

Information for Brigadistas

Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba

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Information for Brigadistas Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba

This document gives some tips and information from former brigadistas to people going on the upcoming Southern Cross brigade to Cuba. Because of the distinctiveness of Cuban society, there are some different ways of doing things that are discussed in this document. The brigade is a fantastic opportunity and these tips can help to make your experience even more enjoyable!



The Southern Cross Brigade

Brigades to Cuba have been organised by the Australia and New Zealand Cuba Friendship Societies since 1982. In that time, hundreds of Australians and New Zealanders aged from six to eighty eight years old have enjoyed an exciting and informative time on this tropical island. The brigade provides the opportunity to look at the achievements and failures of a small socialist country which has withstood fifty seven years of economic blockade imposed by the USA.

The Brigades are planned with two main goals in mind. First, it is your chance to support Cuba directly by showing your solidarity with the Cuban people, providing first-hand experience of the cultural, political and social conditions in revolutionary Cuba. Second, the Brigade provides a good opportunity to advance the process of providing political information to Australians and New Zealanders about Cuba.

The Cuban people, who suffer much hardship to maintain their revolution, receive a huge boost in morale when they see that people from all over the world are prepared to come and support them in any way. The fact that brigadistas are ready to share some of their hardships reaffirms to many Cubans that the social change that they are carrying out is important, not only for their country, but also for the whole world.

Brigadistas are hosted by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People (Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos: ICAP), who organise the brigade in consultation with the Australia/New Zealand Cuba Friendship Societies. Brigadistas don't need to be members of political groups or of the Cuba Friendship Societies but **they do have to have an interest in finding out more about Cuba and a willingness to participate in all group activities**. We would, however, encourage them to make contact with their local Friendship Society branch & join the branch so that they have a better understanding of what to expect in Cuba & why the Friendship Societies exist.

The main features of the brigade include:

- Talks on various aspects of Cuban life given by prominent Cuban speakers
- Visits to places of interest (e.g. schools, hospitals, factories)
- Light agricultural work with Cuban workers

- Opportunity to explore Havana independently
- Visits to provincial centres
- Participation in cultural activities

Cost

The Southern Cross Brigade costs approximately \$AU1160 in total, per person. This cost is paid in two parts. There is a **non-refundable* registration fee of \$AU250 to be paid by 31 October to secure your place on the brigade**. On arrival at the camp in Cuba you will need to pay **a further 670 CUC (Cuban Convertible Pesos) in cash, which equates to approximately \$AU910**. Please ensure you arrive with either Euros, Canadian Dollars or Mexican Pesos & NOT Aus or N.Z. dollars as you cannot change this currency in Cuba. This cost covers all accommodation, food, travel and activities for the duration of the brigade. International flights, visas and health insurance are not included and must be arranged separately.

There may be a few optional extra activities that will incur an extra cost, which is usually quite reasonable. The cost of the brigade covers basic necessities, however, bringing extra money is suggested e.g. for extra food and drinks at the camp, group activities organised by the Brigade such as the Australia Night or going to a restaurant, souvenirs, toiletries, optional activities, as well as taxis into Havana and activities in Havana in free time.

In order to avoid problems due to a shortage of money **approximately \$800 is suggested as a minimum amount of extra cash**, depending on your own personal lifestyle preferences.

The Brigade Leader

The Brigade organisers look for a leader who is an active member of a solidarity organisation, who is preferably fluent in Spanish and English, is knowledgeable about the political, economic and social situation in Cuba, and who has good organisational and group management skills.

During the Brigade, the leader is responsible for:

- Liaising between the Brigade and Cuban organisations and individuals - hotels, banks, etc.
- Relaying information about work, starting and ending times, expectations etc.
- Helping with interpreting at meetings and during the political program when needed (ICAP supplies interpreters & there are usually other Spanish speakers on brigades who share this responsibility).
- Sorting out problems for individual brigadistas who require a Spanish speaker.
- Ensuring that everyone who wishes to is able to participate in the brigade's discussions and decision making processes.
- Making sure all Brigadistas get an opportunity to share in giving thanks to guests or officials
- Taking care of administrative details - letter-writing, meetings with ICAP etc.
- Acting as a front person or impromptu speech-maker for the brigade, if necessary.
- The overall organization of the Australian New Zealand Night.

All of these tasks require a reasonable degree of self-confidence, tact, organisation, patience and diplomacy. It is not easy to stand up and interpret in front of a large group or to organise a meeting of brigadistas, all of whom have different opinions on everything!

Please be mindful that while the leader may try to consider your point of view it is their role to ensure the smooth running of the Brigade so you should adhere to their decisions. If you are not happy regarding something a quiet one-on-one conversation later may resolve any future issues.

Please contact the National Coordinator if you would be interested in the position of Brigade Leader.

Cuban Life

Language

The experiences gained on the brigade are heightened by your ability to interact with a wide range of people. While you do not need to speak any Spanish to participate in the brigade, an ability to understand and speak Spanish is helpful to enrich your experience. Learning a little Spanish is highly recommended.

