

Cuba – Know before you go

Congratulations on being an adventurer along with the mighty vessel Spree exploring the coast of Cuba. I want to tell you what you can expect from this trip and what not to expect. We will leave the United States for Cuba with paying passengers onboard and dive on reefs that have never been seen by anyone. The reefs of Northern Cuba are an untouched area, even by the locals.

Boarding: we will board the Spree at 8 PM on the Saturday of departure. The Spree is docked at Robbie's of Key West at 7281 Shrimp Road on Stock Island, FL and we have parking dockside. There is a map to the boat on our website here: [map to M/V Spree](#). Our website www.spreeexpeditions.com has a tremendous amount of information on it that is all good stuff to know, you might want to go there and have a look at what we have to say. We will depart shortly after 8. The crew typically has dinner at the Hogfish Bar and Grill about 5:30 before boarding. If you would like to join us, you will be more than welcome.

Arrival in Cuba: we will arrive at Cuban Customs at first light on Sunday morning. The first person to board will be the physician who will enquire as to our general health, and will take everyone's temperature. If you have a fever, you will be removed from the Spree and taken to hospital. This brings up an important point. Do not show up with a fever (or a cold, or sick, or with any gaping wounds) for departure. We don't know if they would turn the whole boat around or just take you to the hospital, but we don't really want to know. **If you are sick, we will deny you boarding so we don't lose the entire trip. Buy travel insurance!!!** Divers Alert Network now offers travel insurance as well as dive accident insurance that is valid in Cuba. There are a number of companies that will sell trip cancellation or interruption insurance. Get this. You do not want to lose the adventure of a lifetime and not get a refund because you have caught a cold. After the doctor we will be taken one by one to the immigration office with passports to check in. You will be given a tourist visa and asked if you would like a passport stamp. This is a completely legal trip, so there is no reason not to have a Cuba stamp in your passport. After clearance we will head out to go diving. There will be plenty of time to set your gear up Sunday morning.

Why this is legal travel: the Spree is permitted to be exported and reimported into Cuba and the United States by the Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security. The Non Profit Corporation Gulf Reefs Environmental Action Team (GREAT) is approved by the Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control to conduct educational tours for people to people contact. All participants will sign an affidavit stating that they have been educated. Spree will carry a marine biologist who will offer short lectures/classes on coral reef fish identification, coral identification, artificial reef biology, etc. That affidavit will be turned in to Spree and filed for 5 years, just in case anyone ever asks you why you traveled to Cuba. You have to retain a copy of the affidavit for 5 years also.

Diving: we will dive Sunday through Wednesday. Diving is from the Spree, live boat, on reefs and walls. Live boat diving means jumping off and climbing back on the Spree while drifting, so experience using a surface marker buoy is highly recommended. Due to this, there are no night dives. No artifacts may be taken. Nothing may be removed from the water. We are limited by law to recreational dive limits, 130 feet no deco diving. We may or may not have a government

representative on the boat with us to make sure we aren't finding Spanish treasures or taking lobster or any of the other things that it is illegal to do in Cuba. Please don't get arrested for diving outside of the limits set on us by the Cuban Government, and don't bring back that bar of gold.....

Land Tour: we will clear back into Marina Hemingway (8 miles from Havana) on Thursday morning. We expect to arrange a bus to take us to the National Aquarium, El Morro Castle, Old Havana, the Museum of the Revolution, and the National Hotel. Lunch will be provided. The bus will return you to the Spree in time for dinner and departure to Key West around 6 PM.

Arrival in Key West: Spree will be at the Key West Sea Buoy at first light. We can expect to be boarded by the US Coast Guard. They are very nice; they are looking for stowaways, and will require all of us to be seated on the back deck. They will search the boat and will examine your passports against your faces and our permit. When that is complete, we will go to the dock to be met by Customs and Border Patrol. They will clear in all passengers and check your bags for contraband, including shells, animal, vegetable, or some mineral products. Please don't carry any contraband. Fines range from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per violation.

Food: both the Cuban government and the American government are paranoid about transferring diseases between countries. Cuba has no citrus blight, and no bird flu. They are extremely cautious about what food comes in. Please do not bring snacks, special meals unless prescribed by a doctor (with prior approval only) or any other food on the Spree. We have to have country of origin certification for all food onboard for both Cuba and the US. Please no food onboard in either country. I promise, we will feed you and have plenty of snacks.

As is stated clearly in our [FAQ's: Meals aboard M/V Spree](#), we do not cater to strict vegan or kosher diets. We will do our best to accommodate allergies and other food restrictions, but remember, we are feeding 24 people from a galley the size of your pantry at home. Food restrictions are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, so please let us know **before you book**. The Spree provides a full gluten, full fat, full salt, and full sugar menu. We do not cook with substitutes. We use organic if available, there is no guarantee either way. If this dietary plan is not in accordance with your personal dietary needs, please consider a different choice for your Liveaboard.

Swag: you are allowed \$400 in Cuban goodies, of which \$100 may be a combination of rum and cigars. You will find art vendors, trinkets, and other goodies, but it would surprise me if you could spend \$400 in our day in Havana. There is a liquor and cigar store at the Marina Hemingway. Some of the best rum I've ever tasted is \$3 a bottle, so a case is not out of the question. The cigars are hand rolled by an 80-year-old lady right there at the store. She claims she rolled cigars for Castro. I didn't ask which Castro.

I think that I have pretty much covered the high points. You will want cash for shopping, and the exchange rate is either 87% or 90%, depending on where you change money. US dollars are widely accepted. US credit cards are not.

Flexibility: it is the name of the game on these trips. We currently have an excellent rapport with the Cuban government, with the United States Government, and the marinas at both locations. As with any adventure travel, things happen. As I write this, the customs station at Cabo San Antonio is out of Tourist Visas, which means that no one can check in there. That means that people traveling from Mexico must find an alternate place to clear in. We do not clear in at Cabo San Antonio, but the point is that anything could happen, and we all have to be flexible in our planning. We could be diverted east or west or not allowed into port because the Navy is out on maneuvers (this happened on our first trip) or we could find new rules pop up overnight. Please be flexible.