Study Abroad

USAC CUBA: LA HABANA (HAVANA) 2020

Program Guide
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Congratulations on being accepted to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire study abroad program with USAC Cuba. Living and studying in a new culture is both an exciting and a challenging experience. Past participants of study abroad report that the many advantages of international study include:

- Gaining new perspectives on a chosen academic field
- Increasing understanding of different cultures
- Enhancing personal development
- Developing different perspectives on U.S. culture
- Gaining self-confidence and independence
- Learning skills for the future international job market

It is up to you to determine how you can best benefit from these possible advantages. This is your adventure!

Use this program-specific guide with the more general resources in your BlugoldsAbroad account. While this guide contains the information available at the time of publication, it is impossible for any single resource to answer all of your questions. Your peer advisor will email information throughout the semester, and we encourage you to do your own research, also, using the web resources listed towards the end of this guide, as well as others that you find. Contact the Center for International Education (CIE) staff or your peer advisor with your specific questions.

Questions only you can answer include:

1) What are YOUR goals for this experience? Advancement in a future profession, desire to expand personal and academic horizons, and wish to challenge yourself in a new environment?

2) How can you best prepare to meet your goals within the context of this program? For example, if one of your goals is truly being immersed in Cuban culture, yet you are going with a group of UW-Eau Claire & American students, how can you insure that you do not spend too much time with other Americans?

The information in this guide was current at the time of publication, though changes may occur at any time.
**ACADEMICS**

Additional information on topics such as maintaining program eligibility, registration at UW-Eau Claire, class attendance, course equivalencies, grades, transcripts and service learning is in the Academics section of your Study Abroad Handbook.

**Pre-departure Planning**

Please see the Cuba Academics Page on our website, for details on how to plan your courses. There are tables on the academics page that detail out how your courses will transfer back to UWEC.

**Credits and Course Load**

**Winterim Students:**
You will enroll in 3 or 4 credits. One course has to be 3 credits and then you can take an additional elective course for 1 credit.

**Summer Students:**
You will enroll in 3-4 credits per session, with at least one 3-credit course being required in each session. The maximum amount of credits you can take is 8 credits.

USAC uses the same credit/course load system that you are used to in the states. Courses are contingent on student enrollment and are subject to change.

**Keep in mind:**
- Summer students: to receive summer financial aid, you must take at least six credits.
- The credits you earn abroad are considered UW-Eau Claire resident credits.
- The classes you take abroad will count towards the total credits needed for graduation.
- Dropping below full-time status may result in loss of financial aid and/or insurance coverage and must be approved in advance by the CIE and USAC.

**Registration for USAC Cuba**

As part of the USAC admissions process, you completed a preliminary course registration. You completed this form indicating your course and tour selections along with two alternative courses in case any courses become unavailable.

If you need to change your courses before you arrive in Cuba, you can do so by contacting registration@usac.edu and letting them know which courses you want to change. You can make changes up until USAC’s application deadline. You will receive your final course schedule during the on-site orientation. Your resident director in Cuba will make every effort to avoid class conflicts; however, there may be scheduling conflicts and you may need to adjust your class selection. Please be flexible and prepared for course changes.

**Dropping/Adding Courses**

For courses that are only a month long, the add/drop/change deadline is usually 3 days after the class begins.

Written permission is required from both the Resident Director and instructors in order to add/drop/change a course once it has begun.

**Course Overload for USAC Courses**

If you decide to take more credits than what is allowed, you need to complete a course overload form on USAC’s Gateway account. This form needs to be approved by your UWEC
academic advisor AND CIE coordinator. Students are not allowed to take more than the promoted number of credits but occasionally an overload is allowed. Due to regulations it may not be possible to take more credits than what is promoted.

**Withdrawning from USAC Courses**
Your Resident Director in Cuba will establish a course withdrawal deadline (typically about two-thirds of the way into the term). If you must drop a course after the drop deadline, but before the withdrawal deadline, a grade of “W” will be reported on your USAC grade report. If you stop attending a class without officially withdrawing from it, the grade will be reported as an “F.”

**Class Attendance**
USAC generally allows students one excused absence. Each tardy is considered one half of an absence. If you fail to attend class, this will affect your grade in the course. All exams must be taken as scheduled.

You will be expected to be in class Monday – Friday. Do not assume that your faculty will be flexible. Your top priority should be attending class and completing all that is asked of you.

**Grades**
Courses in the program are graded on the U.S. A-F grading scale. The grades reported on your USAC grade report are the same grades that will appear on your UWEC transcript.

**Note:** UWEC students abroad are not allowed to take classes pass/fail. Grades from USAC are figured into your UWEC GPA and posted to your UWEC transcript. No exceptions will be made.

**USAC Grade Reports & UWEC Transcripts**
Please see the Academics section of the Study Abroad Handbook for important information if you are graduating, transferring or applying for a competitive major such as Nursing or Education at the end of your term abroad.

