
Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel Plans Cuba Vacation

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Chicago mayor and former White House chief of staff **Rahm Emanuel** is taking his family to Cuba this holiday season.

That puts Mr. Emanuel and his family among the thousands of Americans taking advantage of [looser travel regulations](#) President Barack Obama announced last December. Still, traveling to Cuba as a tourist remains illegal and Congressional action will be required to fully lift the travel ban.

“Yes this year, if my wife doesn’t kill me now because of what you just did, we will take our kids to Cuba,” Mr. Emanuel said at a breakfast hosted by Politico in Chicago on Wednesday, in response to a question from the breakfast’s moderator, Mike Allen. ([Video of the exchange was posted by GOP.com.](#)) Mr. Emanuel was clearly displeased that the moderator revealed his vacation plans, which hadn’t been previously disclosed. Mr. Emanuel said he would provide Mr. Allen’s cellphone number to his wife so he could be the recipient of Mrs. Emanuel’s angry call.

“Thanks for telling everybody what I’m going to do with my family, you had a private conversation with me and now you decided to make that public,” Mr. Emanuel said. In the interview, [Mr. Emanuel also said he wouldn’t resign in the wake of a video showing a Chicago police officer shooting a teenager 16 times](#), according to Politico.

Mr. Emanuel and his family, like any other Americans, can’t legally go to Cuba as tourists. They must justify their travel under one of 12 categories, including people-to-people exchanges, professional research, journalistic or religious activities, participation in sports competitions, visits to close family members and participation in academic programs. Mr. Obama’s loosening of travel rules expanded the number of legal travel paths to Cuba.

American travel to Cuba has surged about 35% since Mr. Obama’s policy shift and Cubans are bracing themselves for as many as 10 million American tourists per year if and when the travel ban is fully lifted, according to International Monetary Fund estimates.



Beyonce and Jay-Z in Havana in 2013

Associated Press

Should he call it a vacation? Lawyers said it was ok, so long as Mr. Emanuel and his family fall under one of the 12 categories.

“There are people who go on an archaeological dig on vacation, or harvest wine or go take classes,” said Augusto Maxwell, head of the Cuba practice at Miami-based law firm Akerman. “I don’t think it’s inappropriate at all to call it a vacation.”

A likely way for the Emanuels to travel to Cuba would be through a people-to-people exchange. They could travel with a group, or a travel company could arrange a private schedule for their family with activities that would fall under the “people-to-people” category.

People who travel to Cuba under the people-to-people category currently can’t go on their own and must go on organized trips with full schedules that usually include meetings, lectures, visits to small businesses, community projects, etc.

Before the regulations were loosened, **Beyonce** and **Jay-Z** took a [much criticized trip to the island](#), but ultimately the Treasury Department determined their travel was legal as it was organized by a nonprofit with a license to organize “people-to-people” trips. Since the policy shift, organizations no longer need special licenses to organize such trips.

Other celebrities who have traveled to Cuba since the loosening of rules include **Rihanna**, **Usher**, **Mick Jagger**, **Katy Perry**, **Paris Hilton** and **Naomi Campbell**. The island has also received visits this year from three cabinet secretaries, three governors and scores of lawmakers. President Barack Obama hopes to travel to Cuba before leaving office.