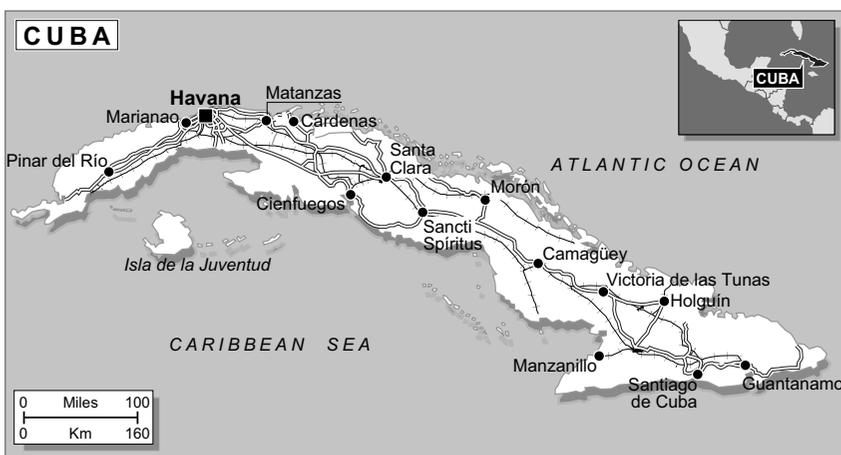


Cuba



Human Rights Watch's (HRW) report on the state of basic freedoms in Cuba makes for sorry reading. According to HRW, the Cuban government 'maintains a media monopoly on the island, ensuring there is virtually no freedom of expression. The government controls all media outlets in Cuba and access to outside information is highly restricted. Limited internet access means only a tiny fraction of Cubans can read independently published articles and blogs.'

The valiant few

HRW notes that although some independent journalists and bloggers are able to produce articles for foreign websites or independent blogs, this is often done in a clandestine fashion, from home computers, 'saving information on memory sticks and uploading articles and posts through illegal internet connections; others dictate articles to contacts abroad.'

In 2013 Cuban journalists and bloggers are often subjected to short-term arrests and harassment by police and security agents, facing threats of imprisonment if they continue to work. For example, according to HRW, members of the Women in White – a respected human rights group – have been arrested and even beaten, transported to police stations where they were assaulted and held *incommunicado*. Bloggers and independent journalists have also been the victims of public smear campaigns, such as a

March 2011 episode of a government-produced news programme – broadcast widely on public television – which referred to independent bloggers as 'cyber-mercenaries' and (hark-back to Soviet days) 'puppets of the empire.'

The government uses press accreditation (an essential for journalists reporting from the island) to control media coverage of Cuba and mete out punishments to those media outlets considered overly critical of the regime. In September 2012 the Cuban government refused to renew the press credentials of a journalist from Spain's highly respected *El País* newspaper, claiming that he presented a biased and negative image of Cuba.

Aspirations – or just desperation?

After over a half century of communist rule, in 2012 the aspirations of most Cubans remained remarkably similar to those of their contemporaries elsewhere in Latin America: a decent education, material comfort, personal advancement and good health care. In virtually all Latin America, this agenda could often be summed up in one phrase 'Estados Unidos' (the US). However, what was emigration elsewhere, in Cuba was generally desperation. Obtaining a visa to even visit the US is a prolonged exercise in bureaucracy requiring the procurement of a *tarjeta blanca* (the ill-defined and often refused document that starts off the whole

KEY FACTS

Official name: República de Cuba (Republic of Cuba)

Head of State: President of the Council of State Raul Castro Ruz (since 24 Feb 2008, re-elected Feb 2013)

Head of government: President of the Council of State Raul Castro (since 24 Feb 2008, re-elected Feb 2013)

Ruling party: Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) (Cuban Communist Party)

Area: 110,860 square km

Population: 11.08 million (2011)*

Capital: Havana

Official language: Spanish

Currency: Cuban Convertible peso and Cuban peso (Cu\$) (CUC) both = 100 centavos (NB From 2004, the US dollar was only to be used to convert to CUC)

Exchange rate: CUC1.00 per US\$ (Jul 2013); (a government 10% surcharge is imposed on all US\$ transactions converting to CUC, which was revalued by 8% in April 2005). Cu\$ cannot be used for local payments, nor exchanged for any other currency.

GDP per capita: US\$5,410 (2011)*

GDP real growth: 2.70% (2011)*

GDP: US\$60.80 billion (2011)*

Unemployment: 1.60% (2009)

Inflation: 4.70% (2011)*

* estimated figure

emigration process), a minimum payment of US\$160, and a letter of invitation. Most Cubans could see little future for themselves if they stayed: for the most part state employees, their salary was inadequate for life's basic requirements. nevertheless, visitors have to be careful that any critical comments are levelled at the system, not at its people. Equally taboo is foreign criticism of the régime's founder, Fidel Castro. Cubans can make the odd good humoured joke about 'Fidel', but not so the *yuma* (the word for foreigner which seems to have replaced *gringo*).

Fidel himself was replaced by his 'younger' brother Raúl as leader. He lacks his brother's authority and charisma.

Iron rations

One Cuban joke compares the island with North Korea: 'But our music is better, our girls are prettier and our weather is warmer. Pity about the food.' But just as there was muted optimism in the air in Pyongyang, so there has been in Havana. However, Cuba's leader is aged 82, North Korea's Kim Jong Un is some 50 years younger, reportedly under 30. Perhaps the most obvious aspect of this sense of change is the fact that since 2010 some 150,000 state employees have either left their jobs or been laid off. This in a country where full state employment had long been a given, something that had been an integral part of the system. Even Fidel Castro had acknowledged that Cuba's inefficient agricultural sector needed to reduce the number it employed by around half a million. Land owned by the state has begun to be leased to co-operatives and to individual farmers working on what has become known as *cuenta propia* – 'own account' activities.

It's all about the economy... what economy?

Cubans are understandably sceptical about their economy, which since the

implosion of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, has languished, deprived for most of that period of the subsidies and loans which once enabled it to strut the world's political stage. In the twenty-first century, Cubans on the dusty streets of Havana did not so much joke about their economy as simply regard it as a joke in itself. In 2012, as part of the drive to update Cuba's economic model, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) the Cuban government continued to roll out measures to strengthen the non-State sector of the economy and bolster the agricultural sector. It also continued to rationalise spending in non-priority areas and focused on the financial strengthening of its business units. Among other things, spending on the financial overhaul of public enterprises rose by two percentage points of GDP (from 14 per cent in 2011 to 16 per cent in 2012). Recovering and rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Sandy (which struck in October) had a minimal impact on spending in 2012 but was expected to push public expenditure up in 2013, albeit without increasing the deficit because the government could reallocate spending and draw on the disaster reserve. Pursuant to the economic and social policy guidelines approved in April 2011, pilot programmes would be launched at some State-owned enterprises in January 2013 in search of planning and managerial arrangements that will give them more financial autonomy.

The construction sector, commerce and the manufacturing industry all did well in 2012. The stated ends of the government's fiscal policy were the rather grand – and vague – objectives of rationalising expenditure and improving resource management. Cuban economic reforms never come without their accompanying bureaucracy, in this case the establishment of the Contraloría General de la República (Comptroller General of the Republic)

under the Council of State. The bureaucratic dimension was increased by accounting procedures at the federal level as well as for a group of no less than 15 municipalities. The gradual privatisation of state funded budgeted units had got under way in 2011, so that necessary government expenditure on health, education, social security, culture, arts and sports fell from 70 per cent of total expenditure in 2010 to 66.8 per cent in 2011 and to 64.8 per cent in 2012, an overall reduction of 5.2 per cent.