At the end of the program, USAC prepares a grade report, which must be sent to UWEC. If you have any outstanding financial charges, your transcript will be withheld until payment is made.

If you are asked to complete a transcript release form by USAC, have the transcript sent to the Center for International Education (see Contacts page for full address). UWEC cannot post grades that were first sent to a student.

USAC will also update your grades on your Gateway account for you to review. Courses, credits, and grades are incorporated into your UWEC transcript.

Grade reports are not available until a few weeks after the program ends.

**Cuban Academic System**
USAC courses are taught by local and visiting faculty. Professors will provide a syllabus at the beginning of the term and coursework will generally follow a typical U.S. structure with a combination of exams, projects, essays, and/or homework. Your classmates will be other USAC or international students. Local students typically aren’t proficient enough in English to join you in courses taught in English. There will still be plenty of chances for you to interact with local students.
You should plan to be in courses Monday – Friday. You will have plenty of time to explore Cuba on weekends. It is not recommended to plan any weekend travel until after you arrive.

You can expect to do more independent learning than you typically do in the U.S. Group work is very rare, if at all. The courses will be structured around lectures with discussion afterwards. In the U.S., you may be used to PowerPoints and other visuals, but do not expect that in Cuba. You can expect lectures to be given and pen and paper resources. There may also be less structure in the classroom which will make you think critically. Faculty are friendly but remember to respect them and their authority.

Many of your courses will be in English but don’t forget that you are taking them in a Spanish-speaking country. Ninety five percent of all library resources will, of course, be in Spanish. Most of your "textbooks" may actually be photocopies of books, due to the high cost and lack of availability of actual books.

Syllabi may be different than those used in the U.S. They have much less detail and are far less explicit about exact dates things are due, what percentage each assignment counts toward your grade, etc. Some of your professors have taught or studied in the U.S. system and will use a U.S. style syllabus. Don't expect that from everyone, part of your experience abroad is learning how to operate in a different academic system.

**Internships & Service Learning**
At this time, internships and service learning are not an option on the Cuba program.

**Foreign Language Immersion Requirement**
This program does NOT fulfill the language immersion requirement for Spanish or LAS majors/minors.

**MONEY MATTERS**

UWEC information about making payments, when they are due, withdrawal and refund deadlines, financial aid, general scholarships, budgeting and ways to bring money abroad is in the Money Matters section of your Study Abroad Handbook.

**Cost Estimate**
You can find the most current Cost Estimate for your program, in easily printable format, on the Cuba brochure page. Be sure you are looking at the correct term. The cost estimate includes what you pay to UWEC, what you pay to USAC, and what you pay directly to other vendors.

**Personal Travel:**
The above estimate does not include additional personal travel. How much money you need for travel is always a difficult and personal decision. Keep in mind that you can spend as much money as you have, but you do not need to!

**USAC Payments & Refund Policy**
If you have any questions about paying your optional tour fees, please contact the USAC accounting person listed in your Gateway Account. You can pay with credit card, check, or money order.

In addition to the UW-Eau Claire refund policy outlined in the "Money Matters" section of the Study Abroad Handbook, USAC has its own financial policies related to payment, cancellations, and changes. You can learn
more about the withdrawal deadlines and penalties by referring to your copies of the USAC Program Agreement and Program Fee & Options.

**Housing Costs**
Housing fees are paid to USAC.

**Currency Exchange**
There are now two types of currency in Cuba. One is the money used by foreigners – called the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC). 1 CUC = 1USD. The second is the Cuban Peso (CUP) that locals use. 26.5 CUP = 1 CUC.


**Cost of Living**
For an idea of what everyday costs you may encounter, check out this website: [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Havana](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Havana)

**Scholarships**
**USAC Scholarships:** USAC offers a variety of scholarships. For information, visit [USAC’s Scholarship website](#). You will see optional scholarship applications on your USAC Gateway account when they open. You can apply for all scholarships you are eligible for and can be awarded more than one scholarship.

**Scholarships for UWEC students on USAC Programs:** USAC also offers an Affiliate Scholarship just for UWEC students on a USAC program. You will be considered for this scholarship when you complete the UWEC Study Abroad Foundation Scholarship application. The number of awards varies by term. Amounts vary between $200 - $500.

**Money in Cuba – Important Notes**
Bring around $750-$800 in U.S. dollars to Cuba for your meals and personal expenses. Do your research and make sure you know how much you plan to use. Personal expenses vary by student. Past students have mentioned they wish they had brought more to help cover activities and allow for more exploring. The amount of money you bring needs to last the entire program!

U.S. dollars are subject to an additional 10% surcharge when they’re exchanged for convertible pesos (CUC). Try changing your U.S. dollars to Canadian dollars, Euros or Mexican pesos to avoid this surcharge (not guaranteed).

