarding seeing a doctor about your ailment. There are very very good doctors in cuba and a special tourist hospital.



### **Dengue Fever:**

Dengue Fever is present in Cuba. It is a viral infection that is spread to humans by the bite of female *Aedes* mosquitoes. In all previous trips we have not experience any problems with mosquitoes – we will get and update and assess the situation when we get there.

Urban or rural areas can have dengue mosquitoes. Peak times of biting activities: first 2-3 hours after dawn and mid to late afternoon hours.

The most important thing to do is to use insect repellent containing 30% DEET on skin that will be exposed. DEET is a pretty harsh ingredient, a way around using it is to wear shoes, socks, long pants and long sleeved shirts. This may be unrealistic for us since the temperatures will be quite high during our time in Cuba.

Use unscented cosmetics and toiletries, mosquitoes love smells and will come looking for you.

Stay in rooms with screened windows and doors or close them.

---

### **Recommended Readings and Films:**

If you can do some preparation on learning more about the history and political situation in Cuba it will go a long way for you to understand more about what our hosts and guides are sharing with us. Bare minimum, read the documents at the end of this handbook for a brief history of Cuba. Most of these documentaries and many more on Cuban can be found free by googling them or on Youtube.

#### Films:

Fidel, the untold story  
Documentary about Fidel Castro, covering 40 years of the Cuban Revolution. Rare Fidel Castro footage: he appears swimming with a bodyguard, visiting his childhood home and school, playing with his friend Nelson Mandela, meeting kid Elián Gonzalez, and celebrating his birthday with the Buena Vista Social Club.

#### List of 40 best Cuban Movies:

[http://www.cubaabsolutely.com/articles/art/art\\_icle\\_art.php?landa=23](http://www.cubaabsolutely.com/articles/art/art_icle_art.php?landa=23)

#### Books:

Episodic look at the life of gay Cuban poet and novelist, Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990), from his childhood in Oriente province to his death in New York City.

Waiting for Fidel: This feature-length documentary from 1974 takes viewers inside Fidel Castro's Cuba. A movie-making threesome hopes that Fidel himself will star in their film. The unusual crew consists of former Newfoundland premier Joseph Smallwood, radio and TV owner Geoff Stirling and NFB film director Michael Rubbo. What happens while the crew awaits its star shows a good deal of the new Cuba, and also of the three Canadians who chose to film the island.

Any travel guide books on Cuba, like Lonely Planet will give you a good basic overview of the history and current situation in Cuba.

---

### **A History of the Cuban Revolution:**

In the final days of 1958, ragged rebels began the process of driving out forces loyal to Cuban

dictator Fulgencio Batista. By New Year's Day, the nation was theirs, and Fidel Castro, Ché Guevara, Raúl Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos and their companions rode triumphantly into Havana and history. The revolution began long before, however, and the eventual rebel triumph was the result of many years of hardship, guerrilla warfare and propaganda battles.

### **Batista Seized Power:**

The revolution began in 1952, when former army Sergeant Fulgencio Batista seized power during a hotly contested election. Batista had been president from 1940-1944 and ran for president in 1952. When it became apparent that he would lose, he seized power before the elections, which were canceled. Many people in Cuba were disgusted by his power grab, preferring Cuba's democracy, as flawed as it was. One such person was rising political star Fidel Castro, who would likely have won a seat in Congress had the 1952 elections taken place. Castro immediately began plotting Batista's downfall.

### **Assault on Moncada:**

On the morning of July 26, 1953, Castro made his move. For a revolution to succeed, he needed weapons, and he selected the isolated Moncada barracks as his target. 138 men attacked the compound at dawn: it was hoped that the element of surprise would make up for the rebels' lack of numbers and arms. The attack was a fiasco almost from the start and the rebels were routed after a firefight that lasted a few hours. Many were captured. Nineteen federal soldiers were killed, and the remaining ones took out their anger on captured rebels and most of them were shot. Fidel and Raul Castro escaped, but were captured later.

### **"History Will Absolve Me":**

The Castros and surviving rebels were put on public trial. Fidel, a trained lawyer, turned the tables on the Batista dictatorship by making the trial about the power grab. Basically, his argument was that as a loyal Cuban, he had taken up arms against the dictatorship because it was his civic duty. He made long speeches and the government belatedly tried to shut him up by claiming he was too ill to attend his own trial. His most famous quote from the trial was "History will absolve me." He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, but had become a nationally recognized figure and a hero to many poor Cubans.

### **Mexico and the Granma:**

In May of 1955 the Batista government, bending to international pressure to reform, released many political prisoners, including those who had taken part in the Moncada assault. Fidel and Raul Castro went to Mexico to regroup and plan the next step in the revolution. There they met up with many disaffected Cuban exiles who joined the new "26th of July Movement," named after the date of the Moncada assault. Among the new recruits were charismatic Cuban exile Camilo Cienfuegos and Argentine doctor Ernesto "Ché" Guevara. In November, 1956, 82 men crowded onto the tiny yacht Granma and set sail for Cuba and revolution.

