



1225 Eye St. NW
Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005
+1 202-347-9203 x.417

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Rebekah Stewart
Phone: +1 202-347-9203 x.417
Email: rstewart@responsibletravel.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 23, 2018

State Department Reclassifies Cuba's Travel Advisory to Level 2, No Longer Recommending That Americans "Reconsider Travel"

Washington, DC – Today, the U.S. Department of State updated its travel advisory rating for Cuba from “Level 3: Reconsider Travel” to “Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution.” The move is welcomed by a coalition of U.S. tour operators and organizations that have seen educational exchanges between the U.S. and Cuba deeply hurt by the State Department’s level 3 classification. However, other measures are still in place, including a warning in the travel advisory to “avoid” the popular Hotel Nacional and Hotel Capri. The updated rating came as part of a mandatory six-month review of the Cuba travel advisory, which was last evaluated on March 2, 2018.

“We are pleased that the State Department has made this common-sense decision,” said Martha Honey, Executive Director of the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), which has coordinated the coalition’s advocacy work. “Cuba is one of the safest countries in the world, and people-to-people exchanges, which began to flourish under the Obama administration, ground almost to a halt when the travel restrictions were imposed last year.”

Ahead of the State Department’s review, the coalition sent a [letter](#) to the State Department advocating for this change to Cuba’s travel advisory. The group argued that the “Level 3: Reconsider Travel” rating was unwarranted given the realities of travel to Cuba and explained the travel advisory’s far-reaching negative impacts for the Cuban people as well as for U.S. travelers and travel businesses. For the first half of 2018, U.S. travel to Cuba – not including travel by Cuban Americans – declined by 23.6% compared to the same period in 2017. In a [survey](#) conducted by CREST in early 2018, 84% of U.S. tour operators cited the State Department’s travel advisory as the main reason for this drop in U.S. travel to Cuba.

“As travel professionals, we have seen firsthand the benefits of people-to-people travel to Cuba, which puts revenue directly into the hands of Cuban households while providing U.S. travelers with outstanding cultural and educational experiences...We are concerned about how the decline in U.S. travel to Cuba is hurting Cuban entrepreneurs and curtailing invaluable exchanges between American travelers and the Cuban people,” the coalition said in their letter to the State Department.

Cuba’s travel advisory rating was designated at “Level 3: Reconsider Travel” after U.S. embassy personnel in Havana were stricken with unexplained health ailments. However, as the coalition’s letter explains, there have been no confirmed cases of similar ailments among visitors to Cuba.

Today’s update to the Cuba travel advisory rating is a critical step forward for the Cuban people and recognizes the importance of educational and people-to-people travel. Kate Simpson, President of Academic Travel Abroad in Washington, DC notes, “This move on the part of the State Department, placing Cuba in the same category as most of Europe, should reassure American citizens that it is legal and safe to travel to this unique and compelling destination.”