You will exchange your U.S. dollars (or Canadian or other currency) to Cuban currency (CUC) once you arrive in Cuba. You cannot do this in the U.S. because Cuba has a closed currency meaning that you cannot acquire CUCs before you arrive.

The U.S. State Department encourages you to only exchange currency with the state-run offices known as CADECAs.

**The amount of cash you bring with you to Cuba must last you the entire program.**
When you depart Cuba, you should be able to convert any leftover CUCs into USDs in the airport.

**Credit Cards and ATMs**
You will not be able to use your debit/credit cards anywhere. You may read that some hotels offer ATMs that foreigners can use, but USAC does not recommend using them. Nearly all ATMs do not work with cards that are
associated with an American bank. Do not rely on your debit card to obtain more cash when abroad. This is why you need to plan accordingly and bring enough cash with you.

**Traveler’s Checks**
You will not be able to use traveler’s checks.

**HEALTH & SAFETY**

*General information on these issues, as well as information on CISI insurance, is included in the Health & Insurance and Safety Abroad sections of your Study Abroad Handbook.*

**Centers for Disease Control**
The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has vaccination suggestions, how to stay healthy when abroad, and health information specific to Cuba. You can review the CDC site for Cuba here.

Due to an increasing measles and mumps cases in the world, we strongly encourage all students to check their vaccine history to see if they have had the MMR vaccine.

**Water**
Water is not safe to drink in Cuba. You will want to drink only bottled water. If you consume soda or other beverages with ice in them, please ask for no ice, as ice is usually made from tap water.

Please see the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommendations on eating and drinking safely in Cuba.

**Insect Bites**
Insect borne diseases, particularly mosquito, such as Zika and dengue fever are present worldwide and in parts of Cuba. There is no vaccine for zika or dengue fever so prevention of insect bites is the best prevention. See the CDC recommendations on avoiding bug bites for detailed information.

**Dengue Fever**
Per the CDC, “Dengue fever is the most common cause of fever in travelers returning from the Caribbean, Central America, and South-Central Asia. This disease is spread through the bites of infected mosquitoes and cannot be spread person to person.” Severe dengue can be fatal, but with good treatment, less than 1% of patients die from dengue. See a doctor immediately if you develop dengue symptoms during or after your time abroad:

Symptoms of dengue include:
- Fever
- Headache
- Pain behind the eyes
- Joint and muscle pain
- Rash
- Nausea/vomiting
- Mild bleeding, such as nose or gum bleeding or easy bruising

As there is no cure for dengue fever, the best prevention in all cases for insect bites is using a good repellent (with DEET) and wearing appropriate clothing. Depending on activity, loose, long-sleeved shirts and pants are good choices. For more protection, clothing may be sprayed with a repellent containing permethrin. (Don’t use permethrin on skin.)

**Zika Virus**
The CDC does warn that there is a risk for the Zika virus in Cuba. The Zika infection, in pregnant women, can cause serious birth defects so the CDC does not recommend travel to Cuba for women who are pregnant. If you
have concerns over this, please consult with your doctor.

**Medical/Mental Health Availability in Cuba**
The USAC staff in Cuba will accompany you to the appropriate health facility if you do get sick or need to seek mental health support. They will also help translate, if needed. Be aware you’ll have to pay up front, and then CISI insurance will reimburse you. See the Study Abroad Handbook for more information about CISI.

Medical facilities will not be the same standard as the U.S. Many prescriptions may be hard to obtain so you are encouraged to bring everything you will need with you.

**Health Insurance in Cuba**
As part of your program fees to USAC you receive health insurance. Your USAC health insurance cards will be handed out at the on-site orientation. This insurance is in addition to the CISI insurance that you have through the UW system policy. You are not able to opt out of either one, both are required as they have different levels of coverage.

**CISI Insurance in Cuba**
If you have an accident or become ill while studying in Cuba, you may have to pay the price of the medical service up front. You will then file a claim through CISI, the insurance provided through the UW System for partial or full reimbursement in accordance with plan coverages.

**Services for Students with Disabilities**
If you will need any disability accommodations when abroad, it is important to complete your USAC Disability and Health Accommodation Request Form on your USAC Gateway account. While USAC cannot guarantee services, they will do their best to accommodate your needs. When you complete that form, USAC will be in contact with you regarding services they can/cannot provide.

It is also important to look at the level of accessibility in Cuba in general.

**Safety in Cuba**
Information on crime, road safety, drug penalties, and terrorist activity in Cuba can be found in the State Department Consular Information Sheet. Safety in-and-around Cuba will be discussed during orientation in Cuba.