Here are a few words and phrases to begin with:

SPANISH	ENGLISH	SPANISH	ENGLISH
Hola	Hello	Cama	Bed
Adiós	Goodbye	Casa	House
Por favor	Please	Mesa	Table
Gracias	Thank you	Vaso	Glass
Mucho gusto	Pleased to meet you	Plato	Plate
¿Cómo está?	How are you?	Tengo sueño	I'm tired (I have sleepiness)
Agua	Water	Estoy cansado	I'm tired
Baño	Toilet	Tengo hambre / sed	I'm hungry / thirsty
Cerveza	Beer	Tengo frío / calor	I'm cold / hot
Frijoles	Beans	¿Hay...?/ ¿no hay...?	Is there any...?/ Isn't there any..?
Arroz	Rice	¿Quieres bailar?	Would you like to dance?
Congri o Moros y Cristianos	Rice and beans or Moros and Christians	¿Cuántos hijos tiene?	How many children do you have?
¿Se encuentra Juan?	Is Juan there?	Compañero	friend/comrade/lover/companion
Mas o menos	More or less	No tomo alcohol	I don't drink alcohol

When travelling overseas it is important to recognise how much your own cultural values and assumptions influence the way you see another society. Before you go to Cuba, it is useful to familiarise yourself with as much background material as you can. **Please go with an attitude of wanting to learn from the Cubans rather than wanting to impose your values etc on them.**

Economic Situation

- Cubans are paid according to a national award, based on level of education, experience and, most recently, performance. The average Cuban earns the equivalent of around \$25 per month. This would make them amongst the poorest people in the world, except that most staple goods and services are provided free or heavily subsidised, and there is free housing, health and education.
 - Money is not considered an appropriate gift in Cuba. However, tipping is part of the culture and some restaurants include a 10% service charge.
 - When you use a public toilet the attendant will expect a coin, 10 or 25 centavos.
 - You will see some Cubans who are begging. **Do not give to beggars.** These people prey on the gullible and tell them how hard up they are, or need food for their children. Many of these people do not work but still receive all the social assistance and free services and by begging have the potential to earn more than a doctor.
- Bear in mind that Cuba has not solved all of its social problems.

- Black market purchases are possible in Cuba, especially in Havana, where there are many cigar-selling rackets. It is highly recommended that you do not buy products on the black market in Cuba; if you are caught, there are serious consequences. This is especially true for illicit drugs. Please also consider that, ethically, you work against the Cuban system when you engage in these activities.

Getting There

Flights

- It is the responsibility of individual brigadistas to make their own way to and from Havana. **It is advisable to book early**, as flights at this time of year fill quickly. We received confirmed dates in May and as soon as this happens, they will be made available on our website.
- If your flight arrives on the day the Brigade begins brigadistas will be met by the ICAP staff at the arrivals gate at José Martí International Airport, Havana, and be taken to the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp (CIJAM). This is why it is important that we know the flight information for each brigadista.
- If time permits, you may change money at the airport **but there is a money exchange at the camp that will be waiting for us to arrive for those who need it** so we encourage you to use this service. **You can NOT change Australian or New Zealand currency in Cuba so enter with either Euros, Canadian dollars or Mexican Pesos.**
- For those who arrive in Cuba prior to Day 1 of the programme you need to meet at the main ICAP building Number 301, Calle17 between H & I, Vedado, Havana (Calle = Street) at a time you will be advised. It is normally around 1pm. The National Coordinator will let you know closer to the date. You need to have **accommodation organised prior to arriving** in Cuba & notify the National Coordinator of the details.
- There are a few points to consider when booking your flights. One is whether there are overnight stays in the flight plan, which incur extra hotel and/or transfer costs. However, overnight stays can be beneficial, to give time to get over the possibly serious jetlag when you arrive in Cuba. Second, flights via the US run the risk of unwanted and overzealous attention from US immigration and customs officials and for that reason some Brigadistas prefer other routes. There are also direct flights to Cuba from Santiago de Chile & Buenos Aires plus numerous European cities such as Paris, Madrid & Stuttgart. There are now flights from China to Cuba.
- To find flights to Cuba, please visit a travel agent, or try airline websites or flight comparison websites (for example, www.webjet.com.au). Please note that, due to the blockade imposed by the USA, Cuban cities cannot be designated as destinations in some flight comparison sites, however, it is easy to put your second last destination in (popular ones are Mexico City, Cancun or Toronto) and then visit individual airline websites (such as www.cubana.cu or www.aircanada.com) for direct flights from that city to Havana. Please contact your local coordinator for further advice if required.

Visas

A Tourist Visa is required to enter Cuba. The visa is totally removable from your passport and may be kept separate at all times. This is important if you intend to travel through the USA before or after your time in Cuba. For more information on visas, the Consulate can be contacted on (02) 6286 8770 or at asiscuba@cubaus.net. Their office address is 1, Gerogery Place, O'Malley, ACT, 2606.

Travel Insurance

Comprehensive travel insurance is compulsory for everyone taking part in the brigade to Cuba. The Government of Cuba has announced that travellers will have to present proof of health insurance in order to enter the country. Upon arrival, travellers may be required to present an insurance policy, insurance certificate, or medical assistance card valid for the period of their stay in Cuba. Those who do not have proof of insurance coverage may be required to obtain health insurance from a Cuban insurance company when they arrive. Your travel insurance policy must cover you for the duration of the trip, and to be effective must provide cover from the day you depart Australia until the day you return. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, you must arrange to be covered for these conditions as well. This may involve the payment of an extra premium. Your participation in the brigade assumes that you are fit and well enough to make the long journey to Cuba and to participate fully.

Luggage

Please make sure that all luggage is labelled inside and out. Have a telephone contact number in Australia inside your case and a stick-on label is a good idea, as luggage can occasionally get lost. Check your airlines' luggage limits before leaving, as there are restrictions on the size, weight and number of bags.

Arriving in Havana

Cuban immigration is thorough and you may be asked many questions followed by a warm welcoming smile. For your information:-

- You are travelling to Cuba as a member of La Brigada Cruz del Sur (The Southern Cross Brigade) organised by the

Australia/New Zealand Cuba Friendship Societies in association with ICAP who will be at the airport to pick up the group

- You are not in Cuba for a holiday, but as part of a solidarity brigade
- Complete your arrival card accurately and present it at immigration with your passport, visa and return ticket.