Rationing, long a nagging irritation for many Cubans, saw many products withdrawn, replaced by aid targeting for Cuba's hungriest. Overall, 2012 saw a fiscal deficit that corresponded to 3.8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) as 'non-priority' expenditure decreased and transfers to business activities and co-operatives steadily increased. The 2012 state budget had projected no change in state revenues over 2011.

Over the years, Cuba's credibility on the international financial markets has generally and often surprisingly, been sound. This credibility was evident as in 2012 Cuba managed to renegotiate a large proportion of its external debt. A number of factors – not least the US led international embargo and finding itself on the US list of sponsors of terrorism – worked against any access to external funding. The only countries that maintained financial support for Cuba in one form or another were Venezuela (through subsidised oil shipments as well as hard cash), Brazil, China and Spain.

Cuba's exchange rate policy has, since the 1990s – blown hot and cold with experiments in a two-tier (dollar and peso) system often leading to increased corruption and social tensions (in 1999 the writer witnessed an embarrassing incident when a distinguished university professor observed that the waiter who had just served us coffee and drinks at a hard currency provincial hotel earned more per month in gratuities alone than a university professor's salary). In 2012/13 the government seemed to be at a loss in formulating monetary policy with a view to eliminating the remaining two-tier exchange rate policy.

According to ECLAC, Cuba's GDP grew by 3.0 per cent in 2012 with private consumption up by 2.5 per cent. Exports rose, albeit at a slower rate than in 2011 and fixed investment rose by a creditable 6.6 per cent. Good as this performance was, ECLAC noted that the figures fell short of those set out in the government's US\$20 billion investment programme,

KEY INDICATORS

Cuba

| | Unit | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Population | m | *11.20 | *11.45 | *11.26 | *11.08 | *11.08 |
| Gross domestic product (GDP) | US\$bn | 54.60 | 56.10 | 58.00 | 60.80 | – |
| GDP per capita | US\$ | 4,860 | 4,980 | 5,160 | 5,410 | – |
| GDP real growth | % | 4.1 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 2.7 | – |
| Inflation | % | 1.6 | 1.4 | 2.9 | 4.7 | – |
| Current account | US\$m | -2,594.0 | 513.0 | 201.0 | -22.0 | – |
| Exchange rate | per US\$ | 0.82 | 0.82 | 0.82 | 0.82 | 0.82 |

* estimated figure

described by ECLAC as ‘ambitious’. The growth figures enabled overall prices to be stabilised, notwithstanding the liberalisation of prices for a number of rationed items and agricultural products. Cuba’s official inflation figures are less than reliable; although the official inflation rate was announced to be 1.6 per cent, products priced in convertible Cuban pesos are not included. The figure is further distorted by the failure to include regulated price items, which, according to ECLAC, constitute around 40 per cent of the consumer price index.

Cuban unemployment in 2012 hovered around the 3.4 per cent mark, virtually unchanged from the 3.2 per cent of 2011. These figures do not, of course, take into account Cuba’s ‘underemployment’ levels, which are obviously high to any perceptive visitor. The number of autonomous – self employed – workers grew, according to ECLAC, to 394,867 by October 2012. Interestingly, workers with no previous employment history made up 66 per cent of the total; 16 per cent were ‘retirees’ and the remaining 18 per cent were thought still to have another job.

Despite high international food prices, Cuba’s goods and services account remained in surplus in 2012, underpinned by the services sector and nickel exports. The trade surplus was 1.2 per cent of GDP and the current account to GDP ratio also returned a surplus of one per cent, slightly up on 2011. Tourism continued to be an important foreign exchange earner, with arrivals from Canada leading the way. European tourist levels fell, to be replaced by tourists from Brazil and a number of other Latin American countries. The number of tourists from China also began to rise.

Risk assessment

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Politics | Poor |
| Economy | Poor |
| Regional stability | Good |

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1492 Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba and claimed the island for Spain.
1511 Diego Columbus, son of Christopher, settled the island. Spanish settlers established sugar plantations and exploited slaves from West Africa.
1514 The city of Havana was founded.
1607 Havana was named the capital of Cuba.
1762–64 Havana was captured by the British but was returned to Spain under the Treaty of Paris.

1868–78 The first war of independence ended in a truce after Spain promised reforms and greater autonomy – which were never fulfilled.

1886 Slavery was abolished.

1895–98 José Martí led a second war of independence; the US declared war on Spain.

1898 Spain was defeated and gave up all claims to Cuba, ceding it to the US.

1901 The constitution of the Republic of Cuba, modelled on the US constitution, was adopted.

1902 Cuba was officially granted independence from the US. Tomas Estrada Palma became its first president. However the US retained the right to intervene in Cuban domestic affairs.

1925 The Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) (Cuban Communist Party) was founded.

1933 Fulgencio Batista took power in a *coup d’état*.

1934 The US abandoned its right to intervene in Cuban internal affairs.

1940 A new constitution was promulgated.

1944 Batista retired from office.

1952 Batista seized power again, backed by the US government. His regime was oppressive and corrupt.

1953 On 26 July Fidel and Raul Castro lead an attack on the Moncada barracks. This is reckoned to be the first battle of the Cuban revolution

1956 Fidel Castro began a guerrilla war against Batista’s dictatorship.

1958 US backing for Batista was withdrawn.

1959 The Cuban revolution concluded when Castro’s revolutionaries defeated the Cuban army and assumed power, founding a socialist state.

1960 All US owned businesses in Cuba were nationalised without compensation; the US broke off diplomatic relations.

1961 The US sponsored an unsuccessful military invasion, by Cuban exiles, at the Bay of Pigs. Cuba was declared a Communist state and Castro allied it to the USSR.

1962 Castro’s fear of US aggression resulted in the Cuban missile crisis when he agreed to deploy USSR nuclear missiles on Cuba. The US blockaded Cuba, published evidence of the missiles and US President Kennedy gave an ultimatum that they be removed or the US would bomb Cuba. The crisis was resolved when the USSR agreed and withdrew the missiles, and in return the US closed its missile sites in Turkey. The US imposed a full trade embargo on Cuba.

1976 A new constitution created a National Assembly, which held its first session and elected Fidel Castro as president.

1989 The USSR began to disintegrate and the trade in Cuban sugar for subsidised oil collapsed.

1991 Soviet troops left Cuba. The economy fell into depression.

1993 To ameliorate the economy some market reforms were adopted and the US dollar was made an official currency alongside the Cuban peso.

1998 US restrictions on remittances were eased.

2000 US approves the sale of food and medicines to Cuba.

2001 The first shipment in 40 years of US exported food arrived.

2002 The UN criticised Cuba for its poor civil rights. It was announced that at least 71 of Cuba’s 156 sugar refineries were to be scrapped.

2003 A crackdown on dissidents resulted in international condemnation, as 75 people were imprisoned. The EU broke off diplomatic contacts.

2004 The official exchange rate of Cu\$1 per US\$ replaced the convertible rate of Cu\$21 per US\$.

The US tightened restrictions on visits and money remittances to Cuba; the US dollar ceased to be legal tender and a 10 per cent commission for converting dollars to pesos was imposed.

2005 EU diplomatic relations with Cuba were re-established. President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro signed a co-operation agreement; Cuba supplied doctors and medical treatment to Venezuela in exchange for crude oil at a preferential price.

