



Center for Responsible Travel

Transforming the Way the World Travels

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Survey of U.S. Tour Operators and Other Service Providers to Cuba: Key Findings

In January and February of 2018, the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) reached out to 156 U.S. tour operators and other service providers that have previously offered or currently offer trips to Cuba. The following is a summary of the 42 responses received. Although some questions were not answered by every respondent, each question was answered by either all or a vast majority of the respondents.

Cuba Travel in Numbers

- There is a **marked difference in tourism statistics to Cuba between 2016 and the present**. In 2016, the tour operators surveyed sent an estimated 25,586 U.S. travelers to Cuba. In 2017, they sent 17,028 U.S. travelers to Cuba, a **33.5% decrease** from 2016. 66% of respondents reported **cancellations on Cuba trips** from the museums, universities, and other organizations with whom they partner in 2017 and 2018.
- **Bookings to Cuba went down and cancellations went up in the second half of 2017**, the same time frame that the State Department issued new warnings on travel to Cuba. **85% of respondents reported that they saw a greater decline in bookings/ increase in cancellations** in the second half of 2017 compared to the first half.
- Many tour operators surveyed **predicted fewer bookings for people-to-people travel to Cuba for 2018** than 2017 (85%).

Reports of Illnesses

- **No respondents received any confirmed reports of illnesses** experienced by their travelers to Cuba similar to those that affected U.S. Embassy staff.

Perceived Causes

- The main reasons that tour operators perceived for the decline were **the State Department travel advisories (84%) and the belief that the new U.S. policies make travel to Cuba illegal for U.S. citizens (75%)**. Other reasons included health concerns/fears about Cuba (56%) and safety concerns about Cuba (50%), and the fear of being subjected to unnecessary scrutiny by U.S. authorities upon return, regarding documentation or other requirements (37%).

Quotes for Attribution

- “Holbrook Travel offers programs in over 30 countries and focuses especially in Latin America. We’ve been operating in Cuba since the year 2000. Cuba remains one of the safest destinations in which we operate. The Level 3 travel status on the US State Department website should be

changed to better reflect the safety and risk status of the country. As it is, the Steve department website information is misleading. Many of these actions are causing a huge impact on the travel industry and my organization.”

- Andrea Holbrook, President & CEO, **Holbrook Travel**

- “There are many reasons why Congress should lift the embargo which only harms the people of US and Cuba, but from the perspective of an American business owner, it's very hard to live with the uncertainty that each new administration brings. Working in the Cuba travel industry has given my co-workers and I a way to support our families and have the flexibility to care for our children, and we also provide the same opportunities for Cubans to provide for their families in a way that their government cannot or does not. We have already been negatively impacted by the new administration's Cuba policy, and the misinformed reporting of it. We have had many cancellations and the inquiries were nothing but a trickle compared to previous years. It would be financially devastating for us, and many Americans and Cubans if relations continue to deteriorate to the point where travel was no longer legal.”
- Sarah Arizaga, Sales Manager, **Cuban Adventures USA**
- “Cuba remains as safe and amazing as ever and has unparalleled potential. During this transformational period in its history, it is in both US and Cuban interests for US government, business, and citizens to engage constructively and respectfully. There has never been a better time to visit and experience Cuba's rich cultural, historical, and natural beauty.”
- John Haffner President, **Cuba Trade and Travel**
- “Our company presently offers travel programs to 45 different international destinations, and Cuba is the destination that receives the highest rating for traveler satisfaction among returning travelers. It is very disturbing that because of political expediency, our business is being unjustly undermined. And even more unjust, the entrepreneurs in Cuba who have had the opportunity to meet Americans from every walk of life and have been able to open and grow the small private business ventures that we, as Americans, believe are the path to a better life, are now left without customers, because Americans are worried that visiting Cuba is somehow not legal. How ironic that the Prince of Business, President Trump, has put an arrow in the hearts of the young Cubans who have opened paladars, bed and breakfasts and boutiques in Cuba. More than 50 years of embargo have not had nearly the same impact on the Cuban people as the tsunami of curious Americans, meeting face to face with everyday Cubans, admiring their achievements, enjoying their music and culture and patronizing their businesses.”
- Peggy M. Goldman, President, **Friendly Planet Travel, Inc.**
- "At Access Trips we believe firmly in the power of cross-cultural connections to effect change. We are proud to have improved the lives and livelihood of our Cuban operations team of private citizens, as well as countless other private homeowners, restaurant operators, artists, and other craftspeople. Our business to Cuba has declined by approximately 75% since last year and we are no longer able to provide our local team with stable income. From what we see, the current US policies, and the confusion they have created, are not helping private citizens and they are worse off than one year ago."
- Tamar Lowell, CEO, **Access Trips**
- “The curtailing of diplomacy with Cuba has had a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the Cuban people, and on U.S. businesses in the tourism and agricultural sectors. Maintaining an

open dialogue with Cuba and ending legal restrictions with regard to travel and trade with Cuba can only improve conditions for the Cuban people and for U.S. businesses, who have been hit hard by this irrational policy.”

- Ian Sergeant, Director, **Soltura Cuba Travel**