Time Difference

There will be a sixteen hour time difference between Havana and Sydney/Melbourne, so expect some jet lag during the first days. Drink plenty of water on the way to Cuba. If possible, stretch and walk around the plane.

What to Bring

Personal Items

- You will need comfortable everyday clothes for most of the time and it is a good idea to take some warmer clothes, such as pants, a jumper and a light rain jacket. It is important to remember that it is winter in Cuba when the brigade is there, and while the Caribbean weather can be quite warm, there are also occasional cold fronts and nights and early mornings can also be cool. In January in Havana, the average daily temperature is 18°C (14°C min – 24°C max) and average rainfall is 64mm.
 - There are a few 'special occasions', such as a gala performance by the Cuban National Ballet in the GranTeatro. It is appropriate to have a smarter outfit for these occasions, such as a nice top or shirt and a reasonable pair of shoes.
 - The group also participates in some agricultural activities, which require clothes that can get dirty and damaged by the red Havana soil. A pair of sturdy shoes and a hat is also highly recommended (Note: as part of the Brigade you will be supplied with a Brigade cap & T-shirt).
 - **You will also be asked to carry some additional T-shirts & hats to be given to workers in the camp & guest speakers etc in Cuba. These need to be passed on to the Group Leader for distribution on arrival at CIJAM** (The Campamento)
 - Washing supplies are necessary, as there is only hand washing facilities at the camp. Take pegs for the clothes lines as there are never enough. Some extra line (such as an elastic or nylon line) may be useful if there are a large number of Brigadistas in the camp, however, you can purchase nylon clothes lines in local shops. Some plugs will come in handy. Soap powder, soap & shampoo are available at the camp shop but you may chose to bring some with you. You can purchase buckets in Cuba. You may wish to pack a 110volt immersion water heater but you will need an International adaptor to go with it.
 - You may wish to donate all these items to the camp on departure to save you having to carry them home. The Cuban workers appreciate these.
 - It is fine to bring cameras and other electronic equipment with you but be mindful of their security. Don't rely on being able to buy camera batteries or chips in Cuba. **Remember an International adaptor** for recharging.
 - Bringing some toiletries & **all your prescription medications** is still advisable, as in Cuba there are sometimes shortages of commodities which we take for granted. You can now buy paracetamol in the local chemists or get some from the nurse in the camp. The shop in the camp usually has toiletries for sale, and on arrival at the camp you will be given a roll of toilet paper and a bar of soap. Extra is available in the Camp shop. It pays to take toilet paper with you for use during free time in Havana & other towns as generally toilet paper is not provided in public toilets.

See the packing list at the end of this document for further details.

Donations

Any non-money donations you can bring are very welcome. Also, any clothes and items that you want to leave when the brigade ends are welcome, especially any shoes or boots. These are handed in to the head of the camp by the Brigade Leader to be distributed appropriately. Small gifts to be given as tokens of appreciation to speakers and people that you and the Brigade meet are also a good idea (for example toy kangaroos and koalas are popular as are other items of 'Australiana' if possible seek out items Made in Australia).

Money

• Cuba is a safe country in which to travel, however, it is a poor country and so, as anywhere, blatant displays of wealth are not a good idea.

- For money to use while on the brigade (for food, drinks, optional activities, souvenirs etc) and for your own travels:-

CASH IS THE BEST IDEA. Money is best brought in **Canadian dollars, Euros, Pounds Sterling or Mexican Pesos.**

- **Do not take US dollars, as these attract an 11% changing fee, as a result of the US blockade.**

Australian & NZ dollars cannot be exchanged anywhere on the island.

• Cuba has a dual currency system. The local currency is National Money, which is valued at about 24 pesos to the US dollar. Visitors will not usually use this currency. Cuba is moving towards a single currency system and many shops now accept both currencies. Obviously the smaller of the two prices displayed is CUC.

- The Cuban Convertible (CUC) is the currency used by tourists, and the CUC is pinned one for one to the US dollar.
- There is a money exchange at the camp, at the airport, banks or some places in Havana, such as in big hotels.
- *Do not change money in the streets* as quite apart from not being legal you may end up getting ripped off and given National

Money.

• When leaving, be sure to exchange all of your CUCs as it is not possible to exchange CUCs outside of Cuba. **There are money exchanges in the departure lounge once you go through customs.**

• The Departure Tax no longer applies as it is now included in your airfare.

• **The US blockade of Cuba, which is still firmly in place, has a big impact. Debit cards and Cash Cards, despite what the bank will tell you generally do not work in Cuba, and since May 2014 Australian banks will not allow you to transfer money from Australia to Cuba** because our banks are now majority owned by US Companies & therefore come under US law & thus the Blockade. Credit cards are not used in the same way as in other countries. They can only be used in some circumstances, **in most cases you will need to pay cash.**

- Credit cards issued by American financial institutions, such as American Express cards, are not accepted.

*Credit cards are **only sometimes** accepted at major establishments,* but payments are generally in cash in Convertible Pesos. **Private restaurants (paladares) and private guest houses (casas particulares) do not accept credit cards of any kind.**

- Credit card cash advances (in CUCs) may be obtained at ATM's, banks, hotels, or Cadeca exchange houses.

ATMs are outside most banks at major provincial cities, but the key to using them is to *check what denomination notes* they issue. As Cuba is a poor country some ATMs only issue 1 or 3 Peso Convertible notes, so only a very small withdrawal amount will be accepted from these machines, leaving some thinking they do not work. There are plenty that issue 5 or 10 Peso notes, and some ATM's outside large banks in Havana issue 20 or 50 peso CUC notes. Many banks in the rural areas, such as Caimito near the camp have a card machine inside with one of the tellers.

