

# *Cuba:*

*The Land Time Forgot*  
*The Communist Threat*  
*The Decadent Land*  
*The Controversial Country*  
*The Ecological Reserve*  
*An Axis of Evil*  
*Cigars, Rum, & Tourism*


## *Notes of Current Conditions in Cuba*

- Cubans are survivors
- Two-thirds of the 11 million people in Cuba have been born since the 1959 revolution
- Cuba had 4 million tourists annually and was expecting 5 million in 2005. Half of the tourists come from Europe and many from Canada and Latin America. Tourism provided \$2 billion/year in revenue, usually in hard currency.
- Relatives abroad sent hundreds of millions of dollars to Cubans annually.
- Cubans are allowed to earn money through pedicabs, shops, restaurants, and crafts, although various restrictions are applied including issuing licenses
- The Cuban government focuses on education, medical care, and rural development and less on housing, although particular areas, such as Old Havana (UNESCO World Heritage Site), are experiencing extensive restoration
- Food is rationed. Monthly rations in 2002 are only a supplement to the total diet: 2.5 kg rice, 1.5 kg sugar, 1 kg fish, .5 kg beans, 28 gr coffee, 14 eggs. Also distributed are soap, detergent, vegetable oil, cornmeal, fruits and vegetables, and crackers. Pregnant women, pensioners, and children receive extra milk and some additional supplies. Food can be purchased in private markets at higher prices.
- Cuba has many trained doctors, but they lack equipment and medicines. Hospitals perform only emergency surgeries, but surgery is free
- The CDR (Committee for Defense of the Revolution) deals with the neighborhood block area with people's concerns of medical care, education, and recreation.
- Dollar & peso societies exist in Cuba. There are dollar-only hotels, shops & clinics. Some areas are restricted to particular populations. The government controls the media (Granma is the newspaper of the Communist party), military, exports, and allows @ 50 protest groups to exist, but under tight restrictions. Human rights abuses include corruption but there are no death squads. The government controls many aspects of society. The government arrests dissidents, political organizations are not recognized, the right to accumulate wealth is limited, the buying and selling of property is restricted, forming associations is limited, & travel abroad is controlled.
- The U.S. Interests Section is the defacto U.S. Embassy in Havana. There is a lottery for U.S. visas. The U.S. allows 20,000 to immigrate/year with the lottery bringing in 15,000 persons. The Interests Section receives 500,000 requests annually, which is about 5% of the population. Under the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, 678,000 Cubans have been granted permanent resident status in the U.S. This number was 15,798 in 2004 and 7,664 in 2003.
- Castro's personal life is not recorded. He is not shown eating, relaxing, or with his family.
- The U.S. sends Cuba a check for \$4,085 each year to lease Guantanamo Bay (the equivalent of \$2,000 in gold coins at 1934 rates), which Castro has never cashed. Termination of the lease requires the consent of both the U.S. and Cuban governments.
- The USAID Cuba Program promotes a rapid and peaceful transition towards democracy in Cuba. The strategic objective is to increase the flow of accurate information of democracy, human rights and free enterprise to, from, and within the island with \$26 million provided in grants to 28 Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in the U.S. This amount was increased to \$58 million in mid-2004 and will be increased to \$80 million in 2007. Direct USAID monies totaled \$8.9 million in 2005 & a projected \$15 million in 2006 to develop a civil society in Cuba. This
- Spain, Canada & the USSR were leading donors to Cuba's development, superseded recently by Venezuela and China. Other countries include Netherlands, Italy, France and the United Nations.
- Current travel and trade restrictions have been enacted to reduce the power of the Castro regime & to encourage democratic reforms. Cuban-Americans, educators, students, tourists, entertainers, & humanitarians are restricted from visiting Cuba & from supplying aid to the Cuban people.

## *Selected Recent Events*

### **1991-1999**

- \*December 1991 The collapse of the USSR leaves Cuba without its chief economic & military support creating a "Special Period" in Cuba
  
- \*May 1992 Bush signs the "Cuban Democracy Act" which reinforces & strengthens the embargo in order to increase economic pressure on Cuba. This includes no food shipments to Cuba from foreign branches of US companies
  
- May 1995 US announces that Cubans picked up at sea will be returned to Cuba where they could apply at US Interests Section as part of the 20,000 legal immigration quota
  
- \*February 1996 Two planes from Miami-based Brothers to the Rescue are downed by Cuban government killing 4 pilots. Clinton suspends direct flights to Cuba & signs Helms-Burton Act, which curtails presidential authority to loosen embargo, places power in hands of Congress, & sets rigid legislative bench-marks for changes which must take place in Cuba before relations can be normalized. Also, US companies can sue Cuba for nationalized property, & foreign companies that trade with Cuba cannot trade with the US within 6 months of trading with Cuba.
  