### **In the Highlands:**

Batista's men had learned of the returning rebels and ambushed them: Fidel and Raul made it into the wooded central highlands with only a handful of survivors from Mexico; Cienfuegos and Guevara were among them. In the impenetrable highlands the rebels regrouped, attracting new members, collecting weapons and staging guerrilla attacks on military targets. Try as he might, Batista could not root them out. The leaders of the revolution permitted foreign journalists to visit and interviews with them were published around the world.

### **The Movement Gains Strength:**

As the July 26th movement gained power in the mountains, other rebel groups took up the fight as well. In the cities, rebel groups loosely allied with Castro carried out hit-and-run attacks and nearly succeeded in assassinating Batista. Batista decided on a bold move: he sent a large portion of his army into the highlands in the summer of 1958 to try and flush out Castro once and for all. The move backfired: the nimble rebels carried out guerrilla attacks on the soldiers, many of whom switched sides or deserted. By the end of 1958 Castro was ready to deliver the knockout punch.

### **Castro Tightens the Noose:**

In late 1958 Castro divided his forces, sending Cienfuegos and Guevara into the plains with small armies: Castro followed them with the remaining rebels. The rebels captured towns and villages along the way, where they were greeted as liberators. Cienfuegos captured the small garrison at Yaguajay on December 30. Defying the odds, Guevara and 300 weary rebels defeated a much larger force at the city of Santa Clara on December 28-30, capturing valuable munitions in the process. Meanwhile, government officials were negotiating with Castro, trying to salvage the situation and halt the bloodshed.

### **Victory for the Revolution:**

Batista and his inner circle, seeing that Castro's victory was inevitable, took what loot they could gather up and fled. Batista authorized some of his subordinates to deal with Castro and the rebels. The people of Cuba took to the streets, joyfully greeting the rebels. Cienfuegos and Guevara and their men entered Havana on January 2nd and disarmed the remaining military installations. Castro made his way into Havana slowly, pausing in every town, city and village along the way to give speeches to the cheering crowds, finally entering Havana on January 9.

### **Aftermath and Legacy:**

The Castro brothers quickly consolidated their power, sweeping away all remnants of the Batista regime and muscling out all of the rival rebel groups that had aided them in their rise to power. Raul Castro and Ché Guevara were put in charge of organizing squads to bring to trial and execute Batista era "war criminals" who had engaged in torture and murder under the old regime.

Castro was an unknown factor in 1959; he would not "come out of the closet" as a communist until later. Communist Cuba would be a thorn in the side of the United States for decades, causing international incidents such as the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The United States imposed a trade embargo in 1962 which led to years of hardship for the Cuban people.

Under Castro, Cuba has become a player on the international stage. The prime example is its intervention in Angola: thousands of Cuban troops were sent there in the 1970's to support a leftist movement.

The greatest legacy of the Cuban Revolution has perhaps been as an example to other would-be Chés and Fidels. The revolution spawned copycats in almost every nation in Latin America as idealistic young men and women took up arms to try and change hated governments for new ones. The results were mixed. In Nicaragua, rebel Sandinistas eventually did overthrow the government and come to power. In the southern part of South

America, the upswing in Marxist revolutionary groups such as Chile's MIR and Uruguay's Tupamaros led to right-wing military governments seizing power: Augusto Pinochet is a prime example. Working together through Operation Condor, these repressive governments waged a war of terror on their own citizens. The Marxist rebellions were stamped out, but many innocent civilians died as well.

Many Cubans disagree about the revolution. The thousands of middle and upper class Cubans who fled the nation (often to Miami) loathe Castro and have kept the pressure on the United States government to retain the embargo. Many of those still in Cuba, after years of hardship, have tried to flee to the United States or Mexico in makeshift rafts and boats. Nevertheless, there are still many in Cuba who love Fidel and continue to embrace the revolution. Will history absolve him? Only time will tell.

---

### **Current/Recent Situation in Cuba:**

Amnesty International annual report on Cuba 2012:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/cuba/report-2012>

Economic Embargo Timeline until 2007:  
<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/funfacts/embargo.htm>

US embargo on Cuba: tough times breed survivors from Feb. 2012

HAVANA (AFP) - The US embargo on Cuba, comprehensive economic sanctions which have now dragged on for 50 years without toppling Communism here, have made life in Cuba harder but forged Cubans' fierce survival skills.

"The impact really is hard to quantify. It has made life a lot more difficult," Nelson de la Rosa, 72, a retired economist, told AFP, looking back on the US sanctions regime under which the entire life of 70 percent of all 11.2 million Cubans has taken place.