2006 The Non-Aligned Movement held its 14th meeting in Havana under Cuban chairmanship. Fidel Castro, amid rumours and speculation about his health, did not attend delayed celebrations of his 80th birthday or the 50th anniversary parade of his return to Cuba.

2007 A letter by Castro was read out on national television saying he would not hold on to power indefinitely.

2008 In parliamentary elections 614 candidates, including Fidel Castro, contested the 614 seats; turnout was 95 per cent.

Fidel Castro announced he would not return to the presidency due to ill health.

Raúl Castro was voted in unopposed as president. The Marxist ideologically driven system of equal pay for all was abandoned. The EU lifted sanctions imposed in 2003. Talks on mutual co-operation resumed between the European Commission and Cuba.

2009 The US Congress voted to remove restrictions on family members travelling to Cuba, once a year, and sending remittances; trade in medicines and food was also eased. Costa Rica opened an embassy in Havana. The Organisation of American States (OAS) voted to lift Cuba’s suspension of its membership.

2010 Political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo died after an 85-day hunger strike. Zapata was one of 75 dissidents jailed in 2003, and was serving a 25-year prison sentence for political activities against the regime. El Salvador, the last Central American nation withholding diplomatic relations, opened an embassy in Havana. For the first time since 2006, Fidel Castro publicly addressed the National Assembly, appearing fully recovered from his illness.

2011 In January, the US further eased travel restrictions, allowing religious groups and students to visit Cuba. It also allowed the payment of remittances of up to US\$500 per quarter to non-family members for private economic activity, and greater amounts for religious institutions in Cuba. In 14 March, in an effort to stimulate the flagging economy by boosting exports and domestic production, the hard-currency convertible peso was devalued to match the US dollar, losing around 8 per cent in value. The devaluation increased the value of remittances from relatives in the US as well as the spending power of tourists. However, the convertible dollar remains worth 24 domestic pesos, so the cost of imports will rise for most Cubans. In April, during the first congress of the ruling PCC since 1997, President Raúl Castro said that top political jobs should be limited to two five-year terms in office and that the PCC leadership was in need of renewal and should be open to critical self-analysis. President Castro was elected first secretary of the PCC. In April, the government announced that people would be allowed to buy and sell their homes for the first time since the communist revolution in 1959. The law was passed in November and included the selling of cars. In December, an amnesty released 2,500 prisoners, some political convicts, ahead of the planned papal visit.

2012 Pope Benedict XVI began a three-day visit to Cuba on 27 March. In a speech on 29 March he criticised the 50-year old US embargo imposed on Cuba, saying that the economic measures 'unfairly burden' the Cuban people. On 31 March, the government declared that Good Friday (central day of Christian Easter celebrations) would become a public holiday, following an appeal by Pope Benedict. In June import duties on food carried in by visitors was reintroduced, to curb resale in Cuba. On 6 July the Council of State announced that general elections would begin on 21 October. On 19 October, it was announced that the exit fee levied on Cubans travelling aboard will be removed on 14 January 2013. Hurricane Sandy, which struck the eastern province of Santiago on 25 October,

caused extensive damage to buildings and the sugar cane crop in the region. 2013 On 4 Feb 86-year old Fidel Castro was shown on television voting in the parliamentary elections. Raul Castro was re-elected president on 24 February. Five members of the powerful Central Committee were removed by President Castro on 2 July, including Ricardo Alarcon, a close ally of ex-leader Fidel Castro. President Castro pointed out that the moves were a normal course of events. In a speech celebrating the 26 July 1953 start of the revolution Raul Castro said power in Cuba was being gradually transferred to a new generation who would keep socialist ideals alive. In a long article published in *Granma* the day after his 87th birthday on 13 August, Fidel Castro said that when he handed power to his brother in 2006 he had not expected to live another 7 years. In September the council of ministers approved measures to allow Cuban athletes to keep more of their overseas earnings. Cubans earning large salaries in the US will not benefit since US sanctions prevent funds being remitted to the Cuban government. On 9 October the Politburo replaced the editors of *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*. On 22 October *Granma* reported that the council of ministers had approved a timetable for implementing 'measures that will lead to monetary and exchange unification' between the lower-value CUP and the more valuable convertible peso (CUC) which is pegged to the US dollar. Reuters reported that the conversion could take 18 months.

Political structure

Constitution

The 1979 constitution gives all legislative power to the Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular (National Assembly of People's Power) which runs local and central government. An amendment in 2002 made the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) (Cuban Communist Party) the permanent party of government.

Form of state

Socialist republic.

The executive

The president and the Consejo de Estado (Council of State) and council of ministers are appointed by the national assembly and drawn from the state (communist) party.

The council of state is the highest-ranking executive institution and is made up of a president, first vice president, and five vice presidents and 30 members. It has legislative powers when the national assembly is in recess. The council runs foreign trade and foreign relations, draws up the draft budget and is responsible for the general

organisation of the revolutionary armed forces.

National legislature

The unicameral, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular (National Assembly of People's Power) has 609 members, elected for a five-year term from a closed list of PCC members. Its chief role is to approve laws put forward by the council of state. According to the constitution the national assembly is the 'supreme organ of state power and represents and expresses the sovereign will of all the working people'. Its role includes approving laws, discussing and approving the state budget and supervising other official bodies.

Legal system

While the constitution provides for independent courts it explicitly subordinates the courts to state control. The national assembly chooses all judges. The People's Supreme Court is the highest judicial body; it oversees a system of regional tribunals and is accountable to the national assembly.

Last elections

February 2008 (presidential election by National Assembly); 20 January 2008 (parliamentary).

Results: Parliamentary: 609 pro-government candidates stood for exactly the same number of seats in the National Assembly and were elected unopposed.

Next elections

January 2013 (presidential, elected by national assembly); 4 February 2013 (parliamentary)

Political parties

Ruling party

Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) (Cuban Communist Party)

Main opposition party

There is no opposition party.

Population

11.08 million (2011)*

Last census: September 2002: 11,177,743

Population density: Population density: 102 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 75 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 0.3 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

The Cuban population is a product of the mix of four cultural groups: the indigenous people, Spaniards, Africans and Asians.

Mulatto (51 per cent), white (37 per cent), black (11 per cent), Chinese (1 per cent).

Religions

Many Cubans are agnostic or atheist, while unofficial estimates are of 75,000–100,000 practising Catholics. There is a smaller Protestant community. Practices based on African religions are reported to be increasing in popularity.

Education

Public expenditure on education amounts to 8.7 per cent of GDP. There is sustained investment in education with incentive rewards for excellence in pupils, teachers and schools. The education system promotes inclusively for learning outcomes and curriculum development between teachers and students.

Education is free at all levels. It is based on the Communist principle of combining learning with manual labour. Day nurseries and pre-school centres are available to all children after just six weeks. Primary schools are compulsory for six years until aged 12. Secondary schools are for 13- to 18-year-olds. State subsidies are available for workers returning to education to complete university courses.

Literacy rate: 97 per cent adult rate; 100 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

Compulsory years: 6 to 12.

Enrolment rate: 106 per cent gross primary enrolment, of the relevant age group (including re-enrolment); 81 per cent gross secondary enrolment, of the relevant age group (World Bank).

Pupils per teacher: 12 in primary schools.