- 1998 Canadian-financed Jose Marti International Airport opens.
  
- \*January 1998 Pope John Paul II visits Cuba. He called for moral renewal & reconciliation among Cubans, the world to engage with Cuba, & also condemned the embargo.
  
- March 1998 Clinton announces resumption of direct flights & sale of medicine to Cuba
  
- September 1998 Five Cubans arrested in Miami for terrorism and espionage.
  
- January 1999 Clinton announces steps to revise US policy including increase people-to-people exchanges, expand flights from other US cities, establish direct mail service, & an initiative to hold baseball games between the US & Cuba.
  
- March/May 1999 Baltimore Orioles play Havana in Havana & in Baltimore.
  
- November 1999 Elian Gonzalez, a young Cuban boy, is rescued off the coast of Florida & remains in US for 8 months
  
- 2000**
- \*June Elian Gonzalez is returned to Cuba after legal & political battles between Gonzalez's Miami relatives, the Clinton Administration, Gonzalez's family in Cuba, & the Cuban government
  
- October Senate & now the House pass legislation that ends all unilateral sanctions on sale of food & medicine worldwide, except Cuba can receive neither public nor private US financing in order to buy these products. Cuba must pay in cash or seek financing through third countries. Travel restrictions are also codified, removing presidential power to issue general licenses to Cuba

## 2001

- June Five Cubans convicted in Miami of espionage are sentenced 15 years to life in prison for infiltrating Cuban-exile groups
- November Hurricane Michelle devastates large sections of Cuba & the country is allowed to purchase food & medicine as a result of the devastation by Hurricane Michelle

## 2002

- Jan/Feb US Freighters carrying produce purchased by Cuban government arrive in Havana. Cuban purchased \$30 million (in cash) meat & grain to replenish supplies depleted after Hurricane Michelle. Also, Governor Ryan (IL) visits
- March Twenty Cubans smashed into the Mexican Embassy compound in Havana with a hijacked bus & were forcibly removed 30 hours later.
- \*April Congressional Cuban Working Group (17 Republican & 17 Democrat Senators) form with 4 goals: lift travel ban; advance democracy; permit private financing of food & agriculture; promote cooperation on control of drug trafficking. Also, Senator Boxer (CA) & delegation visit Cuba. Also, 75 Cubans jailed--Cuba claimed they were collaborators with US diplomats to undermine Cuba; US claimed they were human rights activists and journalists.
- \*May Varela Project is delivered to Cuban National Assembly with 11,000 signatures calling for free speech, electoral reforms, amnesty for 250 political prisoners. Former President Carter visits Cuba.
- July Governor Hoeven (ND) visits. US delegation visits.
- September Cuban musicians nominated for Latin Grammy Awards cannot attend ceremony because they did not receive US visas. Food & agriculture trade show in Cuba with 285 companies from 33 states including ADM, Cargill, ConAgra, Hormel, Perdue Farms, & Tyson. Governor Ventura (MN) visits.

## 2003

- March Armed hijackers divert plane from Havana to Key West, FL. Plane sold to pay lawsuits against Cuban government
- \*April Six men who hijack ship in Havana for US convicted of terrorism & executed by firing squad. Trials held for the 75 Cubans & sentenced to varying jail terms.

## 2004

- January Cuba & Venezuela sign exchange & trade agreement. Venezuela gives oil & Cuba supplies medical products, & experts in literacy campaign, health care, and sports
- January South Carolina trade delegation visits Cuba.
- \*May US tightened embargo with President's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba to further undermine Castro regime & hasten end of dictatorship by capping remittances sent to Cuba by US Cubans (eliminated all sent remittances & reduced

carried remittances from \$3000 to \$300) & restricting travel (no importation of Cuban goods, luggage limit of 44 pounds, travel by Cuban-Americans once every 3 years, no US student or teacher travel, no US sport or entertainer travel)

October Castro stumbled after speech & suffered minor injuries. He denied CIA report of Parkinson's Disease

August Hurricanes Charley & Ivan hit. Four people died & billions of damage

November U.S. dollar no longer accepted as legal tender.