- **Leave copies of your card numbers with a family member in case of emergency.**

THE ONLY CARD THAT WORKS CONSISTENTLY TO WITHDRAW CASH IN CUBA IS A VISA CREDIT CARD.

- A credit card is good as a backup considering most people have at least one, especially if you are spending more time in Cuba as a tourist, or going to another country. For more information, visit the Canadian Government site, www.voyage.gc.ca and click on the Cuba Travel Report.

- That said, **we recommend that Brigadistas change money on entry into Cuba** (at the airport or at CIJAM) **sufficient to last them over the New Year's period at least**, if not for the duration of the Brigade **& NOT rely on trying to use cards of any form as you may not have access to these facilities.** The Brigade programme cannot be changed to allow you time to find somewhere to exchange money. The camp has a Security room where valuables can be kept.

The Camp

Brigadistas will spend a good portion of the program staying at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp (CIJAM), which is located near the town of Caimito, 45/50 km or a one hour drive out of Havana. The camp can hold about 250 people, and other brigades will be staying there at the same time as the Southern Cross brigade - the Nordic Brigade when one arrives and the Latin American Brigade after us. It is important to emphasise that the camp is not a five-star hotel or even a one-star hotel! There may be interruptions to the water and electricity supply. However, don't let this put you off. *View it as a way of experiencing what life is like for the average Cuban.* Hot water is available in accommodation when you travel to other venues. Panic not...You will survive! Brigadistas from all round the world have and the Southern Cross Brigade is now in its 34th year. By the end of the Brigade you'll miss the camp life.

Dorms

The dorms are basic concrete brick construction and the rooms are shared and single sex, with each dorm room holding up to four + people. **Blankets, sheets and pillows and pillow cases are provided. You will need to bring a towel.**

People of the same family and gender are normally put in the same room. If there is space in the camp couples usually will be able to have a room to themselves but this is not guaranteed as it is dependent on the number of Brigadistas in the camp.

Food

The food at the camp is served in a canteen style, with three meals provided each day. Food is basic, but will meet all your daily nutrition needs. There is no choice of menu. A light breakfast of fruit juice, bread, eggs on occasion, coffee and hot milk or yoghurt is provided. For lunch and the evening meal there is fresh fruit and salad and an emphasis on rice, beans, yucca & malanga. They also serve beef, pork, chicken and some fish. It is safe to eat all the food at the camp, including the fresh fruit and vegetables. It is not recommended to drink the tap water in the camp. However, there is a treated drinking water dispenser in the canteen and also one near the bar, or to play it safe buy bottled water.

The camp has a bar which sells food and drinks. This is where Brigadistas can buy Cubanita coffee, pizzas, alcohol, soft drinks and bottled water at highly reasonable prices; usually an item is 1CUC or less. The camp bar will also supply you with hot water, so it's worth taking your own mug, tea, coffee, tube of milk and sugar. You may want to bring some extra food; please see the packing list at the end of this document.

If you are vegetarian please indicate on the registration form at the end of this document.

Bathrooms and Washing Facilities

The facilities at the camp are very basic. It is important to know that **NO toilet paper is to be thrown into the toilet at any time.** This is because the sewerage and pipe system is different to ours and cannot flush paper or products down. Bins are provided in each cubicle to throw away toilet paper etc. If toilet paper is flushed down, the toilets will become blocked and un-usable. Having all the toilets blocked is a far less desirable situation than the effort of putting toilet paper in the bins in the first place. If you throw paper in the bowl by accident (force of habit) please hook it out yourself. Don't expect others to do it or worse still try to flush it away. It will block the entire system. The showers are cold.

There are troughs outside the showers for washing clothes. That said, having a bucket of some kind is useful as it means you'll need less water. Keith, who was the Leader last year, is purchasing some for general usage. It may be advisable to bring plugs. A small scrubbing brush is useful for trying to get rid of the red dirt from clothes after working in the fields.

Camp Life

In the Camp, night time activities will include dancing lessons with professional teachers, and chances to socialise with brigade members and with the Cuban staff from the camp. At the camp, there is usually some overlap in Brigades from other countries in particular the Nordic Brigade who are at the end of their Brigade.

There is also a library open at specific times where you can read and borrow books on Cuba, Cuban history and politics, or newspapers and magazines, there are also a number of books in English. Donations of unwanted books are appreciated to add to the library collection.

Be prepared to offer your skills (singing, dancing, miming, etc) at the Australia/New Zealand night, which is a show that the Southern Cross brigadistas put on for the staff and their families at the camp. **Come prepared** with a particular focus on Australian/New Zealand flags, themes, songs, words, music, poems, etc for this evening, as well as props, CD music or costumes that you may need for the night's entertainment. The brigadistas will also put dinner on, so bring any quintessential recipes that you think will be makeable in Cuba (with limited ingredients & utensils).

The Camp Shop

There is a small shop at the camp where you can buy personal items, such as soap, shampoo, detergent and toilet paper, as well as gifts for friends and family, such as slogan t-shirts, Havana Club rum and Cubita coffee. They also sell biscuits, chocolates, towels, postcards, cigarettes and a small selection of books. T-shirts and bottles of Havana Club rum are cheaper at the camp than in the shops in Havana.

Valuables

The camp has a secure place to keep valuables. Money, important documents and other valuables are recorded and signed in by the Brigadista and the security officer on a receipt that enables you to access your things, before the valuables are secured. You should be aware that once in the safe, valuables can only be accessed at certain times of the day, so you will need to ensure that you keep enough money on your person for a few days at a time.

Stealing from the camp is rare especially as there are security guards on duty 24/7. Missing items usually turn up either where the Brigadista left them or in the case of clothes another Brigadista may have grabbed items off the line by mistake. However, do not leave items on the bus at night and try to take clothes off the lines at night and don't leave valuables lying around in your room.

