CUBA

Location

Cuba is also known as the Republica de Cuba and its capital, Habana, is located at 23°8N latitude and 82°23W longitude. Cuba is located in the Caribbean and is the largest of the Greater Antilles. It is the 15th largest Island of the world. Cuba land area covers 104,945 sq km, and is 1250km long and 191km wide at its widest point. Cuba has 750 miles of roads, is the size of Pennsylvania and it is composed of beautiful mix of plains, mountains ranges and 200 bays. Cuba is 144 km from Florida, 140 km from the Bahamas, 210 km from Cancun, and 146 km from Jamaica.

Geography

Cuba is a long and narrow Island surrounded by water and no point is farther than 80 km from the sea. The island is approximately 1,260 km east to west in length and its width is from 193 to 32km. Some bays and an island named Isla de la Juventud (Youth Island) are part of Cuba’s territory. Cuba is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the north and east, by the Caribbean Sea in the south and the Gulf of Mexico in the west. Cuba’s elevation is mostly low but it has some mountains that run from west to east, Sierra Maestra is the West Indies main mountains system which crosses through the south east. Cuba land has a limestone base on the west coast and is where the the Guanahacabibes Peninsula is also located. West of Havana, the Sierra de los Organos, and other mountain formation can be found in the center of the Island such as Sierra del Escambray, with Pico San Juan the eastern part of the island is mountainous and it is divided into the northern and southern ranges by the Guantanamo Valley. At the north
we find Sierra de Cristal, Sierra Nipe, Cuchillas de Toar and Sierra Purial South. In the valley we find Sierra Maestra, which has the highest peak known as Pico Turquino, Cuba has many other unusual areas which include, valleys and caves such as the Bellamar cave, famous for its crystalline formation. Near Matanza and La Havana the land becomes more level of low elevation. Cuba does not have large commercials rivers. The Cauto River is the longest with a length of 240 km but is only 75 km is navigable by small boats. Another curious river is the Yumuri because it has a circular diameter with a depression of 8 km, flat floors and steep walls of 150m. The north coast of Camagüey is full of unexploited beaches and caves.

Climate
The climate in Cuba is a subtropical climate with an average temperature of reaches 81ºF during the summer and 72ºF during the winter months with an average humidity of 80%. The rainy season is between May and October while the dry season is from November through April. Cuba, often called the "Pearl of the Antilles," has a subtropical trade wind climate, adequate rainfall, significant mineral resources, and a great amount of fertile land which makes it suitable for mechanized farming.

History
The Cuban flag was elaborated in Cuba in 1850 as their national symbol. Each color combined to represent different aspects of the Cuban solidiration; Red, white, and blue. Red represents the blood spelled during wars of independence; the blue stripes represents the way the island is divided; white stripes the strength of the ideas of the independent party, the red triangle means equality, freedom, brotherhood and at the
same time the blood lost in the wars of independence. The star symbolized absolute freedom.

Cuba was discovered by Christopher Columbus the 27th of October in 1492. Diego Velazquez conquered it in 1514 founding seven settlements of the Spanish crown. Before the Spanish arrived to Cuba, the Taino Indians agriculturist by nature, already lived on the Island. The Spaniards came to the Island to implement Christianity among the Indians and soon enslave them to work in agriculture. Spaniards brought with them many products and animals like horses and cattle, vegetables, fruits and diseases which slowly killed the native Indians since they had no resistance to the infections. In 1542 when little Indians were left and most were too ill to work (an estimated of 5000 survive from 100,000) the Spaniards started bringing African slaves to replace the Indians in their jobs. Africans preserved their culture and tribes and many of them still are practiced.

In 1762, the British colonies invaded Cuba bringing more slaves to the island and by 1820 Cuba was the world's largest sugar cane producer. In 1868, the first war for independence was launched. The Spanish then established control executing and placing rebels into concentration camps, reestablishing control over Cuba. Spain offered new home rules but the Cubans wanted nothing but full independence. The U.S. had a special interest in the island and on 1897-8 they anchored a warship (Jan 1898) in the Havana harbor which mysteriously exploded, causing thus the Spanish-American war. By December of 1898, the U.S. prevailed in the war and Spain as a gift gave to the US, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. The United States could not take over Cuba because of restricting laws which would not let them annex Cuba outright. Instead they
built buildings, schools and improved public health and left a governor in Cuba even though the US had no legal right. In 1903 they built a military base in Guantanamo Bay (that is still in operation today) becoming the only US legal right on the Island.

Cuba’s industries and farmland was owned mostly by US companies and by the end of 1920 Cubas became a place for prostitution, gambling and drinking. A rebellion that was quelled to President Gerardo Machado who was later overthrown by Sergeant Fulgencio Bastista who within a twenty years period was overthrown by a lawyer and the guerrillas of Fidel Castro. Batista fled to the Dominican republic taking with him $40 million dollars of governmental funds. Fidel Castro took power over Cuba, nationalized US owned petroleum refineries because they refuse to process Venezuelan Oil then the US cut all of Cubans sugar imports and Castro turn to the Soviet Union who helped him. The Soviet Union supplied them with food, support and nuclear weapons. Later the missles were sent back to the USSR and the US put an embargo on Cuba. The Cuban government along with Che Gevara started supporting guerillas in South America and the American government started to support the dictators in those countries. By 1970 Cuba limited themselves to only send doctors and technicians to those countries due to their economic ruin and in 1989 Russia withdrew its aids as Eastern Europe collapsed. The Cuban constitution was amended in 1991 and by 1993 a law was pass allowing Cubans to own and use US dollars. In 1994 foreign companies were allow to own and operate businesses which helped the Cuba’s economy.