## **2005**

January Cuba resumed diplomatic contacts with EU, frozen since 2003 following Cuban crackdown on dissents

May The Working Group on Arbitration Detentions of the UN Human Rights Commission concluded that the imprisonment & treatment of the Cuban Five is arbitrary & recommended that the US government rectify the situation

\*June Luis Posada Carilles sought asylum in US. Venezuela requested extradition for bombing Cubana Airlines #455 (73 people killed; 10/76). Posada is naturalized Venezuelan citizen & Cuban citizen by birth. Labeled a terrorist supported by US

July Hurricane Dennis caused evacuation of 63,000 & 16 deaths. Damage estimated over \$1.5 billion. In reference to \$50,000 offered by US, Castro said, "We will never accept it, not if they offered us one billion dollars. If they really want to help us we suggest they lift the cruel and genocidal blockade of the island and cease their persecution."

October Hurricane Wilma hits. US offered assistance which Cuba refused

## **2006**

February Castro unveils monument that blocks view of illuminated messages displayed on US Interests Section building

March Cuba placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the World Baseball Classic held in San Diego, CA

May Cuba became member of the UN Human Rights Council

June Hurricane Alberto drenches Cuba after evacuation. Also, Cuba lost bid in US Supreme Court to stop US firm from using Cohiba name on cigars

July "Ladies in White", Cuban relatives of jailed dissidents who stage a weekly protest march, were denied travel documents for Europe to receive the Sakharov human rights award

## *Resources on Cuba*

### **Books, Magazines, Articles, Videos**

- Cuba, Lonely Planet, 2000  
Cuba, National Geographic, 1999  
The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis, by Ernest R. May & Philip D. Zelikow, Harvard University Press, 1997  
Dreaming in Cuban: A Novel, by Cristina Garcia, Ballantine Books, 1993  
Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy, by Carolos Eire, Free Press, 2003  
“Cuba: Evolution in the Revolution” John J. Putman, National Geographic, June 1999  
“Cuba Reefs: A Last Caribbean Refuge”, Peter Benchley, National Geographic, February 2000  
“Saving Old Havana”, Archeology, March/April, 2002  
“The Nature of Cuba”, Smithsonian, May 2003  
“Castro’s Clinic”, Worldview, Fall 2003  
“The Secrets of Cuban Medicine”, World Press Review, December 2003  
“Cuba Naturally”, National Geographic, November 2003  
“The Beat in Cuba: A Celebration of Life on an Island That Time Forgot—Before the Tide of Modernity Rolls In”, National Geographic Traveler, March 2004  
“The Cuban Economy Today: Salvation or Damnation”, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADD794.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADD794.pdf)  
“The Cuban Economy in 2004-2005”, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/asce/pdfs/volume15/pdfs/mesalago>  
“Havana”, 1990  
“Buena Vista Social Club”, 1999  
“13 Days”, 2001  
“Motorcycle Diaries”, 2004

### **Youth Materials**

- “Republic of Cuba”, Culture Grams, 2001 (1-800-528-6279)  
Countries of the World: Cuba, Gareth Stevens Publishing, Milwaukee, 2000  
Cultures of the World: Cuba, Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1995  
Cuba—In Pictures, Lerner, 1997  
Children of Cuba, Carolrhoda Books, 1996  
Cuba on My Mind, Roman de la Campa, 2000  
15, Nancy Osa, 2003  
Free Baseball, Sue Corbett, 2006

### **Internet Sources**

- U.S. Interests Section <http://havana.usinterestsection.gov>  
USAID (Latin America & Caribbean) [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/)  
Commission for Assistance for a Free Cuba <http://www.cafc.gov/>  
National Network on Cuba (solidarity) <http://www.CubaSolidarity.com>  
Cuba Net (Cuban exiles) <http://www.cubanet.org/cubanews.html>  
U.S. State Dept.--International Information <http://www.usinfo.state.gov/wh/americas/cuba.html>  
U.S. Dept. of Treasury—Cuba Sanctions <http://www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/>  
International Relations Center <http://www.fpif.org>  
Center for Cuban Studies <http://www.cubaupdate.org/index.htm>  
Cuba Web (Cuban government) <http://www.cubaweb.cu>  
CIA World Factbook <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>  
Latin America Working Group <http://www.lawg.org>  
Minnesota Cuba Committee <http://groups.msn.com/minnesotacubacommittee>  
Cuba Transition Project <http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/default.htm>