Under former president Fidel Castro, who led the Americas' only one-party Communist for almost five decades until 2006, the government hammered away day and night, blaming US sanctions for any and all economic ill.

The Cuban government officially maintains that as of 2010, the US economic embargo has cost Cuba's cash-strapped centrally planned economy staggering losses of 104 billion dollars at current dollar values.

US President Barack Obama's government counted with longstanding US policy: that when Cuba opens up to democracy, the sanctions -- clamped in place fully since 1962 -- will end. And meanwhile, the Cuban government uses the embargo as an excuse to justify economic mismanagement, the United States insists, alone in trying to isolate a nation just 90 miles (145 km) from its shores. President Trump erased parts of Obama's open policies.

Until the 1990s, Cuba was economically subsidized by the ex-Soviet bloc. After it collapsed, plunging Cuba into a protracted economic crisis, Venezuela stepped in with subsidized oil to help keep power plants humming and the economy grinding along.

Meanwhile, Cubans -- who now earn under 20 dollars a month -- have turned years of



hardship into Masters' degrees in improvising solutions to everyday economic desperation. Lacking spare parts, they have become pros at making welded fakes to keep vintage 1950s cars rolling. In a country that grows coffee, millions can't afford it and brew roast chicory to make do. In a country with ample fallow farmland, the government spends billions of dollars importing food.

US sanctions "really developed inventiveness to stratospheric levels. You simply have to make do with whatever there is," laughed mechanic Josvany, 36, who works on the rolling relics.

"We swap out the US parts -- pistons, gears, brake systems -- and swap in (tweaked) Russian, Korean or Japanese parts."

Cuba's mechanical and engineering inventiveness has been artfully applied to jerry-rig everything from train engines to refrigerators, to toasters and pressure cookers.

After decades of government charges, millions of Cubans still have the ingrained idea that the embargo is making their economic lives tougher.

To be sure, some US-made medical machinery, services or new antibiotics are not widely available in Cuba, and that is seen here as particularly cruel.

De la Rosa, 74, who is undergoing treatment for stomach cancer, argued that "many times a family member will die (in hospital) because we do not have medication."

"The blockade's impact is felt in every single economic sector," he argued. People dying due to lack of US medical services "happens every day in this hospital," he argued at the Havana Cancer Institute.

In fact, most goods or services they might want usually are fully and legally available in Cuba, just not affordable to Cubans, especially imported goods. Many US-branded foods, diapers and the like are imported from third countries, as are Chinese and European goods; but there is a limited market for a 7-dollar bottle of olive oil when people make under 20 dollars a month.

Cubans also pirate US movies and computer programs, and then rent them out in state-owned chains -- one local industry that would be crushed if US sanctions faded. US patent holders for now have nowhere to take a complaint.

And even President Raul Castro, 80, recently urged Cuba's leadership to stop "blaming the (US) embargo" and work harder and more efficiently.

US-approved agricultural loopholes to the embargo already make the close-by United States Cuba's number-six trade partner, even if Cuba sells nothing in the United States.

The Cuban president -- who as armed forces chief put the army in charge of a money-spinning hotel chain -- still however calls US sanctions "the main obstacle to development" for the Caribbean nation.

Since taking the reins from his then-ailing and now stable brother, he has expanded self-employment and cut state payrolls but still has avoided a market-oriented economic overhaul.

Even with US sanctions in place, Cubans who have left the country send home more than two billion dollars a year in remittances, a critical pillar of the local economy along with tourism.

### **Turning the Tide: President Obama and a new relationship with Cuba:**

As of December, 2014, talks with Cuban officials and American officials including President Barack Obama have resulted in the exchange of releasing Alan Gross, fifty two political prisoners, and an unnamed non-citizen agent of the United States in return for the release of three Cuban agents currently imprisoned in the United States. Additionally, while the embargo between the United States and Cuba will not be lifted, it will be relaxed to allow import, export, and certain commerce within a limit between the two.

**White House Fact Sheet on Cuba, travel to Cuba, and a new relationship:** Today, the United States is taking historic steps to chart a new course in our relations with Cuba and to further engage and empower the Cuban people....

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/fact-sheet-charting-new-course-cuba>

**Recent New York Times article on Cuban thoughts/hopes about the change in Cuba/US relationship:**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/world/as-havana-celebrates-historic-shift-economic-and-political-hopes-rise.html>

---

### **Coping with a crisis situation....**

Even though every effort will be made to maintain the safety of the entire group it is important for us to examine how people cope when situations arise and to recognize that there are some helpful ways to react and to act during a crisis. A crisis situation could happen to our group: someone gets lost, someone gets injured, there is an accident, someone is robbed, for example.

