



# SALSA SECRETS DANCE RETREAT HABANA, CUBA

## IMPORTANT INFO

•**Visas** - Visas will be designated by Salsa Secrets with airplane tickets. Visa will be granted under the condition "Support for the Cuban People". Upon arrival in Fort Lauderdale, each person will be responsible for paying \$50 for the Visa. You can pay with credit card. You will need your passport and airline ticket from FLL to HAV.

•**Customs in Cuba** - 1. Visa checkpoint - your photograph will be taken, passport stamped and visa checked; 2. Security checkpoint; 3. Customs - you will hand the white form to the customs agent (1/person); 4. Declaration - you will hand the blue form to the agent (1/family)

•**Customs in the US** - 1. Checkin Kiosk - you will scan your own passport and a photograph will be taken of you. You will receive a white receipt. 2. Customs - you will bring the blue form, white receipts and passports to the agent. He will ask you the purpose of your trip. Please say in support of the Cuban people, taking many hours of dance lessons and supporting only local industry. Please see our Purpose below for more details. 3. Second Checkpoint - Another security officer will check your white receipts and take them. 4. You will have to re-enter the airport through security (if you have checked bags, you will need to wait for them, then recheck them, then go through security).

•**Roommates** - Please make your selection for roommate prior to the trip and provide us with this information. If not provided, you will be assigned a roommate.

•**Currency** - It is advised that you exchange your currency to Euros before going to Cuba. Often banks need to order currency, so it would be wise to exchange American money to Euros 2 weeks before you depart. You will need \$400-\$500 Euros per person for expenses. American currency is exchangeable in Cuba, however a 10% fee on top of the exchange rate is required. In Cuba, you will exchange money at a Cadeca or Banco. In our neighborhood, the each are located one block away. The Cadeca is located at 368 Obispo Street. At the Cadeca, you simply wait in line for your turn outside the Cadeca. The Banco is located on Aguacate at the corner for O'Reilly. At the banco, you will need to state your purpose "money exchange - cambio dinero", take a number and sit, waiting for the number to flash on a screen. You should expect to spend at least one hour for money exchange. You will need your passport for each time you exchange money. Finally, you will want to change to CUC. In Cuba, there are two forms of currency CUC and pesos. Pesos are the currency of local people and are not widely used by foreigners, the exchange can be very complicated. CUC are similar in value to US dollars.

•**Accommodations** - Our case particular is located centrally in Habana Vieja on Villegas between (entre) Obrapria y Obispo. The accommodations are beautiful, traditional Cuban homes. There are several common living areas and a common kitchen. You will receive a key ring with keys to the outer building, your room and the safety deposit box in your room. Please note, it is important to shut the outdoor gate when you leave for safety, lock your door and place belongings like passports, cell phones and extra money in your safety deposit box. The rooms will have air conditioning, bedding, one towel per person, a fridge, a full bathroom with hot and cool water plumbing in the shower, and the safe. The housekeeping is very friendly and safe, however, they may tidy things you leave messy, for example, folding unfolded clothes or picking up things from the floor. Gratuities should be offered on the last day \$7-10 CUC per guest.

•**Food** - Breakfast is included in your trip and will be provided at your casa. Breakfast will include fresh juice, fresh fruit, eggs, ham, bread and butter. If you would not like to have breakfast due to dietary needs, please let us know in advance. Lunch and dinner will be on your own. There are many restaurants on Obispo, Mercaderes, y San Ignacio. In restaurants it is customary to tip 10%. Sometimes 10% is added to your bill, so be sure to have a look. There are also street vendors that sell churros, bread, pizza, sandwiches, croquets and other traditional Cuban street food. There are few grocery stores and markets, those that exist have very limited unprepared foods. Please bring appropriate snacks with you.

•**Water** - The water in Cuba is not safe to drink, even from the casas. Bottled water is available on every street corner, but prices vary from \$1-5 CUC. You should intend to drink a lot of water in Cuba as you will be dancing and walking a lot. Bottled water can be quite expensive. An alternative that we have used without any ill digestive side effects is to purchase a filtration system that removes bacteria from water. These can commonly be found on Amazon, Walmart, Target and camping stores for around \$25. Generally they are compact and easy to travel with. Bring one or two water bottles with you to dispense water into and you will have fresh water for the week.

•**Dance Lessons** - Dance lessons will be offered in two groups for the first 1.5 hours and one large group of Rueda de Casino for the next 1.5 hours. Limited private lessons in son and Cuban salsa will be available on a first come first serve basis. Privates will need to be paid in advance to us. We have hired the best dance instructors to fit the needs of you, the students of Salsa Secrets. They have learned to dance from their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. The dance means very much to them and they care much about offering high quality teaching. The instructors have been with us for two full weeks and we consider them to be family, as they have taken us in as part of theirs.



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•**Safety** - Cuba is generally a safe place as the government has very strict rules about weapons and misconduct. However, it is still recommended that you travel in groups of 2 at a minimum. It is recommended not to wear fancy or expensive jewelry while walking about in Cuba. Keep your belongings in your pocket or backpack. The greatest annoyance is hecklers and hustlers - they will approach you on the street asking you to take a taxi ride, pedi cab ride, tour of the city, buy crafts, walk you to your destination or beg for money. They are looking for an easy target to make a buck. It is best to not engage with them after firmly saying "no, gracias". They are respectful once you turn them down.