Just as you need to do in any U.S. city, you will need to take safety precautions while walking and traveling around Cuba. While the security environment in Cuba is relatively stable, due to increases in tourist activity, there have been increases in pickpocketing and purse snatching. Using your common sense at all times will aid you well. Avoid unlighted areas at night when you are walking around the city, and do not walk or take buses alone at night – especially women. Don't take any unnecessary risks!

There will be many markets/busy streets in Cuba, and this is a place where theft is most common. It is very important to be aware of your surroundings and keep your personal belongings very close to you.

**NOTE:** Both men and women should be aware of their safety at all times. In the past, men have been just as susceptible as women to potential risks. As U.S. Americans, you may stick out as "foreigners." The best advice is to be aware of your surroundings, listen to your instincts, and use your common sense.
**Pick-Pocketing:** Pick-pocketing is common on public transportation and at popular tourist sites throughout Cuba. To reduce the risk, do not have your phone or other valuables out in public spaces. An iPhone is a target for pickpocketers. If you carry a purse, make sure it is across the body and has zippers. Keep your wallet in a front pocket, not a back pocket. Only carry small amounts of cash on you to minimize loss. Do not carry all of the money you bring into Cuba while exploring/going to class/etc. Using a money belt under your clothing is another way to prevent valuables from being stolen.

**Machismo Culture** Machismo is defined as strong or aggressive masculine pride. Cuban women are expected to keep house and cook the meals and care for any children they have, even if they hold a full-time job, which many women do. Men on the other hand are able to relax and enjoy a beer or be with friends. You will most likely notice this while walking around. The machismo culture ensures that men receive the upper hand and are respected by all. Catcalls (piropos) are unavoidable for women. There is nothing you can do to avoid these, so it is best to ignore and keep walking. Past students have said that the catcalls can be excessive but do you best to not engage.

**Local Laws to Know:** The U.S. State Department notes the following crimes will result in strong penalties in Cuba:
- Possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs
- Suspicion of assisting Cubans to leave the country illegally
- Drivers involved in accidents that result in injury or death, regardless of fault
- Importing weapons or ammunition

- Photographing military or police installations or personnel, or harbor, rail or airport facilities

The government of Cuba does not recognize the U.S. nationality of Cuban born U.S. citizens and may not allow U.S. consular access to Cuban-American prisoners.

Criticism of the Cuban government is also punishable of up to 30 years in prison.

**Emergency Contacts**
General emergency procedures are described in the Study Abroad Handbook, and the USAC staff is available if difficulties arise. You will receive an emergency contact card with USAC staff information at the Orientation 2; be sure to keep it in your wallet at all times. The information is also on the Contact Names & Addresses page of this guide.

**911 Equivalent in Cuba**
Just like in the US, Cuba has an emergency number and uses 106 for local police, fire or ambulance services.

**Marijuana and other Illegal Drugs**
The possession and use of marijuana is illegal. Even carrying it on your person can be considered drug trafficking. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Cuba are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. U.S. citizenship offers no protection if you break a Polish law. There is NOTHING the CIE, USAC, or the U.S. government can do if you are found in violation of Cuban laws.

In addition to legal penalties, you are putting yourself at risk of robbery or assault, or you
may get a much more dangerous combination of drugs than you thought you were buying.

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTS**

*Passport information is included in the Travel Resources section of your Study Abroad Handbook.*

If you are not a U.S. citizen, please contact the CIE for more information about the following topics.

**Visa**

A visa is official permission to temporarily reside in another country and is granted by the government of that country.

U.S. citizens studying in Cuba must acquire a student visa and a general license.

It is currently illegal for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba for tourism, U.S. citizens are NOT allowed to be in Cuba before or after the USAC program dates. Arrange your travel accordingly.

If you are a U.S. citizen, your USAC program advisor will need a copy of your passport in order to take care of the visa process on your behalf. Your USAC program advisor will email you a copy of your visa a few days before the program starts. Print this in color and bring it with you. When you arrive in Cuba, before you go through immigration, one of the USAC staff members will greet you and give you your actual visa. Then you will proceed through immigration and customs.

**General License:** U.S. citizens only. This is required by the United States of America for all U.S. citizens who travel to Cuba. This is your legal documentation of your sanctioned reason for being in Cuba (education in your case). You need to fill out the travel affidavit that will be attached to your USAC Gateway account in the Visa Guide. You will need to scan and email the Travel Affidavit to your USAC program advisor. Your program advisor will then complete the remainder of the steps to secure your General License.

Keep your General License paperwork for a period of five years after you return from Cuba. These documents may be requested by the U.S. Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), or other law enforcement officials (i.e. U.S. Customs and Border Protection) upon demand during that five-year period.