Money Exchange

In 2014 a money exchange was set up in an office at the camp for the convenience of Brigadistas, and is open when there are brigades there to avoid having to go to the bank in Caimito, or looking for a Cadeca when in Havana or during excursions to other larger cities.

Electricity

Cuba's power output is 110 volts (Australia and New Zealand use 220V). Because Cuba uses a lower voltage, it is safe to put our appliances in Cuban sockets, battery charger transformers will mostly operate the same, but other appliances will not work. **Most hotels, casas and in the camp itself do have some plugs which are 220 volts.**

You will need an adaptor, however, to convert Australia/New Zealand plugs to Cuban sockets, which are most commonly in the North American style double flat prong, but can also be in the European round pronged style. Many sockets take both of these types. **International adaptors can be very handy.**

Phone, Computer and Internet Access in the Camp and in Cuba

- Internet access is quite restricted in Cuba and is expensive. This is because Cuba is unable to use the submarine cable to the USA to connect to the global network, and so they have to use satellite, and a cable to Venezuela for international phone and internet, which is less effective and more expensive. It is easiest to tell family and friends to expect limited contact from you during your time in Cuba.

- There is an internet room at the camp with 5 terminals, access speed is slow and when other Brigades are at the camp a long waiting line can develop. For this reason please limit your usage to short sessions to give others the chance to access the internet.

- There are also a small number of pay phones at the camp with instructions in English on how to call overseas, purchase - phone cards from the camp shop or an ETECSA outlet. The best bet in case the camp shop runs out is to buy a 10 or 20 CUC card and some recharge cards from an ETECSA shop, the airport or private vendors.

Make sure it is in convertible pesos (CUC) and not national money, and it is for making calls and not a mobile phone recharge card. Cuban mobile phones work on a pre paid basis.

- There is internet access in Havana, usually in the bigger hotels and the cost per hour is 10CUCs. The national telephone provider, ETECSA offices, have cheaper internet service for about 4CUC, but there are sometimes queues for this service.

- An increasing number of locations throughout Cuba now have Wi-Fi, but a NAUTA scratch card from an ETECSA shop is needed to access it. This costs \$2 per hour, and the locations are easy to find with people sitting about with their laptops and cell phones.

Contacting Brigadistas while they are in Cuba

Please note **there is no Australian or New Zealand Embassy** in Cuba (the nearest Embassy for Australians is in Mexico City), however, the Canadian Embassy in Havana deals with Australian matters in Cuba.

Our contact in Cuba is ICAP. This organisation acts as host to Brigadistas during the time of the Brigade.

Odalys is the ICAP Director Asia & Oceania. Her email is director.dao@icap.cu.

The Asia office of ICAP is Street I no. 304 between 17 and 15 Streets, Havana. The phone number is 7838 2430.

The camp, Campamento Internacional Julio Antonio Mella (CIJAM), is contactable by phone and fax on 047319232, 047 319343, or 047 319200. **Please only use these facilities for emergencies & not just if your family wants to chat or know**

how you're getting along on the Brigade.

Health and Hygiene

Cuba is a healthy nation and it is unlikely that brigadistas will encounter any major health problems. Yellow fever, polio, malaria and diphtheria have been eradicated, while infectious diseases, including meningitis and tuberculosis, are rare. Health care in Cuba is of high quality. There is a doctor and nurse at the camp and you are encouraged to visit the medical centre over any concern and not self diagnose or self medicate. This service is free to brigadistas.

However, some medications are in short supply, due to the lack of free trade in pharmaceuticals because of the economic blockade imposed by the USA.

It is *strongly recommended* that you bring any medications from home that you may need during your stay, including:-

- Sufficient prescription medications for the duration of your journey overseas.
- A 'stopper' for diarrhoea, (Gastrostop or Loperamide)
- Antibiotics for both bladder/urinary tract infections and bowel infections
- Motion sickness tablets
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- An antibacterial hand sanitiser, to wash your hands when there is no soap and water.

While mosquito born diseases are rare, it is always best to avoid being bitten. Please be aware of signs of dehydration, including leg cramps, exhaustion, dizziness, headaches, swollen legs, puffy or dry skin, memory loss and lack of concentration. Any medication that you do not use will be gladly accepted by the camp medical staff for use in the community.

- If you will be carrying special medication for personal use, a letter from your doctor explaining your condition and treatment is useful in case you need treatment while you are away.
 - **Before departure, attend to any dental problems and if you wear glasses, bring a spare pair if you have one.**
 - Please note that vaccinations are very difficult to obtain in Cuba. Consider organising vaccinations for Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Tetanus and Typhoid and, if you intend to travel to other countries, further vaccinations may be advisable.
 - *Remember if you're travelling via Panama to have your yellow fever jabs **before leaving Australia**.* Carry a record of your vaccinations with you. **If you arrive in Cuba from a country with yellow fever, you must show a vaccination certificate.**
- **General Travel Advice** When eating, avoid poorly cooked food, food that has been washed with unclean water and food that has been standing unrefrigerated for a long time. All travellers should take the following precautions, no matter the destination:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water or use an antibacterial hand sanitiser if necessary.
 - Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travellers, walk and drive defensively. Avoid travel at night if possible and always use seat belts.
 - Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Do not eat or drink dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurised.
 - Only eat thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember outside the camp: boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it.
 - Never eat undercooked ground beef and poultry, raw eggs and unpasteurised dairy products. Raw shellfish is particularly dangerous to anyone who has liver disease or a compromised immune system.

Before leaving, it is recommended that you discuss health concerns with your doctor, as well as contact a Traveller's Medical and Vaccination Centre for advice.

The Itinerary

Please print out a copy to take with you.