These are some standard approaches in how to deal in a crisis situation:

Body Language: non-aggressive body language in a crisis situation:

- Keeping hands visible

- Non-aggressive eye contact

- Relaxed stance, arms at side

- No sudden movements or gestures

- Breathing slowly

- If you must move, explain what you are doing.

- Planning for a crisis:

- If you find yourself in a crisis situation, how can you plan for the best possible outcome...

- Use non-aggressive body language

- Pre-determine who will be the group spokesperson

- Positive visualization: don't think of the worst possible scenario but rather the best possible outcome.

Check-in with yourself, be conscious of your feelings and physical health  
Maintain your humanity and connection as a human being.  
Focus on the immediate safety of the group  
Don't take unnecessary risks  
Self Care: Check in with yourself, remember to breath, try and remain calm,  
Communicate your needs after the crisis.  
Support: Who in your life will be able to support you if you have experienced a traumatic event? What kind of support do you need after an accident, crisis or emergency?

We are talking about these issues because by confronting the possibilities and discussing fears we can often think our way clearly through our problems and have some point of reference to remain calm and prepared before, during and following an emergency situation. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy; else we may find ourselves treading on someone's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.  
-Max Warren

### **Preparing and remembering your experience: journaling...**

Keeping a journal can be an important part of your cross-cultural experience.

A journal will record your observations, your insights and feelings.

Spend some time in the next month journaling about your thoughts, hopes and fears about the upcoming trip.

The first few days of your travel take everything in with your senses. Notice colors, the sights, the sounds, the language, the smells, the smiles on the faces of the people you meet. Make yourself aware of what surrounds you. Write it down while it is still fresh in your mind and heart. You may ask yourself these questions:

What strikes you each day and awakens a new insight in your heart and soul?

What do you see that cries out for justice?

What stories have you heard?

How do you feel?

Stream of consciousness writing: if you do not know what to write about or want to try a new way of journaling, take your pen and journal and simply begin writing words or phrases that come into your mind. Do not stop writing, don't think about what you are writing. Write this way for at least 5 minutes. When you are done take a read at what you've written. This type of writing can often have profound insights into what you are thinking and feeling if you feel you are unable to access it and may give you clues and a start to what else you like to write about.

You are encouraged on this trip to keep a journal. If you are someone who doesn't enjoy writing, you may wish to keep a photographic journal. Take a picture and keep track as you are taking them....make quick notes for later use: what was that picture of, how did you feel taking it, what sense words describe the scene. You may also wish to bring a small sketch book where you could sketch some of the scenes you are witnessing. The purpose is to broaden the experience you are having by intentionally reflecting on it. Happy journaling...

**From your leaders – Jeff Cotter, RWF Founder...**

Thank you for joining Rainbow World Fund (RWF) on our fifth trip to Cuba. To those of you who have traveled with RWF before - welcome back. Greeting to those traveling on your first RWF trip.

I founded RWF 22 years ago because of my desire to bring the LGBT and friends community together in healing our world. Since then we have distributed over \$5 million in humanitarian aid and delivered 75K hours of volunteer service. We support ongoing aid projects in Cuba, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Mexico, and Uganda.

RWF work includes providing: 1 million pounds of food in response to Hurricane Katrina; emergency supplies for the South East Asia tsunami; medical supplies and financial aid to various projects in Guatemala; thousands of pounds of medicine, medical supplies, and school supplies to communities in Mexico.

We support/supported: landmine eradication projects in Cambodia, HIV/AIDS case management programs in South Africa, a computer lab in a Guatemalan middle school, water projects throughout Central America providing safe drink water to hundreds, ....

Learn more about our work at [www.rainbowfund.org](http://www.rainbowfund.org)

Please let me know if you have any questions about our journey or RWF by emailing me at [jcotter@rainbowfund.org](mailto:jcotter@rainbowfund.org) or calling me at 415 608-5333 (cell).

**Karen Kai – RWF Board Member – will be co-leading Cuba (Update: not available 2023)**

**Rik Isensee -- RWF volunteer will assist Jeff during the 2023 trip.** Rik is an psychotherapist practicing in San Francisco. Rik is also a Certified Mindfulness Teacher, and loves to help people feel more at ease in their own skin. Rik is the author of several books for gay men, and has been working in our community for decades.

**Karen Kai – RWF Board Member – will be co-leading Cuba (Update: not available 2023)**

Karen is an independent research and writing consultant, Kai is a community activist who has served on the boards of local, statewide and national Asian American, civil and human rights organizations. She is a former Chairperson of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission and served as co-chair of its LGBT Advisory Board. - **Vaya Con Dios! Jeff &**

**Karen**

**Jeff Cotter, Dame Jane Goodall and Karen Kai**