Health

There are approximately 260 hospitals and over 400 clinics that provide full and free medical services in all regions of the country. However, current US economic embargoes limit access to internationally purchased branded medical supplies. In 2005 US\$100 million was allocated to invest in the pharmaceutical industry. Generic medicines have become a major export item.

HIV/Aids

HIV prevalence: 0.1 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

Life expectancy: 77.6 years, 2004 (MEDICC 2007)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 1.5 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef); maternal mortality 52.2 per 100,000 live births (MEDICC 2007).

Birth rate/Death rate: 10.7 births per 1,000 population; seven deaths per 1,000 population (2003).

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 6 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Head of population per physician: 6.2 physicians per 1,000 people (MEDICC 2007)

Welfare

In a 2005 economist reported to Castro that the minimum monthly income to survive in Cuba was Cu\$300 (US\$14.4). The minimum monthly wage was increased to Cu\$225 (US\$10.8), and monthly pension payments to CU\$150

(US\$7.2) benefiting 54 per cent of state employees. Wages in other sectors grew in line with these increases. Pensions and social assistance were also increased by 50 pesos a month.

The 1976 constitution guarantees all Cubans the right and duty to have a job, while the state provides basic support for the aged, the disabled and others unable to work. Although the principle of full employment stands unchanged, the government has admitted that unemployment does indeed exist.

Main cities

Havana (estimated population 2.1 million in 2012), Santiago de Cuba (444,383), Camagüey (315,386), Holguín (303,068), Santa Clara (219,660), Guantánamo (223,145), Las Tunas (171,957), Bayamo (167,073), Cienfuegos (164,924), Pinar del Río (154,107).

Languages spoken

The Spanish in use in Cuba is more Latin American than Castillian and many words are quite different from the Spanish used in Spain. Quite often the endings of words are dropped, shortened nouns are used and slang is prevalent. The further south in Cuba, the more pronounced the accent.

English is quite widely spoken, as it is the main foreign language taught in schools.

Official language/s

Spanish

Media

The constitution prohibits private ownership of electronic media and there are punitive laws which suppress journalists in a country where the media is tightly controlled and independent media and journalists are targeted for intimidation. The government strictly regulates Internet access.

Juventud Rebelde is Cuba's youth paper. The Cuban Communist party sees the media as an important tool for reinforcing socialist ideals within the scope of entertainment and education.

In December 2010 Cuba launched a Spanish language online encyclopaedia (www.ecured.cu) similar to Wikipedia. 'Its philosophy is the accumulation and development of knowledge, with a democratising, not profitable, objective, from a decoloniser point of view.'

Press

There are several news agencies publishing newspapers in six major languages.

Dailies: In Spanish, regional and local newspapers include *Cubahora* (www.cubahora.co.cu), *Periódico 26* (www.periodico26.cu) from Las Tunas, *Guerrillero* (www.guerrillero.co.cu) from Pinar del Río, *Venceremos*

(www.venceremos.co.cu) from Gauntanamo, with an English online edition, *Sierra Maestra*

(www.sierramaestra.cu) from Santiago de Cuba, and *Vanguardia*

(www.vanguardia.co.cu) from Villa Santa.

Weeklies: In Spanish, national publications include the government-run *Trabajadores*

(www.trabajadores.cubaweb.cu), and

Communist party-run *Granma*

(www.granma.co.cu), *Cinco de*

Septiembre (www.5septiembre.cu) from

Cienfuegos, with an English online edition. Alternative magazines include *Bohemia*

(www.bohemia.cubaweb.cu) an

illustrated and *Dedete*

(www.dedete.cubaweb.cu) is a humorous

publication.

Business: In Spanish, *El Economista de Cuba* (www.economista.cubaweb.cu), *Opciones* (www.opciones.cu), a weekly

publication by the tourist industry and

Negocios en Cuba (www.prensa-latina.cu)

published by Prensa Latina.

Broadcasting

Services controlled by the Ministerio de la Informática y las Comunicaciones (Ministry of Information and Communications).

Radio: There are over 40 radio stations throughout Cuba, most local and catering

for their captive audiences. National

transmissions run parallel to international

services provided via satellite and the

Internet. Radio Cubana

(www.radiocubana.cu) (with access to local

radio streaming), Radio Havana Cuba

(www.radiohc.cu) and Radio Rebelde

(www.radiorebelde.com.cu) are the principal

organs of state for news and

propaganda.

Television: The national, state-run

Cubavision (Sistema Informativo de la

Televisión Cubana),

(www.cubavision.cubaweb.cu) shows domestic

programmes ranging from soap

operas to university education and a wide

range of imported material. There is also

an international channel, Cubavision

Internacional via satellite.

Cuba also joined Venezuela, Argentina

and Uruguay – and later Bolivia, Ecuador

and Nicaragua – to form a pan-American

public news channel, Telsur

(www.telesurtv.net) to broadcast

programmes to offset what they saw as

the overwhelming influence of popular,

privately-run channels such as the US-run

CNN en Español.

The only officially approved domestic

satellite TV service is available to resident

foreigners, tourist and approved Communist

party officials. Illegal satellite provisions,

using the US-based, anti-Castro TV

Marti, have resulted in criminal

National news agency: Agencia de Información Nacional (Cuban News Agency)

Other news agencies: Prensa Latina: www.plenglish.com.mx

Economy

Although 95 per cent of the economy is state-controlled, it is diverse and includes primary industries, such as agriculture and mining, secondary industries such as pharmaceuticals, and the famous cigar manufacturing and tertiary industries such as healthcare and tourism. The US embargo on the Cuban economy since the 1950s has been both a constraint, by limiting growth and innovation, and a spur to seek out alternative markets, technologies and inventiveness. Cuba has managed to survive with a make-do and mend regime during the economic siege.

However, the economic landscape has undergone a sharp change since 2008 when three hurricanes caused over US\$10 billion of damage, tourist numbers fell due to the global economic crisis, which also resulted in a drop in nickel ore sales in much of 2009. These three shocks, falling within such a short period, caused a serious and progressive fall in GDP growth, down from 7.3 per cent in 2007 to 4.1 per cent in 2008, and 1.4 per cent in 2009. A recovery began in 2010, with growth of 2.4 per cent rising to an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2011. While the economy did not fall into recession, Cuba is faced with more hurdles to recovery than experienced generally by other trading nations. The US is Cuba's biggest source of food and although food is not part of the long-standing embargo, the US requires that all imports be paid for before delivery. Cuba's cash-flow problems forced it to cut its imports in 2009 by 26 per cent, as it was faced with unpaid debts to foreign creditors. Cuba looked to other sources, such as Vietnam, for cheaper food and better terms of business.

During 2009, exports rose by 21 per cent, while imports only rose by 1 per cent, so that the trade deficit was cut by 7 per cent. Medical services from healthcare workers working overseas earned US\$9.9 billion.

An embargo on remittances from Cuban exiles (mainly in Miami, USA), which were estimated to bring the island over US\$1 billion a year, was lifted in March 2009. The Cuban authorities require that any such remittances are used in special dollar stores where commodities are priced at a higher mark-up than elsewhere. There are two currencies in Cuba: all local people use the Cuban peso (Cu\$) while a convertible peso (CUC) is used for international trade and by foreign visitors.

The government maintains the price of certain basics for its citizens but all products outside this system must be paid for in CUC, which has led to a flourishing black market, estimated to be as much as 40 per cent of the economy.