It is important to understand that Brigadistas are involved with the group not merely as a holiday, but in solidarity with the Cuban people and their revolution. They should be aware that their conduct reflects on the Cuba Friendship Societies in Australia and New Zealand and that they act as cultural representatives of their countries.

BRIGADISTAS ARE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW THE ITINERARY OF THE GROUP & this means being punctual so others aren't inconvenienced. Other arrangements may be made in special circumstances only. The purpose of the brigade is to participate with the group in the program, as set out by the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People (ICAP). It is important to know that many of the Brigade activities involve talks, presentations and Q&A sessions, often in Spanish with English translation. **Make sure if you are hard of hearing that you wear a functioning hearing aid.** It is disrespectful to guest speakers and a distraction for other Brigadistas when people constantly require clarification of what has been said, owing to poor hearing. Also **be considerate of others** and try not to dominate question and answer sessions. Everyone deserves a chance to speak. **Especially do not put forward your personal viewpoint as if it represents the rest of the Brigade.** Remember that you are an ambassador for your country & as such you need to be diplomatic. You are on the Brigade to learn about Cuba not to try to impose your viewpoint or to promote your particular political views. Please note that **smoking is not allowed in lecture halls or in the buses.**

Free Time

There is usually free time in the itinerary in which brigadistas may leave the camp if they wish, often to go into Havana. A taxi into Havana costs about 25 to 40CUC, however if three or four brigadistas share, this brings the price right down. When at the camp, a telephonist will call a taxi for you if you go to the *Telefono* room. Often you can organise with the driver to bring you back to the camp as well and get a slightly lower price.

When taking a taxi ensure that you agree on the price before getting in.

If there is a meter usually it is in National Money, so is rarely turned on for tourists.

When in Havana, it is easier to get taxis outside tourist hotels, but they are usually more expensive.

Free time can also be spent in the library.

The nearest village to the camp is Guayabal, about half an hour's walk away.

Caimito is another 5 or 6 kilometres further on.

There are some bicycles in the camp that you may borrow, but are for daylight hours only.

Voluntary Work

This work is really a token contribution and is a chance to meet Cuban workers and get out in the garden and the fields.

The group will do agricultural work for a few days in the farming cooperatives that surround the camp. Past work activities have included:- picking oranges; pruning orange trees, papaya & banana palms; picking beans; planting guavas; harvesting yucca; picking tomatoes; harvesting sweet potatoes and cutting weeds with machetes. Brigade members will only be asked to do work that is appropriate and that they feel comfortable with but we encourage you to participate to the best of your ability. Gentler alternatives can be found for those who are less able, so that they can still contribute.

Tradesmen please bring as many tools etc as you can to assist where possible around the camp. Whilst tools are available in Cuba they are expensive for locals to buy & having time to buy them whilst on the Brigade is sometimes problematic for Brigadistas.

DVD's

For those who wish to buy documentaries or movies on DVD's, Cuba uses zone 4 the same as Australia.

Independent Travel in Cuba

Some brigadistas choose to travel independently in Cuba, **it is recommended to do this after the Brigade** rather than before so you are more knowledgeable of Cuban reality and will enjoy the experience much more, with less possibility of problems. Individual tourists should consider the following:-

Tourism

Tourism in Cuba is a venture set up by the Cuban government to make money. While tourism is very reasonably priced by world standards, being a tourist in Cuba is not as cheap as in the rest of Latin America, and options such as backpacking do not really exist as they do in other countries.

Visa

Your visa must be valid for the entire time that you wish to stay in Cuba. **Tourist Visas are valid for 30 days from date of entry into Cuba.** They can be renewed at the Department of Immigration in Havana and also in other provincial cities for an additional 30 days. You need to buy special stamps at a bank first for 25CUC, & show your travel insurance certificate or receipt, your visa, passport and receipt from your accommodation in order to renew your visa.

Food

It must be pointed out that food may not be the highlight of your trip. In the larger cities there are lots of options for meals, hotels, casa particulares (B+B's), and state run and private restaurants (paladares), some of which are very good. In the country and out of the way places there will be less options, however, with the changes to the Cuban economy private cafes and restaurants are increasing in number all over the island.

Accommodation

You can spend as much as you like on accommodation, however, the options on a Tourist Visa are a hotel or a licensed Casa Particular, private homes that have a licence to lodge tourists, whose prices vary from \$20 to \$40 a night (about 30 CUC). On a Tourist Visa it is not legal to stay in a private home, a different type of visa is required, a Family Visa.

The hotel prices vary between 5 star at the Hotel Nacional to some basic hotels that are \$20 to \$30 a night with breakfast. Slightly more for a double.

Some economical hotels are the Lido, Caribbean and Lincoln. For slightly more the Hotel Park View is near the Museum of the Revolution. The Hotels Vedado or Paseo for about \$40 are in a good location.

Transport

Most Cubans use public transport, bicycles or their feet. For tourists, the options are a little wider. Within urban areas, local bus services are very overcrowded. Usually this means tourists take the option of taxis.

For travel between different parts of Cuba, the public transport is much better. The bus and train services are cheap, clean and fairly reliable. A bus or train ticket from Havana to Santiago (1000km; about Sydney to Melbourne) costs about 30CUCs each way. An internal flight with Cubana de Avacion costs about 90CUCs for the same trip.

Hire cars are a popular option for tourists and are fairly widely available. In Cuba, people drive on the right hand side of the road. The road system in Cuba is generally good, however, road signage is low. An international driver's permit is required to hire a car. The price of a car starts at about 60CUCs per day. While road conditions can be severely affected by hurricanes **the Brigade does not take place during the hurricane season.** Try to avoid night driving as roads are often not well lit.

