

STATEMENT ON TRAVEL IN CUBA

Gary Markowski
Founder, Executive Director, Caribbean Conservation Trust

Dear Friends,

I wish to answer questions and concerns about recent news in Cuba regarding Hurricane Irma, the latest State Department Advisory, and Cuban Tourist Cards (visas):

1. Hurricane Irma: Havana is up and running, and your itinerary entirely avoids the Atlantic coast of Cuba. Cuba's Caribbean coast and western province, Pine del Rio, were relatively unaffected by hurricanes this season. In short, the trip itinerary for May/June 2018 will remain as is - there are no issues relative to storm damage in Havana that we are concerned about.

2. State Department Advisory: The State Department issued a warning based on sonic attacks that may have occurred at the US diplomatic residences in Havana. The reports detail months of exposure and specific locations all within Havana (Embassy officials are not allowed outside the Havana province). As our itineraries are not near the diplomatic residences and also spend the majority of the time outside of Havana, our conclusion is that we are not at risk. Travel to Cuba has been politicized for almost sixty years and this appears to be the latest iteration. Here is the source of the advisory: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/cuba-travel-warning.ht> and a NYT article on the subject: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/29/travel/cuba-state-department-warning-sonic-attacks> In addition, I urge you to pursue other news resources that describe the issue related to the advisory, and make your best effort to look at this issue logically. I also ask you to consider my opinion, which in short is that the advisory & eventual changes in Obama's Executive Orders that are still in effect from January of 2015, do not impact our programs. Considering that [all public opinion polls show that a majority in the USA want full, free, and open travel with Cuba](#), this advisory seems out of step with popular opinion and common sense. It is curious that this advisory lacks specificity and fails to identify any particular hotel(s) or residential areas in Havana. Instead, it covers all of Cuba! Compared to for example an August 2017 advisory warning U.S. citizens of violence in specific tourist areas of Mexico, the Cuba advisory is quite vague and over reaching.

The staff reduction at the US Embassy in Havana makes sense as a cautionary move until this issue is resolved. Any reference to a reduction in the embassy staff's capacity to process visas refers to U.S. visas required by Cuban nationals to visit the U.S. It has nothing to do with Cuban tourist cards, which U.S. citizens and other foreign visitors to Cuba require to visit Cuba.

3. Cuban tourist cards (visas): There are 3 options for pursuing these. Cuban tourist cards can only be acquired by ticketed passengers with flights between the U.S. and Cuba. Airline policies and prices for acquisition vary. Southwest Airlines protocols are:

- a) Order online and pay by credit card to have the document delivered to your home (\$ 75).
- b) Order online and pay by credit card and pick up the document while checking in at your departure gate for your direct flight to Havana (\$ 50).
- c) Purchase with cash or credit card at the departure gate for your direct flight to Havana (\$ 50).

We will advise you when we reach our minimum for running this tour, and determine whether a group flight from a U.S. city with direct flight to and from Cuba is our best option for traveling between the two countries.

Please be in touch if you have further questions or concerns.

Warm regards,

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