

OVERVIEW

- Population: 11 Mil (2016 est)
- Capital: Havana (2.1 Mil, 2016 est)
- Religion: Roman Catholic (85%)
- Language: Spanish
- Independence: 20 May 1902 (from US)
- Active leadership role in Third World, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other international forums

Cuban revolutionary leaders leading march (1960)

GEOGRAPHY

Cuba is only 90 miles from the Florida Keys with Mexico to its west and Haiti to its east. This long, narrow island extends over 750 miles and includes a variety of small islands. One of these in the southeast (see map) has a naval base leased by the United States since 1903 called Guantánamo, more commonly referred to as "Gitmo."

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

An indigenous population, primarily the Taíno, first inhabited Cuba. This population began to decline with European discovery of the island in 1492 and its development as a Spanish colony. Over the next several centuries, Cuba served as a hub of the Spanish empire, and large numbers of African slaves were imported to work sugarcane and tobacco plantations. Spanish rule eventually incited rebellions and an independence movement. The United States intervened during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and overthrew Spanish rule. Cuban independence from the United States came in 1902, with conditions imposed under the Platt Amendment, after which the island experienced a sequence of corrupt governments dominated by US influence. Fidel Castro led an insurgency to victory in 1959 and ruled for nearly five decades. Castro established a socialist regime and exported its ideals throughout Latin America and Africa, while forming close ties with the strongly influential Soviet Union.

Fidel Castro

CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

- Detention camp set up at US-leased and controlled Guantanomo, a relic of the Cuban-American Treaty of 1903 (2002)
- Raúl Castro takes over for aging Fidel Castro after 49 years of rule (2008); Raúl re-elected through 2018 (2013)
- EU & Russia revitalize Cuba ties (2008)
- Cuba suffers financial crisis; austerity moves to stabilize economy (2009); Russia cancels Soviet-era debts (2014)
- US diplomatic ties restored; embassy formally reopened (2015)

National Hero: José Martí (1853-1895) was an ardent Cuban freedom fighter and poet who had a goal of a free Cuba. Although he never lived to see Cuba free and died during one of the first battles of an uprising in 1895, he is considered a great national hero. Cubans continue to honor Martí's memory.

José Martí

MILITARY

The Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces is one of the more powerful in the Caribbean region. The Cuban military has historically been very active internationally but its forces and equipment have declined in strength and readiness since the fall of the Soviet Union. However, the Cuban military remains well trained and capable. There is a two-year obligatory service for both sexes between the ages of 17-28. Sharing military experiences can be used as a common bond to build rapport.

Photo by: PRA

Coat of Arms of Cuba

The military is no longer as involved in foreign conflicts and activities and its primary role is to keep the leadership and communist party in power while supporting the weak economy of the island.

ARMY RANKS

	NCO
	Second NCO
	First NCO
	Sub-Lieutenant
	Lieutenant
	First Lieutenant
	Captain
	Major
	Lieutenant Colonel
	Colonel
	Brigadier General
	Major General
	Lieutenant General
	General of the Army
	Commander in Chief

POPULATION - ETHNIC GROUPS

- Around 65% identified as white, primarily of Spanish and Canary Island descent. Many who self-identify as white actually have a mixed ancestry.
- Mulattoes, at around 25%, are persons of mixed white and black ancestry. They are descendants of intermixing since the time of slavery.
- Blacks, or Afro-Cubans, number around 10% of the population. Most have origins dating back to the introduction of African slaves into Cuba but also some recent Haitian and Jamaican immigrants.
- East Asians, mostly Chinese, make up around 1% of the population; many originate from indentured Chinese laborers from the mid-19th century.
- The Spanish conquest eliminated most indigenous people and no distinct indigenous communities still exist; some mixed indigenous Ciboney-Taíno-Arawak-descended populations can be found in rural areas.



CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

EXPORTING REVOLUTIONARY IDEALS

With the support of the former Soviet Union, Cuba worked hard to export its revolutionary ideals to other Latin American and African countries. Cuba's revolutionary message was often well-received in countries where many labored under repressive regimes. Cuba often supplied military assistance to national liberation movements and civilian assistance to many developing nations worldwide. This support of revolutionary ideas can be symbolized in the figure of Ernesto "Che" Guevara (photo right), who played an important role in the Cuban revolution. After also serving in a prominent role in the new Cuban regime, Guevara left Cuba in 1965 to encourage revolution abroad, first in Africa then back in Latin America where he was killed. He became an inspiration of various leftist-inspired movements.