**PACKING TIPS**

*There is general packing information in the Travel Resources section of your Study Abroad Handbook, and you will get a suggested packing list for Cuba at Orientation 2 and USAC will post a packing list to your Gateway account. In addition, you should know the following:*

**Weather**

Cuba has a tropical climate and enjoys year-round temperate weather. The winter/spring (December – mid April) is the drier season. Temperatures will range in the 70’s. The nighttime could be cooler during the winter months. The summer is hotter (80’s-90’s) and wet with the warmest months being July and August.

Hurricane season is from June – November so more rain can occur during these months. According to the National Oceanic &
Atmospheric Association (NOAA), Cuba experiences the lowest frequency of hurricanes and tropical storms than other parts of the Caribbean. That being said, USAC and the CIE will always closely monitor if there are hurricanes projected to reach Cuba.

**Clothing**

Your peer advisor will give a suggested packing list at your second group meeting later in the semester prior to departure.

Students will have air conditioning in their accommodations.

Most of the clothes you will be wearing in Cuba will be casual: summer outfits, such as t-shirts and shorts, pants, skirts and informal blouses.

However, you should plan to pack about two weeks’ worth of socks and underwear as laundry can take a while to get back to you. Dress can be casual but should be presentable. You will want to make sure you have some nicer outfits in case you go to a nice restaurant or out at night. Females should try and stay away from outfits that will draw attention to themselves – such as: low necklines, crop tops, short shorts/skirts/dresses, tight dresses. Longer, flowy sundresses and skirts are a good recommendation. Everyone should bring swimwear.

It is recommended to bring good walking shoes. Sandals are also a must!

**Converters & Adapters**

Cuba uses the same electric plug as the United States. The electrical current in Cuba can be both 110v AC (the same in the U.S.) or 220v AC. Most electronic items are dual voltage, but you’ll still want to use caution.

**Other things to Bring**

You may want to consider bringing non-perishable snacks with you because they can be hard to find in Cuba. Cubans do not value quick/easy food. Some ideas include: granola bars, fruit snacks, crackers, ramen and hot sauce (Cuban food can be bland).

You will want to bring hand sanitizer and small toilet paper or Kleenex packs as most bathrooms won’t have sinks or toilet paper.

Since you will have to bring a lot of cash with you and you won’t have access to additional resources, you may want to look into bringing a lockable bag or money pouch and/or a lock to lock a suitcase or bag.

**Do Not Bring**

Do not bring expensive cell phones, jewelry, or other luxury items that can be lost or stolen. If you do decide to bring items that are expensive to replace, you may want to consider personal property insurance for your time in Cuba.

**GETTING TO CUBA**

There is information on student-oriented travel agencies, instructions for booking a flight, and other travel information in the Travel Resources section of your Study Abroad Handbook.

USAC will also post a detailed “Flight Guide,” around 5-6 months before the program begins, to your USAC Gateway account.

**Travel Arrangements**

It is your responsibility to make travel arrangements to Cuba. Airline tickets are not included in your USAC program fees.
An optional group flight is available for this program through a travel agency recommended by USAC. If you choose not to book the group flight, you will need to book your own flight and arrive at the same time as the group flight. **There is a $200 fee for students who miss orientation!** See the USAC Flight Guide for details on both options.

In both cases, pay attention to the group flight dates **as they may not directly align with the program calendar.** Sometimes there is an optional field trip before or after the program, and the group flight may include this fieldtrip.

If the group return flight leaves after the program end date, and you do not request a change to leave when the program ends, you will be responsible for finding your own housing until the departure date.

**Important Regulations to Follow**

As a U.S. citizen, you are required to book a round-trip ticket as this is part of the visa requirements. Non-U.S. citizens will need to check with the Cuban consulate/embassy for travel requirements.

You cannot arrive early or stay longer. Due to visa reasons, you **CANNOT be in Cuba before or after the USAC program dates. Do NOT plan to arrive early/stay late. USAC and the CIE cannot assist with any legal repercussion that is resulted in arriving early or staying late.**

Make sure you book your arrival and departure flights from José Martí International Airport (HAV).

**USAC Group Flight**

Benefits to booking with the optional group flight:

- Flexible tickets that are refundable and changeable for a fee.
- Flexible payment plan (pay a deposit to hold your seat, then pay the balance 2 weeks prior to departure)
- Select the group return date or select your own date for the same price
- Frosch Student Travel can help book connecting flights to merge with the group flight departure cities.
- Airport pick-up in Cuba (there is no USAC staff to chaperone the flight, but group flight participants will be met at the airport by USAC staff, unless you arrive late).

USAC will be in contact with you and information will be on your USAC Gateway account on how to sign up for the group flight.

**Early Arrivals**

You cannot arrive early due to regulations.

**Airport Pick-Up Service**

Please fill out the Flight Form in your Gateway account after you have booked your flight.

Airport pick-up service is only available for students arriving on the official arrival day with the group flight. If you book an independent flight (non-group flight) you can still use the pick-up service if you arrive BEFORE the group flight.