Today many Cubans risks their lives through the wild and shark water to touch land in the US and become US citizens. They are supported by the wealthy Cuban exile communities in Miami, Florida. There is no expectation of reconciliation with Cuba and
the US any time soon, although sending back to Cuba, Elian Gonzalez in 1999, the boy who touched land and whose mother died before arriving in the US, might become part of a new way of reconciliation.

**Important dates**

**Public Holidays**
1 January - Liberation Day
1 May - Labor Day
25-27 July - Celebration of the National Rebellion
10 October – anniversary of the beginning of the Wars for Independence

**Commemorations**
January – Birth of Jose Marti Cuba’s National Hero
24 February – Anniversary of the beginning of the second War for Independence
8 March – International day of Women
13 March – Anniversary of the attack to the Presidential Palace of La Habana by a group of young revolutionaries who wanted to execute the dictator, Ernesto Batista while in the palace
19 April - Anniversary of the defeated mercenary invaders in the Cochino Bahia
30 July - Day of the Agonized Revolutionaries. The Cuban’s honor the memories of the youths that died in the wars against the Batista dictation during the Liberation War
8 October - Anniversary of the death of Camilo Cienfuegos
27 November - Commemoration of the executions of 8 medical students by the Spanish Colonial government 1871
7 December - Anniversary of the death in combat of Antonio Maceo relevant figure next to Jose Marti and Maximo Gomez from the Wars for Independence against the power of the Spanish Colonial government (last century)

**Historic dates**
Christopher Columbus discovers Cuba
1510 The beginning of the Spanish colonization by Diego Velazquez
1512 Baracoas foundation
1519 Habanas Foundation
1868 The beginning of the Wars for Independence
1902 Establishment of the Republic
1959 Triumph of the Revolution

Population

Cuba has a population of 11 million, of which, 7 million are in favor of Fidel’s regimen. 60% of the population is Spanish descendant, 22% are mix-race, 11% are from African descendant and 1% Chinese. Havana has a population of 2.2 million.

Currency

The Cuban Peso is the national currency although U.S. dollars had been accepted since 1993.

Education

Education in Cuba is free and compulsory till the ninth grade. Cuba has 2174 high schools and 47 colleges/universities/institutions. There is an average of one teacher for every 37 people. Education is Cuba’s priority on governmental concern. There are around 20,000 students from around the world attending beyond high school level institutions and half a million from Cuba studying under government scholarships. Most foreign students are from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There are many research and scientific studies going on in the island and centers with over 30,000 employees
Language

The language used by Cubans is Spanish.

Religion

The religion in Cuba it is mostly catholic with an average of 47% followed by protestant with a 4% and Santeria with 2%.

Agriculture

Cubas soil has plentiful rainfall. The soil is derived from limestone, that produces deep, fertile bright red soil (about 80% of the soil). Cien Fuegos has become the capital of agriculture, Ciego de Avila, located in the center of the Island is also one of the most suitable places for agriculture and animal husbandry.

Some of the products raised are tobacco, sugar canes, bananas, plantain, mangoes, lettuce, tomatoes, wood, rice, and beans.

They also breed sheep, goats, chicken and cattle.

Trade

Currently Cuba relies on tourism and biotechnology. A few decades ago Cuba used to rely mostly on Sugar cane production and exportation. The US invested a great amount of money in the island production of sugar when Fidel decided in 1959 to nationalize a large amount of agricultural, mines, and industrial firms. The US did not like this and put a partial embargo prohibiting the import of Cuban products to the US. The Cuban government claimed $1million US dollars in assets and the USSR offered Cuba benefits and better trades in exchange for sugar. Cuba relies on sugar export and when the markets started to fail in Europe, the USSR reduced their trade and also
reduced their aids. The economy has declined for almost 10 years and by 1990 they increased productivity, cut cost, and accepted foreign investment.

The trade and commerce is mostly with Europe, China, Mexico, and the South Mecor although there are trade with Islands of the Caribbean and other parts of the world. The US embargo closed the International Financial Institutions.

For the last three years, there has been commercial exchange with the E.U.

Food

Local food consists of rice and black beans, and when cooked together is called *Arroz con Moro*, Tamales which is corn pockets stuffed with meat, boiled to perfection. Picadillo, which is ground meat, seasoned and stew served with white rice, Ropa Vieja which is tender shredded beef, and stew served with white rice. This meat needs to be boiled for at least 2-3 hours and then stewed. A typical desert is *Dulce de Leche* which is condensed milk boiled in the can for approximately four hours and then cooled, opened and served. The staples are; however, are rice and black beans.

Landmarks

Plaza de la Revolución, Catedral de la Havana, Sierra Maestra east, Cordillera de los Organos in the west, and Sierra del Escambrai in central Cuba are landmarks.

There are no lethal animals in Cuba. There are 289 beaches in which smoking a fine Cuban cigar under a palm tree would be a delight. The Havana coast consists of sandy beaches and crystal clear waters, packed with hotels and tourists areas., The province of Varadero. At Cienega de Zapata just south of Matanzas, has low lands is used to commercially raise crocodrile. Iglesia Sagua which is under reconstruction is another place that should be visited, followed by Santuario el Cobre which contains beautiful
colonial architecture which is surrounded by green areas, located at the bottom of a big mountain. The Morro Castle is a museum in Havana and houses a maritime museum. It has beautiful skylines and information about Santeria and has performances periodically. The natural wildlife and plants of the island are exhibited at The Emilio Bacardi Moreau Museum in Santiago de Cuba.