The Marxist ideologically driven system of equal pay for all was abandoned in 2008 when the government announced that workers and managers would begin to earn performance bonuses. Workers earn a minimum 5 per cent bonus if targets are met and managers can earn up to 30 per cent when increased production can be demonstrated. Self-employment figures rose from 157,000 in 2010 to 295,000 in 2011.

In 2010 President Raúl Castro announced that state control of the economy was going to be relaxed in a move to help revive the struggling economy. The government announced that it was going to make redundant 500,000 state-workers, and encourage them to become self-employed or join new private enterprises, on which some restrictions were eased. However, some question how the funding for such businesses would be found and pointed to the wariness of foreign lenders who had experienced poor repayment and lack of foreign ownership rights, in the past. Rationing was introduced in 1962 and allowed the government to counter the effect of the trade embargo, avoid absolute poverty and defuse possible social unrest. However, it also cost the country, around US\$1 billion per year of subsidies, as well as the loss of the profit motive flattened enterprise and initiative.

In 2010 rationing of potatoes and tobacco was eliminated and subsidised worker's canteens were phased out in several ministries. Although there were plans in 2011, to remove comprehensive food rationing, in 2012 rice, chicken, sugar, milk, eggs, cooking oil are still including on a list of subsidised food.

In April 2011, the government announced that it would allow people to buy and sell their homes for the first time since the communist revolution in 1959. A law was passed in November, to allow the buying and selling of private property and cars. According to the World Bank, Cuba is an upper-middle income country, based on social criteria of life expectancy and education as well as water and sanitation infrastructure. However, without a fully functioning commercial economy, with entrepreneurial businesses and a free labour market Cuba is still a hybrid society with benefits of one system outweighing what could be the benefits of another. In March 2011, in an effort to stimulate the flagging economy by boosting exports and domestic production, the hard-currency convertible peso was devalued to

match the US dollar, losing around 8 per cent in value. Not only will the devaluation increase the value of remittances from relatives in the US but will also give an increase in spending power for tourists. However the convertible dollar will still be worth 24 domestic pesos, so the cost of imports will rise for most Cubans.

External trade

The balance of payments is reliant on foreign currency earnings from tourism, remittances, nickel and cobalt. Sugar has fallen in importance as an export commodity and nickel and cobalt has expanded to take advantage of increasing world prices.

The US trade embargo continues to have a negative effect on trade, although Venezuela has been supporting Cuba with preferential oil imports in exchange for Cuban goods and services. China and Russia have both entered agreements for investment in Cuba.

Cuba has a trade co-operation protocol with the 15-member Caribbean Community and Common Market (Caricom).

Imports

Domestic companies require a licence to import certain goods, and the withdrawal of these licences a means for the government to control imports and its trade deficit, although the mechanism is regarded as heavy-handed.

Imports comprise petroleum, machinery and equipment, food, chemicals.

Main sources: Venezuela (37.6 per cent of total in 2011), China (9.9 per cent), Spain (8.5 per cent).

Exports

Principal exports are included, nickel, cobalt, sugar tobacco, fish, bio-technical medical products, citrus and coffee.

Healthcare professionals are hired as a team to visit overseas countries (typically in South America and the Caribbean) to treat patients chosen by the host government.

Main destinations: China (24.9 per cent of total in 2011), Canada (21.6 per cent), Venezuela (7.2 per cent).

Agriculture

Sugar is Cuba's most important export crop, however since its collapse as a top cash crop, there has been a concerted effort to diversify. The sugar industry has undergone restructuring to make the production more efficient and identify new markets. Over 70 of the 156 sugar refineries in Cuba have been decommissioned with some 100,000 workers laid off. Half of Cuba's 3.5 million hectares (ha) of sugar cane fields have been re-utilised to produce other crops, particularly food-stuffs for domestic consumption and reduce the need for imports.

Two new cocoa processing plants with a capacity of 45,000 tonnes are planned to provide exports of high quality cocoa butter.

Approximately 95 per cent of Cuba's coffee plantations are the highly prized arabica bean. Coffee exports should be enhanced by the refurbishment of seven processing mills. The international cost of coffee rose by 69 per cent 2010–11 and forced the authorities to reintroduce the practice of mixing roast peas with roast beans for sale and local consumption. In 2010 domestic consumption of coffee was 18,000 tonnes, whereas production was only 12,000 tonnes and imports costs rose to US\$50 million. Investment in coffee production was US\$9.5 million between 2005–10.

Cuba has begun developing organic farming, and there are over 100,000 small-to medium-sized organic farms reflecting the government's commitment to the 'greening of Cuba'.

In November 2011, the government relaxed its rules allowing farmers to sell their produce directly to hotels, restaurants and the public and to make a profit. The new rules are expected to cut out official middlemen, transportation costs and improve productivity.

Catches have fallen since the mid-1980s. The contraction of fin fish catches by the deep sea fleet, partly as a result of changes in fishing agreements, has been largely responsible. Cuba is investing considerable resources in shrimp farming, but production has not been commercially significant.

Forests cover around 2.3 million hectares (ha), around 15 per cent of the total land area. Since 1990 forest cover has increased by an average of 1.27 per cent per annum or 28,000ha.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector contributes approximately 37 per cent to GDP.

Cuba's free trade zones, especially those of Wajay and Mariel have attracted a number of foreign companies. Mariel, located 48.2km west of Havana, is likely to play an important role in the future, especially if trade opens with the US.

The Hola processing plant in Havana toasts and grinds coffee beans for export to the UK, Ukraine, Bulgaria, the Bahamas and Spain.

The cigar industry is significant, with production increasing substantially in the late-1990s and generating annual revenues of an estimated US\$150 million.

Tourism

The importance of tourism to Cuba has grown since it has had to deal with external and internal pressures that require not only hard currencies to buy commodities

but also to maintain growth in its centralised economy. The US embargo on trade with Cuba has hindered development and all capital investment in the industry has been either government backed or in partnership with sympathetic foreign sources.

The sector has experienced a downturn as the share of direct contribution to GDP began to fall from 3.6 per cent in 2005 to 3.1 in 2006 to its lowest of 2.6 per cent in both 2009–10. Direct and indirect employment in the sector also fell during this time as visitor spending fell to its lowest US\$2.106 billion in 2009, before a modest recovery in 2010. Although in 2009–10 government investment in the industry was cut, this had followed a period of higher outlay that matched investment in other sectors.

In May 2010, the government announced that it planned to allow foreign investment in golf courses, marinas and other tourist attractions, with the offer of medium- to long-term leases. Given the US ban on investment in Cuba, the prime candidates for investment are Canadians and Europeans.

In 2010, Cuba was a country unspoiled by mass tourism, but at the expense of a people held back from a potentially good living through tourism. Some of the current, quaint sights that enchant visitors, such as vintage cars left over from the days before the revolution, which have been lovingly conserved not for their good looks but because they were the only vehicles available, are likely to be lost (either snapped up by collectors or exchanged for a modern vehicle) in any headlong rush to modernise. It will require skilled management to move from an old Soviet style economy to a modern, open market where tourism provides a realistic living for workers and does not exploit them based on traditional poorer wages or overwhelm or monopolise local resources. In May 2012 the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) announced that Cuba was the third most popular destination in the Caribbean (after the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico). The number of tourists in the first half of 2012 rose by 5.8 per cent on the same period of 2011, with 1.63 million visitors. Canadians continued to dominate, with Russians and Argentineans showing significant increases in numbers visiting Cuba.