**Late Arrivals—Expected and Unexpected**

You will need to make USAC aware if you get delayed as the USAC resident director must
meet you at the Havana airport to supply you with your visa documents.

**Leaving Your Host City**
USAC will arrange transportation to the airport at the end of the program since all students must leave on the last day.

**SETTLING IN**

**Orientation**
When you first arrive in Cuba, you will be taken to your accommodations. The next day will be the mandatory orientation where topics will include: cultural differences, appropriate behavior, Cuba in general, and safety & emergency procedures. There will also be a city tour. This is also a great chance to get to know the USAC staff. Orientation is mandatory and failure to attend will result in a $200 charge to your USAC account.

**On-Site Support**
USAC provides a resident director and staff to assist students with the transition to Cuba. They will also be coordinating various excursions and activities throughout the term. If any questions or concerns arise, reach out to the onsite staff! It could be anything from how to say something in Spanish to needing to go to the doctor. The USAC staff is there to assist you so please use them as a resource.

**Local Transportation**

**Taxis for Tourists:** You can only take taxis that charge in CUCs. These taxis usually have meters too. If the driver doesn’t turn on the meter, simply ask that they do so. If they aren’t able to, ask in advance what the rate will be. If you encounter one without a meter, ask for the quoted rate before going to your destination.

**Taxis for Local Cubans:** You will also notice there are some taxis that won’t pick you up. This is probably because they are only for Cubans who pay only in Cuban pesos. These taxis are not likely to pick up tourists.

**Pedal and Yellow Coco Taxis:** Yellow coco taxis are automated rickshaws. They can be a fun way to get from location to location. The cart kind of looks like a half coconut shell, which explains its name. These are usually cheaper than traditional taxis, but you should always negotiate your fare before accepting a ride.

**Getting Involved**
In addition, the USAC staff may arrange unofficial field trips or visits to local happenings. You may also get to participate in holiday meals or festivals that occur in the city. Wherever you go, you are bound to find live bands playing all types of music.

**HOUSING**

**USAC:** See the USAC Housing Guide in your Gateway account for additional general information on housing, how to apply for housing, as well as cancellation policies.

**Arranging Housing**
Immediately after being admitted to the Cuba program, you will want to complete your housing questionnaire on your Gateway account. Housing is on a first come, first served basis. If your housing questionnaire isn’t released right away, be sure to keep an eye on your Gateway account so you don’t miss it.

If you do your questionnaire in a timely manner, USAC will arrange for you to live in the Casa Particulares.
Casa Particulares
You will stay in a bed-and-breakfast style apartment called Casa Particulares, which are rented out by the landlord of that apartment complex. This style of accommodation is newer to Cuba but has exploded in popularity. It is an inexpensive and more authentic experience.

Each apartment will house four USAC students, with two students per room.

Distance to class
USAC has housing locations within the Vedado neighborhood which is a 10-15 minute walk from campus. This neighborhood is less touristy and provides a more authentic experience.

Toilets
In Cuba, as in many parts of Central and South America, you can’t flush toilet paper down the toilet. Plumbing pipes are typically only one inch in diameter, rather than the standard two inches used in the U.S. There will be a garbage can next to the toilet to be used for toilet paper. Make sure to throw toilet paper in the garbage can, not in the toilet! This takes some getting used to, but after a few weeks, it will become habit.

Social Life
Cubans are very family oriented and home is the place to be with family. They will do their socializing with friends in the streets, plazas, bars, etc. Since many people do not have social gatherings at home, neighbors and landlords are very sensitive to noise. Drinking and parties in the housing are not acceptable. Landlords have the right to evict students for noise or behavior issues.

What's Provided?
You will have shared living room, bathroom and kitchen. All apartments and rooms are air conditioned. Furniture will include a single bed (for each student), wardrobe, desk, lamp, and fan. Linens such as pillows, sheets, blankets and towels are also provided.

Meals & Snacks
All apartments are overseen by a Cuban landlord who will provide you with a daily breakfast. Lunch and dinner and bottled water are on your own and are NOT included in the program fees. Estimate that you will spend $400-$500 the entire program on lunch, dinner and bottled water. Adjust accordingly if you know you have different eating habits.

Water
Water from the tap is not okay to drink in Cuba. Please only drink bottled water.

Cuban Paladar
You may see or hear about paladars. These are small, family-run restaurants and are a good way to enjoy the local cuisine. They are usually located in a converted part of a family home, but function as a normal restaurant. Some are going to be better than others, so you may want to ask the locals where the best ones are!

Food Preferences
Cuba is a relatively vegetarian friendly country. There won’t be as many options as you are used to, but there should be some.