This information is only a rough guide. Anybody planning to travel independently should purchase a recent travel guide, such as the Lonely Planet, and visit the Cuban Government Tourism website at www.cubatransel.cu.

Contacts

If you have any questions, please contact –

The Australian National Coordinator

Rhonda Andrews ~ bowgadabird1@hotmail.com ~ (08) 9247 2731

or your closest coordinator:

Adelaide	Tamara Otello	tamaraotello@gmail.com	0418 855 574
Albury-Wodonga	Peter Hood	phood4@bigpond.com	0400 346 585
	Fred Sergent	sartan9@yahoo.com.au	(03) 5741 0002
Bendigo	Gayle Cameron	camero@iprimus.com.au	0419 332 659
Brisbane	Debra McLoughlin	dmclough@netspace.net.au	0410 727 094
Canberra	Glenda James	meeand@iinet.net.au	0421 876 869
Hobart	Ro Dallow	rdallow@iinet.net.au	(03) 6234 6068
	Wishes Goodearth	w.goodearth@hotmail.com	(03) 6381 5152
Darwin	Miguel Tovar Valencia	migueltovarvalencia@gmail.com	0466 392 512
Melbourne	Maree Dellora	delloram@hotmail.com	(03) 9478 9473
Newcastle	Kate Ferguson	katelind@tpg.com.au	(02) 4969 3898
Perth	Lorena Trigo	lorena.lst@hotmail.com	0439 525 472
Sydney	Maria Hilario	zamora1612@live.com	0431 275 434
Sydney West	Hugo Nardini	hnardini@bigpond.net.au	(02) 9822 5891

The NZ Coordinator

Warren Brewer ~ cubafsnz@gmail.com ~ (02) 7226 9950 / (03) 328 9580

Or your closest coordinator:

Auckland	Karen Davis	karendavis700@gmail.com	(09) 250 2660
Napier	Evaristo Navarrete	navagas7@gmail.com	
	Gael Donald	gael.d@clear.net.nz	(09) 378 9538
South Island	Paul Maunder	wkcultur@ihug.co.nz	(03) 732 4010

How to reserve a place on the Brigade

- **Ring or email the National Coordinator, Rhonda Andrews, and register your interest.** Leave a message & phone number if you get message bank & we will phone you back.
- Arrange flights and appropriate travel insurance.
- Complete the booking form provided and send to the National Coordinator
 - together with a Bank Cheque for Aust. \$250. Cut-off date 31st October but **you need to have contacted the Coordinator before then**
 - addressed to ACFS BRIGADE, 74 Gossamer Avenue, Mirrabooka. 6061 W.A.
 - If paying via internet banking please ensure you give details (e.g. Susan Jones ACFS BRIGADE). Account details are as follows
BSB: 06 6130, ACC: 10316270, ACC NAME: ACFS BRIGADE
- Apply for a visa with the brigade-appropriate form at the end of this document.

Please book early!!

In previous years people have missed out because of the unavailability of airline seats, owing to the usual heavy Christmas holiday demand.

At the time of printing, all information in this document is correct to the best of our knowledge.

Suggested checklist for packing

- Casual clothes
- One warm outfit including warm jumper
- One smart casual outfit (e.g. for the ballet)
- Raincoat/umbrella
- A jumper or a wind-proof jacket
- Long-sleeved shirts, sun hat, high factor sunscreen for voluntary work
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Waterproof boots (rubber) or old shoes or boots for field work – they will get dirty!
- Bathers (goggles – opt.)
- Spare glasses if you have them
- Sunglasses
- Working gloves, protective eyewear
- Functioning Hearing Aid (if hard of hearing)
- Toiletries – e.g. soap, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, razor blades, sunscreen
- Medications – see section on Health and Hygiene above
- Toilet paper and handkerchiefs/tissues
- Hygienic wipes (e.g. Wet Ones), Hand Sanitiser
- Band-Aids
- Sanitary products – e.g. tampons (you will not find these products easily available)
- A towel (pillowcase, sheets, pillows and blankets are provided)
- Summer sleeping bag light/inexpensive (optional)
- Electrical adaptor for United States (Cuba's electrical sockets are mostly identical) or better still an International adaptor, as some plugs are the round European type
- Washing powder or soap, clothes pegs, travel clothes line, some plastic buckets will be provided for use
- Camera equipment, e.g. batteries, chips etc
- Flight socks, ear plugs, a travel pillow (blow up ones take minimal space) and an eye mask for the plane
- Earplugs are essential if you are worried by noise. In the camp, there can be loud music and dancing at night until the early hours of the morning
- Money belt
- A water bottle
- A torch
- Cubans normally eat a light breakfast (the Camp usually serves milk or yoghurt, eggs, a bread roll and coffee, most of the time without butter), so take extra food if you wish (e.g. jam, vegemite, dry biscuits, dried fruit, nuts in sealed packets)
- If you are a tea drinker take tea bags
- Coffee desperados may wish to take a coffee plunger & their own cup, however, Cuban coffee can also be purchased cheaply from the camp bar.
- Some stainless steel cutlery for your own use which could be left at the Camp after the Brigade
- Guide book. *The Lonely Planet Guide to Cuba* has maps of Havana
- A copy of your travel insurance policy
- Pens and paper, address book and diary
- This Information Kit!!

