

New Survey Finds Cuba Among Safest Destinations in the World

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02/03/2018



[A new survey](#) of recent US travelers to Cuba finds it is among the safest destinations in the world to visit. The survey of US travelers who visited the island in 2017 and 2018, conducted by [Cuba Educational Travel](#), found that those surveyed felt safe in Cuba, and believe that there is limited risk to travelers. They also believe that the country is well prepared to respond to environmental, health and crime related situations. These travelers with firsthand experience on the island overwhelmingly recommend visiting.

“It’s clear that Cuba is among the safest countries in the world for Americans to visit,” said Collin Laverty, President of Cuba Educational Travel and a leading expert on U.S.-Cuba relations. “The situation regarding U.S. diplomats in Havana has been grossly mismanaged by the State Department and highly politicized by the White House and members of Congress against normalizing relations with our neighbor.”

“It’s unfair to the affected diplomats and their families to politicize the situation and it completely discredits the integrity of the State Department’s Travel Warning System,” Laverty added. “The harm caused to Cuban families that are separated because they can’t obtain visas is inexcusable, and the damage it’s doing to Cuban entrepreneurs cut off from U.S. visitors is a tragedy.”

The survey of 462 recent US travelers to Cuba found:

- In terms of **Overall Safety**
- 83% of travelers believe Cuba is “very safe”
- 16% of travelers believe Cuba is “safe”
- Less than 1% of travelers believe Cuba is “unsafe” and no travelers believe Cuba is “very unsafe”
- In terms of **Petty Crime**
- 65% of travelers believe Cuba is “very safe”
- 30% of travelers believe Cuba is “safe”
- Only 2% of travelers believe Cuba is “unsafe” and less than 1% believe Cuba is “very unsafe”
- In terms of **Violent Crime**
- 85% of travelers believe Cuba is “very safe”
- 13% of travelers believe Cuba is “safe”
- Less than 1% of travelers believe Cuba is “unsafe” or “very unsafe”
- **Crime & Safety Preparedness** and travel service providers and Cuban institutions ability to respond
- 58% of travelers believe Cuba is “very well prepared”
- 39% of travelers believe Cuba is “well prepared”
- Only 2% of travelers believe Cuba is unprepared and less than 1% believe Cuba is “very unprepared”
- **Health & Environmental Preparedness** and travel service providers and Cuban institutions ability to respond
- 55% of travelers believe Cuba is “very well prepared”
- 40% of travelers believe Cuba is “well prepared”
- Only 4% of travelers believe Cuba is unprepared and less than 1% believe Cuba is “very unprepared”
- **97% of travelers said they would recommend traveling to Cuba** based on their personal travel experience and what they have read about health issues affecting U.S. Embassy personnel. Only 3% of travelers said they would recommend against traveling to Cuba.

## **Background and March 4th Decision**

The U.S. State Department reduced its diplomatic presence on the island and issued a travel warning in late 2017 after it was made public that U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers in Havana suffered strange health symptoms. It’s been six months since the number of staff at the U.S. Embassy in Havana was reduced, and the State Department is required to make a decision on or before March 4th if it will re-staff the embassy or continue to operate with limited numbers. It will also need to analyze the travel warning and decide if it will continue to advise Americans to “reconsider” travel to Cuba for safety reasons.

The survey of recent U.S. travelers to Cuba analyzes first-hand experiences of safety in Cuba. The findings, which clearly indicate Cuba is safe and well-prepared to respond to crime, environmental, health and safety issues that arise, should be taken into account and the State Department should immediately move Cuba to a level 1 travel advisory and stop warning Americans to reconsider travel to the island.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this survey, the FBI investigation into the incidents, the recommendations of the America Foreign Service Association (AFSA) and discussions with US

diplomats that served in Havana at the time of the health incidents, Cuba Educational Travel recommends:

1. The State Department should downgrade the [Travel Warning for Cuba](#) to a level 1 advisory (currently listed as a level 3), which would advise travelers to “exercise normal precautions.”
2. The State Department should fully restore the U.S. Embassy in Havana, and immediately reinforce the consular section.
3. The State Department should allow Cuba to fully re-staff its embassy and consular section in Washington, DC.
4. The State Department, CIA, Center for Disease Control and U.S. doctors treating the diplomats should join the FBI in cooperating with Cuban counterparts in the investigation into the health incidents, which is the only way to resolve the issue.
5. The FBI should release the findings of its investigation. It can redact certain elements for privacy and national security reasons.

### **Travel Warning & Embassy Closure Impact**

- A reduced number of U.S. travelers has hurt the Cuban people, with entrepreneurs (Airbnbs, restaurants, taxis, etc.) and millions of Cubans that work in the tourism sector suffering economically.
- The U.S. Embassy in Havana is not processing visas for Cubans, meaning hundreds of thousands of families are divided. Cubans are prevented from traveling to the U.S. to be reunited with loved ones or to attend weddings and funerals.
- Important scientific, cultural and educational exchanges have been halted because of visa challenges and the impact of the travel warning.

### **Additional Information**

- Many U.S. diplomats serving in Cuba at the time of the health incidents fought hard to remain in Cuba with their families, including young children, arguing they felt no risk in Havana.
- The American Foreign Service Association [urged](#) against closing the embassy, arguing “American diplomats need to remain on the field and in the game.”
- No U.S. travelers have been affected by any similar health incidents or “attacks.”
- The State Department Cuba Travel Advisory contains stronger language than advisories for countries with serious terrorism, murder, drug trafficking and kidnapping risks. It’s politicized.
- FBI investigators, who were given wide and unprecedented access on the island, determined no so-called “sonic attack” occurred. They found no evidence of any attacks. The release of their findings has been delayed by State Department.
- State Department prevented the Center for Disease Control (CDC) from taking part in the investigation for the first 12 months.
- State Department delayed for months a [Journal of the American Medical Association article](#) on the medical findings of the diplomats’ conditions. Finally released on February 15th, the article showed no evidence of any attacks. [An accompanying editorial](#) warned brain imaging results of the diplomats were “unrevealing” and pointed out a number of shortcomings of the evaluation.

- Many U.S. diplomats have pushed internally to reopen the embassy, saying they serve in much more dangerous environments across the world and don't feel at risk in Cuba. They've been silenced by senior political appointees and the White House.
  - Senator Rubio and Representatives Curbelo, Diaz-Balart and Ros-Lehtinen, all of whom have tens of thousands of Cubans in their districts suffering from family separation, have pushed to keep the Embassy in Havana closed and have said nothing regarding the hardships their constituents are facing.
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