If you have an allergy to certain foods, you may want to consider obtaining a translation of that allergy in Spanish, so you can show the waiter.
**Food Precautions**
Most foods are generally safe to consume in Cuba. If you are purchasing food from a street vendor, use common knowledge to determine if the food looks fresh, was it pulled from a cooler (if a meat or something that should be kept chilled), etc. When consuming fruits and vegetables, it is recommended to consume those that can be peeled. If your food doesn’t look or smell right, don’t chance it.

**Laundry**
Your host will complete laundry once a week and it is included in the shared room fee.

**Internet Access**
See the Communication section below.

**Housing Costs**
All housing costs are paid directly to USAC.

**COMMUNICATION**
*Information on accessing/forwarding your UW-Eau Claire email address and on computer app-based phone services (SKYPE, What’s App, Facetime, etc) is in the Contacts & Communication section of your Study Abroad Handbook.***

**Time Difference**
Cuba falls in the eastern time zone (like New York, Florida, etc.) so it is only one hour ahead of Minnesota/Wisconsin: [https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/cuba](https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/cuba)

**Email/Internet Access**
Internet in Cuba is controlled by the government and less that 5% of Cubans have access to the open internet. You will have EXTREMELY limited internet access when in Cuba. If you do obtain a connection, the speed is very slow.

*Your cellphone won’t work as a phone or GPS in Cuba, but you can still bring it to use as a camera/play music.*

If you need to make an emergency call, please contact the USAC staff onsite. Most students use the phones from a hotel if they need to make a call. WiFi spots are available close to the apartments, however, don’t expect a high-speed connection or reliability. In the few spots you can access internet, it will cost around $5/hour and is very slow.

Computers are mostly located in a few of the nicer hotels and ETECSA buildings around La Habana. You may need to wait in line to use these computers and only have access to select sites. Most likely you won’t be allowed to access some sites you are used to.

You will be able to use your laptop for academic reasons such as writing papers and completing homework.

*Please give your family and friends a heads up that they may not hear from you for long periods at a time. The resident director, USAC staff and your professors in Cuba will notify USAC immediately if anything should happen to you and USAC will notify UWEC and your family.*

Overall, contacting the outside world will be possible but it will require patience. You will not be able to post to Instagram every day and send Snapchats all day long – but maybe that will be okay as it will allow you to live in the moment. You should also not plan on keeping a blog or doing research in Cuba.
Make sure you research places you want to go BEFORE you leave since it will be almost impossible when abroad. It might be in your best interest to purchase a guide book to Cuba, so you have a physical resource.

**Cell Phone Information**
See the email/internet access information above this.

**Snail Mail**
Do NOT have anything mailed to you while in Cuba. The success rate of mail ever actually reaching the intended recipients in Cuba is quite variable. It is also very expensive to mail anything from the US to Cuba and there are many restrictions on what can be sent.

**Spanish**
If you don’t speak Spanish, that is okay. For the most part, all of the courses and tours with USAC will be in English (exception is those that state they will be in Spanish). It is recommended that you download Google Translate and the Spanish package. You don’t need internet to use this app so you it can be super helpful when out and about. It is also recommended you practice learning some common phrases, so you can show the locals that you are trying.

**TRAVEL WHILE ABROAD**
See additional information in the Travel Resources section of your Study Abroad Handbook.

**Tours and Field Studies**
USAC organizes field trips each term to familiarize students with Cuba. These trips generally take place on weekends and are included in the program fees. The exact dates and sites may change at the discretion of the Resident Director. To see what tours may be offered when you are abroad, go to USAC’s site.

**Optional Excursions**
USAC also plans optional tours and field studies at an additional cost. You can select these options on the Course & Tour Registration Form you filled out as part of your USAC application. You will pay any of these additional fees directly to USAC. These excursions are an affordable way to explore more of Cuba.

**Travel Outside of Cuba**
Due to visa restrictions, you cannot travel in and out of Cuba.

**Guidebooks**
If you are like many students, you may want to travel around a bit on your own. To make the most of this, you’ll want to do some advanced planning, especially since access to the internet will be limited. Lonely Planet has books and a great website (to look at before you go). Any local bookstore should have travel guides for Cuba that could come in handy once you’re onsite.

**CULTURAL NOTES**
"Developing World"
Cuba is a developing country. You may become frustrated when things take longer than expected or things keep changing. You may also notice differences in infrastructure so it will be important to view buildings from the Cuban perspective, not the American perspective. Keep in mind that this is all part of truly experiencing life in a different culture.
La Libreta
Since 1962, Cuba has used a food rationing system. Families have to bring their state-issued ration book, known as “la libreta” each time they go to the grocery store. The Cuban government limits the amount of food a family can have based on the ages, gender and health status of each member living in the house. When a person goes to the store, they need to bring their ration book and the store’s clerk records each purchase. The clerk also has to keep their own record and the two books must always match up.

While there has been talks about doing away with this system, it is still used. The cost of the rationed items are low, but so are salaries for the Cuban people. Many families supplement their supplies from higher-priced stores.