RELIGION

Cuba was originally a primarily Roman Catholic nation although decades of secular influences have minimized the modern number of regular church attendees.

The constitution provides freedom of religion, but the communist government has historically restricted these. Typically, those institutions with closer ties to the state have enjoyed fewer restrictions to their activities.

There are several mixed religions too. The most common are Afro-Cuban belief systems such as Santería; up to 70% of Cubans participate in these.



A Santería ceremony in Havana (2011)

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VALUES

Cubans have a strong sense of nationalism and pride in their unique island culture and often reject such things as materialism—especially under the trade embargo and decades of communist rule.

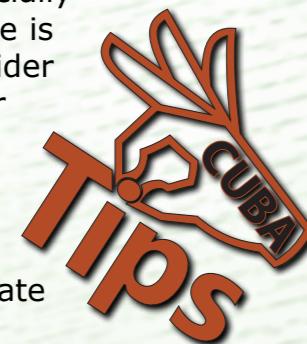
They strongly value education, with nearly 100% literacy and over 20% have pursued higher education. They are known to work hard, deal with hardships regularly and are raised believing in socialist ideals such as equality and justice. They are also used to sharing space and belongings with others, and the typical American expectation of privacy and plenty of personal space is uncommon in Cuba.

As ties with the United States improve, many are more accepting of success and excess. Soldiers will find that younger Cubans will be very interested in Nike shoes, Levi's jeans, etc., as owning them projects a higher social status.

RAPPORT BUILDING

SPEND THE TIME TO BUILD RAPPORT

The most difficult aspect of rapport is the time that it takes, especially during missions when time is valuable. You should consider where you spend your time. Taking time to build rapport with a key leader can be critical, so you should also ensure that you identify the appropriate individuals to work with.



Rapport tips to consider:

- Seek to understand before being understood
- Take ownership of your counterpart's issues and needs
- Align with your counterpart's communication style
- Work to make a good first impression
- Focus on your appearance
- Once rapport is built, maintain coordination and communication

RAPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

When working and building rapport with your Cuban counterparts, keep the following in mind:

- Time is not closely monitored, and meetings will often start late. Always start with small talk before mission discussions, but it is typical to interrupt speakers.
- Locals speak Spanish nearly exclusively, and other languages such as English and French are mostly used by those in the tourism industry. Use a few Spanish phrases to build rapport.
- Trust is very hard to build due to years under communism. Do not ask for/about overly-sensitive information or locations.
- Popular pastimes and discussion topics include baseball, soccer, water sports, dominoes and all kinds of music & dance.
- Attitudes on gender are liberal by Latin American standards (where women often have limited rights) and Cuba is seen as a leader in gender equality. Treat counterparts equally and expect the same.



RESPECT

When in doubt, ask for "how to" advice from interpreters and trusted locals.

- Hospitality and generosity are expected. All men get handshakes and women receive cheek kisses after becoming friends. Speakers tend to stand close and touch while conversing, and eye contact is maintained. Use ranks and titles too.
- Cubans are very animated, and argue and gesture heavily. Handle real issues behind the scenes, rather than through open (embarrassing) conflict.
- It is rude to point at others, so Cubans will nod and purse their lips toward others. Spitting and nose-blowing in public are also rude. Always remember to ask permission before taking photos or recording Cubans.
- Do not use pressure tactics, and allow added time for decisions to be made "top down"—whether military or civilian.



HELPFUL PHRASES

ENGLISH	SPANISH
Yes / No	Sí / No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You're welcome	De nada
Hi / Hello	Hola
Goodbye	Adiós
See you soon/later	Hasta pronto/tarde
I don't understand	No entiendo
I'm sorry	Lo siento
Excuse me	Con permiso
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
How much?	¿Cuánto?
Where is/are?	¿Dónde está/están?
When?	¿Cuándo?
My name is...	Mi nombre es...
Good morning	Buenos días
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes
Good evening	Buenas noches