•**Transportation** - Transit will be provided to and from the airport. There are many forms of other transit in Cuba. Most everything you will wish to do is within walking distance of our casa particular. Local buses - cost very little - \$1 CUC to most locations. If you choose to use this form of transportation, we highly recommend you do the research ahead of time including route numbers, pick up times, cycles, etc. There are often long lines of locals waiting for the buses. Tour buses - the primary double decker tour bus appears to be government run and for \$10 CUC isn't worth the price in our opinion. The tour presentation was not clear and the sights presented were extremely limited and underwhelming. Old convertibles - These cars are the pride and joy of their owners and they cost a lot to fix up, so they are expensive, they will offer a tour of the city for around \$40 CUC which you can bargain down to \$25 in most cases. They often have little interest in simply giving you a ride somewhere, unless its one of the places these cars commonly go i/e habana vieja to hotel nacional which will cost about \$10 CUC. Yellow Cabs - run by the government, thus we can't recommend them. Peso cabs - our favorite, always a new experience and a new driver. They will generally take you anywhere in habana for \$3-5 CUC depending on where you want to go. The cars are definitely a bit more worn but have been safe and comfortable for us. Three wheeled cars - most guide books advise against using these as they are known to be a bit tippy. We've been for a ride in one and it was a thrill for just a short ride. There are also bicycle taxis and horse drawn carriages. The cost of these vary. We've found that it is generally so warm outside that it doesn't seem very appealing for us to ask a horse or human to work so hard.

•**Live Music and Dance** - There is live salsa, son and cha cha cha all over obispo street, find something you like, sit, listen and dance all you want. The musicians survive from tips, so be aware that if you spend a whole set with a band, it is courteous to tip them. Most places offer live music in the early afternoon until the evening at about 10pm. Bars do stay open late, until 1am in many places, from what we are told.

•**Wifi** - Wifi in Cuba is extremely limited. Wireless is also very slow. A wireless card must be used to access the internet and you can only use it at certain hotels. You will need to let us know ahead of time how many wifi cards you would like to purchase as we will do this for you. Wifi cards cost \$5 for one hour. The closest place to use your wifi card is at the Iberostar Parque Central. They are courteous to wifi users that are not guests of their establishment. The Iberostar is located at 267 Agramonte which is in the primary square where the capitol is located, just two blocks from our case.

•**Purchasing Art** - We recommend purchasing art at the Almacenes San Jose, located at the waterfront between San Ignacio and Cuba. This is where the legitimate painters like Chacon and Salazar display their work and sell it. Most often the artists have some negotiating room in their prices. You need to obtain a certificate for all art purchased (each individual painting requires a certificate) - the artists will know what this is when you ask. If you are planning to purchase a large quantity of art, you will need to look up the guidelines beyond these. In our travels, we have brought 2 large paintings back on each trip and had no problems, however, we did need to present the certificates.

•**Maps** - On our website, you will find maps that you can print and/or download that have the points of interest and necessity highlighted. Additionally, we found an app for iPhone called <http://maps.me> that allows you to not only access the map offline but also navigate. You will need to save Havana to your favorites before leaving for Cuba.

•**Language** - The primary language in Cuba is spanish. There are few fluent english speakers. You can get by without much spanish, but a little preparation could be helpful. On our website, you will find a conversational spanish cheat sheet that you can print and/or download. Additionally, we an offline spanish dictionary app called Spanish Dictionario by Dict Box which allows you to type a word in english or spanish and its translation. Another app by Dict Box that was extremely helpful was English Spanish Translate Offline. This app allows you to type a phrase in english with a spanish translation. The phrases are not always exactly what you are looking for but they may help you formulate a sentence.



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- **Packing List** - Our website has a comprehensive packing list that you can use to get ready for your trip.
- **Itinerary** - Our website includes a detailed itinerary of our trip in Cuba. The US government requires that we adhere to this itinerary while maintaining the purpose of our trip.
- **Alcohol and Tobacco** - Regarding usage in Cuba, there is great access to local alcohol and tobacco. If you are planning to bring tobacco and/or alcohol to the US, we ask that you review the guidelines carefully as they are constantly changing. Alcohol and tobacco for personal use must have a certificate/receipt. Please note that we cannot be responsible for what the Cuban security or American security allow you or disallow you to take with you. We have seen many many bottles of alcohol be taken on both ends. Regarding alcohol, we ask respectfully that you please do not drink during dance classes. Additionally, we ask that you follow all guidelines regarding smoking in our casa, which includes not smoking in the actual bedrooms.
- **Our purpose** - We are traveling to Havana, Cuba as a dance company in support of the Cuban people. We are staying at a casa particular for the duration of our trip and training with a local dance company, in Centro Habana for several hours each day. We are providing additional support by using local transport services and restaurants. The trip will serve as educational for us in dance and culture and support for Cuban residents. Additionally, we are hoping to fund a dance program for children through the local dance company in Havana. We are accepting donations and selling packages of photography cards from Cuba to raise money to support this cause.