Talking Politics/Daily Life with Cuban People
You are going to study in a country that has a rich and complex relationship with the United States. You should take advantage of being in this country and learn from as many people as you can. Feel free to communicate with your land lady and ask questions. Keep in mind that many local Cubans won’t know any or very limited English. If you have a conversation, be polite, open-minded and courteous of their culture. Most Cubans will love talking with you, but respect boundaries and do not talk ill of the Cuban government.

Family
The family plays an important role Cuba. The extended family is often a very large, close circle of relatives and friends. It is not unusual for children to live with parents until they marry, or to continue to live with parents if they never marry.

Traditional family roles, although not as pronounced as in the past, are still apparent to a U.S. observer. The man is still the authority figure and main provider, while the woman, even if she works outside the home, is usually responsible for running the household and caring for the children.

Gender Issues
Women in Cuba have made great gains toward equality. They are better represented in professional roles than in many other Latin American countries.

Despite the above paragraph, as you interact with Cubans your age, you may become aware that social rules and etiquette are stricter for women than for men.

U.S. females are stereotyped as being “easy,” so flirting openly with local men may send out the wrong signals to them – you could be seen as an easy sexual conquest. You would want to avoid this stereotype. Remember you are an ambassador of your country and of your university while studying abroad.

Music
Cuba is known for its rich music. Expect to hear all sorts of music as you travel around La Habana and all of Cuba. Music forms such as mambo, cha-cha-cha and salsa music is to be expected. Dancing usually goes hand in hand with the music. If possible, you are encouraged to take the dance course that USAC offers to further immerse yourself in the music scene.
"Piropos"
Piropos (catcalls) are a fact of life for women in Cuba. Although, they may be considered "harmless" at one level, they often do not feel that way to U.S. American women. The best way to deal with piropos is to just ignore them and continue on your way.

Shopping
Cuba isn’t really known as a shopping destination. You will encounter some tourist shops within hotels and in the touristy areas. These are usually run by the state and will contain similar items. They are usually set in price.

At times you may encounter an outdoor market. You may be able to barter at these markets, but you will want to check with USAC staff before you go so that you don’t offend anyone.

Please note that you won’t encounter many shops that sell common items like soap, toothpaste, etc. so you will want to make sure you bring enough to last you the entire time. In Cuba, it isn’t as easy to just run to the store and get everything you need.
## CONTACT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>USAC Cuba</strong></th>
<th><strong>U.S. Consulate in Cuba</strong></th>
<th><strong>UW-Eau Claire</strong></th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Resident Director: Sebastian Bombi  
Sebastian.bombi@usac.edu  
USAC Office  
Instituto de Filosofia  
Calle Calsada y J, Vedado  
La Habana, Cuba  
Cell: 011-53-5302-9196  | Calzada between L & M Streets  
Vedado  
Havana, Cuba  
Phone: (53)(7)839-4100  | **After Hours Emergency**  
(715)577-9045  |

**USAC Central Office (US)**  
Ronald Hemphill  
University of Nevada, Reno  
1664 North Virginia St.  
Reno, NV 89557  
1-866-404-8722 or  
1-775-682-5847  
Ronald.hemphill@usac.edu

Remember that in most cases, local contacts are best in local emergency situations.

If you have an after-hours emergency that can be helped on the U.S. side, please call University Police at the number above. Calls can be made to this number 24 hours a day.

You may get an answering machine; however, an officer is alerted as soon as you have left your message. Be sure to give the officer the phone number you can be reached at, as well as what type of assistance you require.
## Web Information: Cuba

### City

**Habana:** [https://www.britannica.com/place/Havana](https://www.britannica.com/place/Havana)


### Culture


**History/Culture:** [https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-culture-of-cuba.html](https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-culture-of-cuba.html)

**Conan O’Brien Goes to Cuba:** [https://teamcoco.com/cuba](https://teamcoco.com/cuba)

### Country


**Cuba Wikipedia:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba)


**Cuba News:** [https://havana-live.com](https://havana-live.com)
When past participants of the Cuba program were asked to sum up their experience, here is what they said:

It is really important to bring enough money because if you don’t there is nothing you can do. Bring snacks, an umbrella and sunscreen.

If you are a woman it is nonstop catcalling and you have to not let it get to you. The food, we had to buy our own lunch and dinner so we always had to eat out.

I wish there were more planned activities because sometimes I did feel bored and being on a strict budget, I wasn’t able to do a lot. Cuba is very different than the rest of Latin America and I did enjoy learning about the culture and history.

It was interesting. I learned things that I had no idea about and I really enjoyed that, I wish I was able to talk more Spanish and be more involved in the local community. If you are a woman it is a very different experience and you have to mentally prepare for the stares and constant cat calling.

Cuba was fantastic and everyone should try to go!