- **A good sense of humour and desire to learn about Cuba**

Some suggestions for gifts for people you meet

Here are some gift ideas. You will be overwhelmed with the kindness and generosity of the Cubans you meet so be prepared! The items on this list have previously been greatly appreciated, as they are hard to find or expensive in Cuba:

- USBs are a really valuable item – capacity of 4GB or more is best. If previously owned, make sure they are wiped/formatted.
- Guitar strings
- English/Spanish dictionaries, English (travel) phrase book, picture books of Aus/NZ.
- Big box of Panadol or bottle of vitamins.
- Copy some of your favourite CDs to give away.
- Aus/NZ souvenirs; t-shirts, hats, linen tablecloths, tea-towels.
- Sets of coloured biros/pencils for the kids - gold and silver biros especially appreciated.
- Blu-tac and other office supplies.
- Solar powered calculators
- Union paraphernalia, such as t-shirts and caps.
- Quality dolls and toys (but not toys dependent on batteries as for a Cuban they are an expensive).
- Key-rings and other little trinkets, stickers.
- Toy kangaroos, koalas, emus, kiwis, etc.
- Photo of yourself and your family in Aus/NZ, your house, street, work place, local shop, school, etc - helps with the conversation if your Spanish isn't too hot!
- Wall calendar with pictures of Aus/NZ.
- Maps of Australia/New Zealand/world to show where you come from and how you travelled.

Things to donate to the camp

The following items would be of invaluable use for the International Camp Julio Antonio Mella:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gardening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ secateurs ❖ pruning shears ❖ Work boots ❖ Gloves ❖ Mattocks/hoes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laundry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Scrubbing brushes ❖ Soap powder ❖ Scissors & cooking shears ❖ Pegs ❖ Clothes line | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Plastic grater, or metal if you can afford to carry the weight ❖ Mandoline style grater/slicer ❖ Potato peelers ❖ Vegie/cooks knives (don't leave them in your hand luggage!!!) ❖ Serving spoons ❖ Cooking shears ❖ Egg slices/spatulas ❖ Plastic mixing bowls ❖ Plastic chopping boards (the thin flexible type) ❖ Pot holders/oven cloths ❖ Dish cloths ❖ Tea towels |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carpentry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Saws ❖ Saw discs ❖ Planes ❖ Jack planes ❖ Drill bits ❖ Chisels ❖ Glass cutting tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Electric drills ❖ Screwdrivers ❖ Multimeters ❖ Drill bits for drilling metal ❖ Masonry bits ❖ Pliers | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plumbing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adjustable pliers/multi-grips in different sizes ❖ Adjustable spanners ❖ Faucets for basins & sinks ❖ PVC adhesive ❖ Silicon adhesive ❖ Silicon Tape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masonry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Grinder discs ❖ Tile cutters ❖ Computer (for stock control) | |

Websites to visit before going to Cuba

- www.cubaminrex.cu/informacion (DFAT, SPEECHES)
- www.cuba.cu/gobierno/djdiscursos/jindex.html (SPEECHES, GOVERNMENT)
- www.infocex.cu/cepec (COMMERCE, TRADE)
- www.postgrado.cu (EDUCATION)
- www.aduana.com (CUSTOMS)
- www.islagrande.com (CULTURE, TOURISM)
- www.lajiribilla.cu (CULTURE)
- www.cubasi.com (TOURISM)
- www.cubatransel.com (TOURISM)
- <http://embacuba.cubaminrex.cu/australiaing> (CUBAN CONSUL GENERAL)

Registration Form Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba 2018/2019

The information in this form must be the same as appears in your current passport.

Please print clearly in block letters.

Surname: Given Names:

Gender (please tick): M F Date of Birth:/...../.....

Nationality:

Passport Number: Expiry Date:/...../.....

Residential Address:

Street.....

State Postcode Country

Postal Address: (if same as residential address, write 'as above')

Street.....

State Postcode Country

Contact numbers:

Hm Wk Mb

Fax: Email (block letters not required)

Occupation: (If retired add prior occupations)

Level of Spanish language (please circle):

None	A few words	Basic	Moderate	Conversational	Fluent
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Special dietary requirements.....

Areas of expertise, skills, interest, hobbies, sporting, academic etc:

.....

.....
How did you find out about the Brigade? Please elaborate with details if possible to help us choose our most effective means of advertising for the future. Name of print media/ where you saw flyers etc.

E.g. Newspaper ad, magazine ad, radio, flyer at shopping centre/ library /uni, word of mouth

Depart. Date from Home Address _____ Depart. Date from Australia / NZ _____

Arrival Date (Jose Marti Airport, Havana) _____ Time ____:____ Flight # _____ From _____

Departure Date (Jose Marti Airport) _____ Time ____:____ Flight # _____ To _____

Is there anything you would particularly like to see or do in Cuba?

.....
.....

Please name any organisations with which you are affiliated:

.....

.....T-shirt size.....

Travel & Health Insurance

Company Name(Non- US).....Policy Type/Number.....

CODE OF CONDUCT

The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society and New Zealand Cuba Friendship Society's annual work/study brigade was established in 1984 to exchange political and cultural ideas with Cuba.

Brigadistas need to understand that this is not a holiday tour, but a tour in solidarity with the Cuban people and their revolution. Therefore they should be aware of their responsibilities as their conduct reflects on the Cuba Friendship Societies as a whole.

Brigadistas are expected to:

- understand and reflect Cuban culture
- participate in all brigade activities as scheduled by ICAP
- be punctual
- be respectful of other Brigadistas
- appreciate that they are guests of the Cuban people at the invitation of ICAP
- follow advice given by the Brigade Leader

In preparation for the brigade it is recommended that all participants join in the activities of their local Cuba Friendship Society branch beforehand if possible.

I have read and agree to abide by the Brigade's Code of Conduct.

Signature

Date/...../.....

Please return this form together with a bank cheque for \$AU250 payable to:-

ACFS Brigade, 74 Gossamer Avenue, MIRRABOOKA, 6061. W.A.

or

Send electronically

For internet banking, please pay to:-

BSB: 066130, Acc: 10316270, Acc name: ACFS BRIGADE.

Please ensure you identify the payment with your details and advise via email so that we can connect you payment with your registration.