Environment

Incessant rain, following tropical storm Noel, falling from 11 October to 5 November 2007, caused the worst floods in forty years, destroying tens of thousands of homes, leaving roads impassable and damaging crops of sugar and coffee.

The drought that began in 2009 had by 2011 become the worst since the 1960s, as water levels in reservoirs fell to a fifth of normal amounts and tens of thousands of families became reliant on water lorries for their essential supplies. Even if the rainy season, in May–June, brings relief, normal rainfall will be insufficient to compensate for the deficit.

Mining

Mining contributes around 6 per cent to GDP. The island's extensive nickel and cobalt ore reserves, among the largest in the world, offer attractive large-scale mining opportunities. Cuba's rich mineral resources are open to foreign exploration and development.

Exploration for gold, silver and base metals is carried out by more than a dozen foreign firms in concession areas covering nearly a third of Cuba's national territory. Cuba has updated its mining legislation, bringing it into line with most other Latin American countries.

Nickel production has been boosted by the injection of Canadian capital and technology. Government figures for 2004–05 showed nickel production reached 35,000 tonnes and overtook sugar as Cuba's biggest merchandise export, earning US\$545 million. Since 2000 Cuba has supplied over half the nickel China uses in the production of stainless steel, and to maintain supplies China agreed, in November 2004, to invest US\$500 million in the nickel industry. Cuba intends to modernise its processing plants and continue exploration for other base and precious metals. More than half the production comes from the Comandante Pedro Sotillo processing plant at Moa Bay, jointly operated since 1994 by Sherritt (Canada) and a Cuban company, Compañía General de Niquel (General Nickel Company). Cuba's two other operating nickel plants are being modernised with the help of export-linked revolving credits from Dutch, German and other foreign banks and trade houses. Proven oil reserves were 124 million barrels in 2008, with production at 52,000 barrels per day (bpd), however consumption was 176,000bpd which had to be met by imports. Four oil refineries have a capacity of 124,000bpd, since 2007, when the Cienfuegos refinery, a Soviet Russian era facility, was completed and upgraded by Cubapetroleo (Cupet) and the Venezuelan state-oil company. There are plans to increase production in this plant to 100,000bpd and national capacity to 161,000bpd.

The state-run Cupet is responsible for exploration, production and supply of all oil in Cuba, either solely or in partnership with international oil companies.

Exploration has been located mainly on-shore in the northern Matanzas Province. However, offshore exploration is expected to find larger deposits in the future; some analysts have predicted amounts up to 5.0 billion barrels, but most finds are likely to be in deep water which is difficult and expensive to exploit. Drilling offshore began in 2009. In May 2011, the Ministry of Basic Industry (Minbas) announced that plans for drilling five deepwater oil exploration wells were scheduled for August 2011. The Chinese engineering company Yantai Raffles has built a semi-submersible rig, completed by the Singapore's engineering company Saipem, to be delivered and fitted for oil production to begin and be completed by 2013. In May 2012, the Spanish oil company, Repsol announced that it and Cuba's first attempt at oil exploration (50km off the north coast) had failed and the site abandoned. In 2005, Cuba, plus a number of other Caribbean states, signed an agreement with Venezuela to establish PetroCaribe, a multi-national oil company, owned by the participating states. PetroCaribe buys low-priced Venezuelan crude oil under long-term payment plans. Since this agreement, up to 100,000bpd, have been sold to Cuba at a discounted rate (by anywhere up to 40 per cent of world prices) by Venezuela in exchange for thousands of its citizens travelling to Cuba for healthcare and Cuban doctors administering healthcare programmes for low-income patients in Venezuela. Proven natural gas reserves were 70.8 billion cubic metres (cum) in 2008, with production at 396 million cum, all of which is consumed domestically in energy production. Around 40,000 tonnes of coal are imported annually, for consumption in energy production. Any coal deposits are negligible and production insignificant.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity was 5,861MW in 2008, producing over 16,694 gigawatt hours (gWh) and the majority of which is produced by oil-fired power stations. Cuba has a system of distributed generation (DG), whereby small-scale plants are located around the country and closer to their end users. This has allowed Cuba to recover from Caribbean hurricanes, which strike annually, much more rapidly than countries which adopted more centralised power generation plants. Around 40 per cent of all electricity is provided by DG, most generators being powered by diesel but also by renewable sources such as photovoltaic panels and wind turbines. The government programme Energy Revolution, introduced in 2008 encourages energy

awareness along with the installation of over 700 small generators (producing up to 1,700MW).

Hydropower was first introduced in the 1930s and produces around 500MW, with 10MW under construction. Other renewable energy sources include bagasse (residue of sugar cane, burned to produce energy) as an oil substitute and wave power.

Banking and insurance

The Cuban banking sector has been transformed from a closed and highly centralised Soviet-style model to a diversified two-tier banking system.

In a bilateral agreement signed in 2005 Cuba opened a subsidiary of the Foreign Bank of Cuba in Caracas, Venezuela, while a subsidiary of the Industrial Bank of Venezuela has been approved to open in Cuba.

Central bank

Banco Central de Cuba (BCC)

Time

GMT minus four hours in summer, GMT minus five hours in winter (October – March).

Geography

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean, lying 150km south of Florida. Together with offshore islands and an archipelago of about 1,600 coral cays surrounding the main island, the country has an area of 110,860 square km. The largest offshore island is the Isla de la Juventud, formerly known as the Isla de Piños, which covers 2,200 square km. Most of the long, thin main island consists of plains and low ranges of hills. The highest mountains are in the Sierra Maestra in the extreme south-east, where the Pico Real de Turquina rises to 1,974 metres.

Hemisphere

Northern.

Climate

Subtropical, with an annual mean temperature of 26 degrees Celsius (C) the average summer shade temperatures can rise to 30 degrees C and higher. November–April is the cooler, dry season with maximum temperatures peaking at around 26 degrees C. Trade winds and sea breezes cool the air; there are sudden, short showers in summer. The months of June, September and October–November usually bring hurricanes. The north is wetter than the south and the south, in particularly Santiago Province, is much hotter than the north. There is rainfall of up to 250mm a year in the mountains.

It can be humid between May and October with some heavy rain. Humidity averages 62 per cent. However, during

September and October, humidity can reach 95 per cent.

Dress codes

Dress since the 1959 revolution has been casual. Cubans wear lightweight and loose-fitting clothes, and formal dress, such as a tie, is an extremely rare sight.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all. Passports of nationals of countries without diplomatic relations with Cuba must be valid for two months beyond date of arrival.

Visa

Required by all, except nationals of countries who have reciprocal visa-free agreements.

Business visas, valid for 90 days from issue, are only obtained through sponsorship by an appropriate Cuban government organisation. For sponsorship contact the relevant State Trading Organisation or the commercial office of a Cuban embassy. Without a sponsor a visa will not be issued and a tourist card does not provide local firms with the opportunity to trade with business visitors.

Tourist cards are provided by airlines and tour operators who are registered with Cubatur. Exit visas are required for visitors staying more than 90 days.

Currency advice/regulations

The import and export of local currency is forbidden. There are no restrictions on the import of foreign currency, subject to declaration of amounts over US\$5,000. Currency can be exchanged at the airport or hotel for 'convertible pesos'. When departing, they can be converted back again.

Hard currency is generally required from visitors for most transactions, although the US dollar is no longer legal tender. Visitors arriving with US currency must change it into 'convertible pesos', for which a 10 per cent commission is charged.

Health (for visitors)

Mandatory precautions

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required if arriving from an infected area.

