

MIAMI & HAVANA GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS

as of May 2014

CGE books flights in/out of Havana through Marazul 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 exactly where the group will check in and at what time (i.e. 6:00 am at Concourse G-2nd floor). Four hours for check-in may seem ridiculous, but it can take that long to go through multiple lines and screenings and get out to the departure gate. It can be complicated to figure out where to check in. Charter companies set up temporarily at a ticket counter right before the charter leaves. Marazul/Swift Airlines may be going check-in for 2-4 different charter flights at several different ticket counters. Give a uniformed charter agent your flight number and verify that you are in the correct spot.
2. 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. You 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 you to check a bag that they consider 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 day pack be checked (even though a commercial airline would allow them to be carried on). Keep a US\$20 bill handy in case you are told that you must check your 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***. Overage charges are US\$2 per pound.
3. The check-in process usually has 2 steps:
 - a. LINE 1: Passengers 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). You will be given Cuban immigration/customs and public health forms.
 - b. LINE 2: Carry-on and checked luggage will be screened and weighed. Any overage will have to be paid for in cash. Then you will be given a boarding pass for the charter flight and a baggage claim for any checked items.
4. Go through the regular TSA airport security screening process and out to the departure gate. Security lines at the Miami airport, that have always been very long, are now even longer because of the federal government sequester. Plan to proceed on through and then buy food near the departure gate.

5. Once at the departure gate, **stay alert**. Recently, one CGE group was surprised when their flight loaded and departed ½ hour before its scheduled departure time because all of the passengers had checked in!
6. The flight from Miami to Havana will be about an hour with only a beverage served. All flights are on jet aircraft, chartered by Marazul. The planes themselves may be unmarked or from another carrier.

Havana Airport Process (Jose Martí International): Upon arrival, disembark from the plane and walk to the terminal. Do not take photos as the airport is considered a secure area. Get in line to go through immigration. If you run into problems entering Cuba, drop the name of Rev. Raul Suárez, co-founder of the Martin Luther King Center and Cuban legislator.

You are travelling with a tourist visa that was issued by the Cuban government. Although you have a visa in hand, Cuban immigration officials make the final call whether a person will be permitted to enter the country. **If asked by Cuban authorities, state that the purpose of your travel is “tourism.”** [Note: it is the U.S. government that requires that travelers to Cuba demonstrate they are there for educational purposes.] **If they are asked where they are staying in Cuba they should answer the Martin Luther King Memorial Center in Havana, since that it is the official host of your group.** The contact information is:

Centro Memorial: “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”
Ave. 53 No. 9609 e/ 96 y 98 Marianao. La Habana
☎: 260-3940 ☎: 260-9731

In Cuban immigration you will have to show your passport, Cuban visa, and return ticket voucher, and get your photo taken. The Cuban immigration official will take one half of the Cuban visa and tuck the other half into the passport. If you want your passport stamped with a Cuban entry stamp, you will have to state that clearly to the official. **Be very careful not to lose the second half of your Cuban visa as you will need it to exit the country.**

The next step is to go through security. This involves going through a metal detector and being wanded by a 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 you with luggage, it will be necessary to tip them about US\$1 per bag.

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 any import taxes is your responsibility.

You may be picked out of the line for questioning as to what you plan to do in Cuba. This 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. Change U.S. dollars into Convertible Cuban pesos (CUC) for their spending money during the trip. You will need to show your 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, give the claim ticket for your checked luggage to an agent who will verify it matches the tag on the bag.

Upon exiting the customs area, stay together on the sidewalk in the waiting area that is roped off just in front of the sliding door until everyone in the group arrives. Your MLK guide and CGE Trip Leader will be waiting for you there.

Once the group is assembled, you will take your luggage out to the parking lot, put it on the MLK bus, and drive approximately 20-30 minutes from the airport to the MLK Center for a welcome and orientation session.