

MIAMI & HAVANA GUIDE FOR SPONSORS

as of February 2015

CGE books flights in/out of Havana through Marazul Charters. Sometimes a group flies on a Marazul charter flight and other times Marazul purchases seats for a group on another charter (i.e. Swift Air or ABC Charters). If you have charter-related problems, call Marazul at 1-800-223-5334 or 201-840-6711. Our primary agents are Luisa Sanchez (ext. 15) and Mayra Alonso (ext. 11); backup is Marazul Vice President Bob Guild (ext. 16).

Marazul issues vouchers for Cuba flights instead of tickets. These vouchers get exchanged for boarding passes at the gateway airport for the outbound flight to Cuba and at the Havana airport for return flight to the United States.

Miami Gateway

1. Marazul's travel packet will indicate the location of the ticket counter where the group will check in and at what time (i.e. 3:30 am at Concourse G for SWQ#503). Four hours for check-in may seem ridiculous, but it can take that long for everyone to go through multiple lines and screenings and get out to the departure gate. The check-in location can be complicated to find. Charter companies set up temporarily at a ticket counter right before the charter leaves. Marazul may be doing check-in for 2-4 different charter flights at several different ticket counters at the same time. Give a uniformed charter agent your flight number and ask if you are in the correct spot.
2. If possible, get to the area early, have the group stand together (not in any line and out of the way) in an area that is visible from the ticket counter. Identify yourself to the charter agent at the ticket counter as the leader of a group that is ready to check-in. Hand the charter agent all of the signed/dated reservation forms and a list of everyone in your group. Charters are very strict about the weight and size limits for carry-ons and checked luggage (listed on ticket vouchers). Often passengers also are asked to provide their approximate body weight. There are additional fees for checked bags and weight overage. Travel seminar participants are responsible for covering these fees, which must be paid in cash during check-in at both the Miami and Havana airports. There is a **US\$20 fee to check a bag**. Charter agents may obligate a passenger to check a carry-on bag if they consider it to be too heavy (more than 20 pounds) or too large. Be forewarned that agents have, at times, required that all roller board suitcases and any backpack larger than a daypack be checked (even though a commercial airline would allow them to be carried on). Participants should each have a US\$20 bill handy in case they are told they must check their bag. The charter company will weigh all of a passenger's carry-on and checked items (suitcase, purse, day pack, etc.) together to ensure that the **combined total is less than 44 pounds**. **Overweight charges are US\$2-3 per pound, depending on the airline.**
3. Follow the charter agent's instructions on how best to check in as a group. If the group is assembled and orderly, the agent may open a separate line just for the group. The check-in process usually has 2 steps:
 - a. STEP 1: Each participant will show their passport and Cuban visa. The charter agent will take one ticket voucher and the signed and dated Reservation Form (clipped to the front of the Marazul travel packet). Each passenger will be given Cuban immigration/customs and public health forms.

After immigration, everyone must go through a metal detector and be wanded by person of your same gender.

After security there is a table staffed by nurses where you will turn in your completed public health form.

Next, claim checked luggage off the carousel. If porters help the group with luggage, it will be necessary to tip them about US\$1 per bag.

Advise individuals in your group to proceed to the **“Nothing to Declare” line at Customs**. Luggage is commonly inspected due to increased terrorist threats and drug trafficking around the world. It is standard practice to ask arriving passengers to line up their luggage and stand a few feet in front of their bags in a single file line. Bomb/drug dogs may be used to sniff the luggage.

On September 1, 2012, the Cuban government instituted new customs duties. Travelers are permitted to bring 66 pounds of miscellaneous goods into Cuba without charge. Everything after that is taxed at US\$4.55/pound. The payment of import taxes is the responsibility of individual participants, and is not a CGE program expense.

One or two group members and/or the group leader may be picked out of the line for questioning as to what they plan to do in Cuba. Be attentive and try to help answer questions if a student is chosen for questioning. Again, this should not scare people: it is common practice in Cuba as it is in the United States.

In the customs area, before exiting through the glass sliding door, there is a CADECA (*Casa de Cambio*) with money exchange windows. Each person should change U.S. dollars into Convertible Cuban pesos (CUC) for their spending money during the trip. They will need to show their passport to do this. It is prohibited to use U.S. dollars for transactions in Cuba. The Cuban government levies an additional 10% exchange fee for transactions from U.S. dollars into CUCs.

Before exiting through the glass sliding door, each person must give the claim ticket(s) for their checked luggage to an agent who will verify it matches the tag on the bag.

Upon exiting the customs area, the group should stay together on the sidewalk in the waiting area that is roped off just in front of the sliding door until everyone is through customs and has changed money. Your MLK guide Reinier Menendez and CGE Trip Leader Antonio Ortega will be waiting for you there.

Once everyone is ready, you will take your luggage out to the parking lot, put it on the bus, and drive approximately 30 minutes from the airport to the Martin Luther King Center for check-in and a welcome and orientation session.