Advisable precautions

Vaccinations are recommended for typhoid, hepatitis A, tetanus and polio, as well as malaria prophylaxis – mosquitoes are a problem outside Havana.

The water supply in most upmarket hotels is excellent but elsewhere water precautions should be taken. Bottled water is readily available.

Medical services are good and free to visitors in an emergency. Insurance is advisable in case repatriation is required. Resorts and major cities have international clinics for tourists but the US embargo

often means branded medicines may not be available. An adequate supply of regularly administered medication should be carried.

A visitor admitted to hospital is likely to be tested for HIV/Aids and will be deported if found to be a carrier.

Hotels

The best hotels can be found in Havana and Varadero beach. Foreign currencies should be exchanged at official Cadeca outlets.

The practice of tipping is growing – restaurants 5–10 per cent.

Credit cards

Only credit cards which are not issued in the US (Visa, Eurocard, MasterCard, Access) are accepted, generally only at tourist sites.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (Liberation Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 25 Jul (Rebellion anniversary, three days), 10 Oct (Anniversary of the War of Independence), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

Variable dates

Carnival: Havana (Feb); Varadero (late Jan/Feb); Trinidad and Santiago de Cuba (Jun).

Working hours

Banking

Mon–Fri: 0830–1200, 1330–1500; Sat: 0830–1030.

Banks in resorts tend to stay open longer. Banks and post offices do not accept Eurocheques or American Express travellers cheques.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0830–1230 and 1330–1630; some offices open alternate Saturdays between 0800–1700.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0830–1230, 1330–1730.

Shops

Mon–Fri: 0900–1700; Sat: 0900–1200. Shops are normally closed on Sunday, except those in tourist areas. Resort shops and supermarkets often open seven days a week and their hours vary according to demand.

Pharmacies are open daily 0800–2000; those with *turno permanente* signs are open 24 hours.

Telecommunications

Postal services

Cuba suspended mail deliveries to the US in January 2011. The move was thought to be in retaliation for the return of mail by the US as part of stricter security measures introduced after the attempt to mail explosives from the Yemen in 2010. President Obama had allowed the resumption of mail services, via third countries, in

2009; services had been suspended since 1969.

Cuba has very few official mail collection boxes, so visitors are advised to post mail in a hotel, or at the airport.

Mobile/cell phones

GSM 900 service available in main tourist areas and cities only.

In March 2008 reforms were announced which gave Cubans unlimited access to mobile phones. Until then Cubans could only own them through a third party, which meant that mobile phone usage in Cuba was one of the lowest in Latin America. However, payment has to be made in foreign currency.

Internet/e-mail

An under-sea fibre-optic cable from Venezuela improved internet download speed by some 3,000 times from early 2011. It also reduced international telephone costs. The 1,600km cable was paid for by the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alba) – a left-wing regional grouping founded by President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.

Electricity supply

110V AC, 60 cycles

Most plugs in hotels are two-pin, flat-pin type, although some are the two-pin, round-pin variety.

Some electric shaver points can be 220/240V.

Lighting is usually of the screw in, rather than bayonet, type.

Social customs/useful tips

Foreign residents say there are few restrictions on foreign visitors, however, they advise against vociferous public criticism of the government.

Cuba has placed great emphasis on sports; baseball, originally imported from the US, is the national sport with boxing vying as the most popular spectator sport. Cubans address each other, and often foreign visitors, as *compañero* or *compañera*, and the informal *tu* form is often used when speaking Spanish. Photographing airports and sensitive sites is forbidden and permission should be sought before photographing public or religious buildings.

Security

Although Cuba is considered to be a generally safe country, the usual precautions should be followed.

Keep to the main busy areas in the cities. Keep valuables and money belt out of sight. Avoid going out alone if possible, especially at night.

Getting there

Air

National airline: Cubana de Aviación.

International airport/s: Havana-José Martí International (HAV), 25km from city,

with duty-free shops, bank, tourist information, hotel reservation and car hire; Varadero-Juan Gómez International (VRA), 12km from Cuba's main beach resort.

Other airport/s: Santiago-Antonio Macea (SCU).

Airport tax: 25 convertible Cuban pesos, except transit passengers.

Surface

Water: There is no scheduled passenger traffic due to the US blockade. Some cruise vessels and private yachts visit Cuba.

Main port/s: Antilla, Cienfuegos, Guayabal, Havana, Mariel, Matanzas, Nuevitas, Santiago de Cuba.

Getting about

National transport

Air: Cubana operates limited domestic services to main centres. Internal flights by visitors are generally arranged through Cubatur.

Road: The Central Highway (Autopista Nacional) runs for over 1,100km, virtually from end to end of the island and gives access to a network of local roads. Total road system exceeds 30,000km, at least 40 per cent surfaced although some roads/tracks may not be passable in wet weather.

Buses: Cross-country buses are cheap and fairly reliable, but can be overcrowded. Coaches link main centres. An air-conditioned service operated by Viazul offers more comfortable travel around the island; payment in convertible pesos is required.

Rail: Cuba's rail capacity is not as extensive as it once was, due to natural disasters and lack of investment. There was 4,226km of public service track in 2003, an increase on the previous year. The main line connects Havana and Santiago de Cuba; some services on this route offer refreshments and air-conditioning. Other lines include between Havana-Cienfuegos and Cardenas-Jaguey. Railway stations in Cuba are immaculately clean, but timetables are often unreliable.

Water: Hydrofoils run twice daily from the southern port of Surgidero de Batanán to the Isla de la Juventud. There are also slower boats sailing three times a week, but a day trip is not possible using these.

City transport

Taxis: There are state and private taxi services, usually ordered through a hotel. Official taxis are metered and less expensive and more comfortable than private taxis, with which prior agreement on the fare is advisable. Turistaxis, the official taxi service for tourists, has stands at tourist centres and can also be flagged down in the street. Taxis can also be hired for

the day; for travel outside Havana, taxis or cars with drivers are cheap but scarce.

Buses, trams & metro: Services in towns are generally considered erratic, inexpensive but invariably crowded. Cubanacan buses are available for tours of cities.

Car hire

Car hire is the most reliable form of transport for covering larger distances. Modern cars are available and can be booked in advance via the Internet through Cubatur (www.cubatur.cu). Hired locally, the price may rise sharply outside airport, city or tourist areas. Chauffeur-driven vehicles are also available.

A valid driver's licence is necessary. Traffic drives on the right; seat belts are not compulsory and the blood alcohol limit is 80mg/100ml.

Speed limits: autopista 100kph; paved roads 90kph; dirt roads 60kph; urban roads 50kph (40kph near schools).

Petrol is relatively easy to obtain and comes in two grades: *especial* and *regular*. Both are leaded and as a rule only the dearer *especial* is available to tourists. It is sold at 24-hour Servi-Cupet and Oro Negro petrol stations.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling code (IDD) for Cuba is +53, followed by the area code and subscriber's number:

| | | | |
|----------------|----|------------------|-----|
| Camaguey | 32 | Manzanillo | 23 |
| Ciego de Avila | 33 | Matanzas | 45 |
| Cienfuegos | 43 | Pinar del Rio | 82 |
| Florencia | 33 | Santiago de Cuba | 226 |
| Havana | 7 | | |
| | | Villa Clara | 42 |

Useful telephone numbers

There is an efficient, almost omnipresent, police service, but officers are unlikely to speak English.

Police: 116 can be dialled from any call box.

Havanautos (24-hour breakdown service): 338176 or 338177.

Chambers of Commerce

Cámara de Comercio de la República de Cuba, Calle 21, esq. A No 661, Vedado, Havana (tel: 551-321; fax: 333-042; e-mail: bic@camara.com.cu).

Banking

Banco de Inversiones SA, 5ta Ave No 6802 e/ 68 y 70, Miramar, Havana (tel: 243-374/5; fax: 243-373; e-mail: bdi@bdi.colombus.cu).

Banco Exterior de España, Línea esq a 2, El Vedado, Havana (tel: 334-560; fax: 334-559).

Banco Financiero Internacional SA, Línea No 1, Vedado, PO Box 4068, Havana 4 (tel: 333-003, 333-148; fax: 333-006).

Banco Internacional de Comercio SA, 20 de Mayo y Ayestarán, Apartado 6113, Plaza de la Revolución, Havana 6 (tel: 335-482/5484; fax: 335-112; e-mail: bicsa@bicsa.columbus.cu).

Banco Metropolitano SA, (successor of the international branch of the Banco Nacional de Cuba), Línea No 63 esq a M, Vedado, Plaza, Havana (tel: 553-116/7; fax: 334-241; e-mail: banmet@nbbm.columbus.cu).

Casas de Cambio SA (CADECA), Calle Aguiar No 411, e/ Obrapia y Lamparilla, Habana Vieja, Havana (tel: 335-673; fax: 335-673; e-mail: cadeca@cadeca.columbus.cu).

Grupo Nueva Banca SA (NB), Calle 1ra, No 1406 e/ 14 y 16, Miramar, Havana (tel: 247-564/67; fax: 245-674; e-mail: nbanca@nbanca.columbus.cu).

The Netherlands Caribbean Banking, 5ta Avenida No 6407 esq a 76, Miramar, Havana (tel: 240-419/21; fax: 240-472).

Central bank

Banco Central de Cuba, PO Box 746, Cuba 402, Habana Vieja, Havana (tel: 866-8003; fax: 866-6601; e-mail: webmaster@bc.gov.cu).

Travel information

Cubamar, Paseo 306 esq a 15, Vedado, Havana (tel: 662-523.4; fax: 333-111; e-mail: cubamar@cubamar.mit.cma.net).

Cubana, Calle 23, No 64 esq Infanta, Vedado, Havana (tel: 334-949/50; fax: 333-323; e-mail: eca@iacc.3.get.cma.net).

Havanatur/Infotur, Calle Obispo 358, (e/ Habana y Compostella), Old Havana (tel: 614-881); Plaza de Martí, Santiago de Cuba (tel: 23-302).

Ministry of tourism

Ministerio de Turismo Calle 19, No 710, Entre Paseo y A, Vedado, Havana (tel: 334 087; 334 318/9; fax: 334 086; Internet: www.cubatravel.cu; www.cubaweb.cu; www.ceniai.inf.cu).

National tourist organisation offices

Cubatur (Empresa de Turismo Nacional e Internacional), Calle F No 157 el Calzada y Novena, Vedado, Havana (tel: 835-4155; fax: 836-3170; e-mail: casamatrix@cubatur.cu).

Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture, Avenida Independencia, entre Cornill y Sta Ana, Havana (tel: 845-770; fax: 335-086).

Ministry of Basic Industries, Avenida Salvador Allende 666, Havana (tel: 707-711; fax: 333-845).

Ministry of Communications, Plaza De la Revolucion 'José Martí', CP 10600, Havana (tel: 817-654).

Ministry of Construction, Avenida Carlos M de Cespedes y Calle 35, Havana (tel: 818-385; fax: 335-585).

Ministry of Construction Materials Industry, Calle 17, esq 0, Vedado, Havana (tel: 322-541; fax: 333-176).

Ministry of Culture, Calle 2, No 258, entre 11 y 13, Vedado, Havana (tel: 399-945).

Ministry of Economy and Planning, 20 de Mayo y Ayestaran, Plaza de la Revolucion, Havana (tel: 816-444).

Ministry of Education, Obispo 160, Havana (tel: 614-888).

Ministry of Finance and Prices, Obispo 211, esq Cuba, Havana (tel: 604-111; fax: 620-252).

Ministry of the Fishing Industry, Avenida 5 y 248 Jaimenitas, Santa Fé, Havana (tel: 297-034).

Ministry of the Food Industry, Calle 41, No 4455, Playa, Havana (tel: 726-801).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Calzada 360, Vedado, Havana (tel: 324-074).

Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Co-operation, Calle 1, No 201, Vedado, Havana (tel: 736-661).

Ministry of Foreign Trade, Infanta 16, Vedado, Havana (tel: 786-230; fax: 786-234).

Ministry of Health, Calle 23, No 301, Vedado, Havana (tel: 322-561).

Ministry of Higher Education, Calle 23, No 565, esq aF, Vedado, Havana (tel: 552-314).

Ministry of the Interior, Plaza de la Revolucion, Havana (fax: 733-5261).

Ministry of Internal Trade, Calle Habana 258, Havana (tel: 625-790).

Ministry of Iron and Steel, Metallurgical and Electronic Industries, Avenida Rancho Boyeros y Calle 100, Havana (tel: 204-861).

Ministry of Justice, Calle 0, No 216, entre 23 y Humboldt, Vedado, Havana (tel: 326-319).

Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Calle 23, esq Calle P, Vedado, Havana (tel: 704-571).

Ministry of Light Industry, Empedrado 302, Havana (tel: 624-041).

Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, Plaza de la Revolución, Havana.

Ministry of Sugar, Calle 23, No 117, Vedado, Havana (tel: 305-061).

Ministry of Transport, Avenida Independencia y Tulipán, Havana (tel: 812-076).

Other useful addresses

British Embassy, Calle 34, No 702/4, Miramar, Havana (tel: 24-1049; fax: 24-9214).

CariFin (financial services Cuba), 311 and 313 22nd Street, Between 3rd and 5th Avenues, Mirimar, Havana (tel: 244-468/70; fax: 244-140; e-mail: havana@cdc.com.cu).

Compañía Fiduciaria SA (investments), Calle 36A No 121 apto, 2 e/ 1ra y 3ra, Miramar Playa, Havana (tel: 247-434/5;

fax: 249-745; e-mail: nbfid@nbfid.columbus.cu).

Cuban Investment Company, PO Box 30003, North Vancouver, B.C. Canada V7H 2Y8 (tel: 00(1-604)929-9694; fax: 00(1-604)929-3694; e-mail: cubaninvestments@idmail.com).

Etecsa (Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba SA), Havana (tel: 452-221, 451-221; fax: 578-036).

Financiera Nacional SA (FINSA) (non-banking activities), Calle G No 301, esq a 13, Vedado, Havana (tel: 553-177, 338-863; fax: 662-232; e-mail: finsa@finsa.columbus.cu).

TIPS (Technological and Commercial Information Promotion System), National Office, No 302, Calle 30, Miramar, Havana (tel: 331-797/798; fax: 331-799).

National news agency: Agencia de Información Nacional (Cuban News Agency)

Calle 23, 358 Vedado (tel: 662-049; fax: 325-541; internet: www.cubanews.ain.cu).

Other news agencies: Prensa Latina: www.plenglish.com.mx

Internet sites

Cubana de Aviación airline: www.cubana.cu

Granma International (daily update in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, with a summary in German): www.granma.cu

Viazul Bus Transportation: www.viazul.com