



Cuba 2017



Newsletter #1

May 2017

Dear YASC Cuba 2017 Participants:

Once again, we are delighted that you have chosen to be a part of this summer's service and intercultural exchange trip to Cuba. Our group includes 100 YASC volunteers -- 79 adults and 21 teens -- and we will be joined in Cuba by 40 youths from the Matanzas community for two days of joint projects, along with 10 individuals from our ground partner, the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation For Nature and Humanity ([FANJ](#)) and 2-3 from our US logistics partner, [Academic Arrangements Abroad](#).

We have recently received the final approvals for our program from the Cuban authorities and an updated [itinerary](#) can be found on the trip's web site: <http://yalealumniservicecorps.org/current-trips/2017-intercultural-program-cuba>. Please bear in mind that the itinerary may still change on arrival.

This newsletter and the ones that will follow contain a wealth of information about **travel logistics, visa and mandatory Cuban health insurance, project assignments, health and safety tips, orientation sessions**, and more. We know this newsletter has a lot of details, many provided in past e-mails, but we want to provide you the information that you need in one place, so we hope you will take the time to review these details.

You will also note that we have scheduled a Q&A call-in/online session and another orientation session (details below). We are very much looking forward to hearing your questions about our upcoming trip.

I am Najib El-Sayed PhD '93, the volunteer producer of the 2017 YASC trip to Cuba. Supporting me in this role is the dynamic João Aleixo, Director of Yale Alumni Service Corps, joao.aleixo@yale.edu.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions about the trip. Our contact information is listed at the end of this newsletter. Enjoy!

-Najib

Important next steps

- **Read** all the information in this newsletter!
- **Submit** the following as soon as possible:
 - Signed **release forms** (attached) -- for each member of your party -- to Joao via email to joao.aleixo@yale.edu or fax to 203-432-0587.
 - **Photos** for our participant directory via email to Najib at camarioca2017@gmail.com, if you have not done so during registration. For a current version of the participant directory, follow this link:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B41V5RcsX7AhR0pUYmZHRkhMeEk>
 - PLEASE NOTE: You will be contacted shortly by Academic Arrangements Abroad requesting a **signed OFAC form**, a **signed Terms and Conditions form**, a **copy of your flight itinerary** and a copy of the passport photo page for all members of your party. Please respond to this request promptly as our logistics partner cannot finalize transportation and hotel booking without this information. Please do not submit this material to João or Najib.
- **Purchase** your visa! (See below for details.)
- **Review** the project assignments and descriptions (see below) and let us know if you have any concerns. If you're name is not listed, you may have not filled this form or something went wrong when you submitted. We did have a few blank records. If you have not already done so, indicate the top 3 choices of projects for you and each of your accompanying participants by filling in this survey (<https://goo.gl/forms/UPjI4r7oTvDxQFsl2>). Note that 'Arts and Crafts' and 'Art of Photography' are already oversubscribed.
- **Mark your calendars**. We will offer a first online/call-in Q&A session on **May 30 at 7:30 pm**. You will be receiving an invitation by e-mail within the next 24 hrs. We have also scheduled an online orientation session to be held on **June 10 at 10:30 am**. Professor Reinaldo Funes Monzote, Department of History, University of Havana, Cuba and Visiting Professor at the Yale McMillan Center, will join us at 11:00am to discuss all things Cuba! Dr. Funes also heads the Program for Geohistoric Investigation at FANJ and will be joining us for a portion of the trip.

Flight and Arrival Information

You are responsible for booking your own flight to and from Havana. If you would like to work with our logistics partner Arrangements Abroad, they do have an Air Concierge and encourage you to use them to book your flights to Cuba. In the event of any travel issues, the Concierge will be available to minimize disruptions by making alternate arrangements. There is a \$40 booking fee per person for this service.

Air Concierge, Largay Travel: Sylvia Pelletier, sylvia@largaytravel.com, (203) 757-9481 / 888-632-1512



BEGINNING OF THE TRIP

Arrival schedule

We suggest that you book a flight that arrives into Havana before 12:00pm noon on Saturday, July 29. There will be a group transfer from the airport, and touring and lunch in Havana before the group continues to Varadero.

Here are your arrival/transportation options:

Arrival before 12.00pm: will include lunch and touring and transfer to Varadero

Arrival between 12:00pm and 2.00pm: will include touring and transfer to Varadero

Arrival between 2:00pm and 4.00pm: will include transfer to Varadero

Please note that above transfers can only be organized once you send your arrival information to Academic Arrangements Abroad. Once all this information is received, we will send information about meeting at the Havana airport.

If you arrive after 4:00pm in Havana, you will need to arrange alternate transportation. Arrangements Abroad can arrange this transportation for you upon request. The fee for this is \$50 for a car (2 people with luggage) or \$100 for a minivan (4 people with luggage).

END OF THE TRIP

If you are not going on the post-trip extension to Havana , the trip ends on August 5th. We strongly suggest you book a flight that departs from Havana no sooner than 11:00am since we will be transporting everyone back to Havana that morning. Please note we are not providing any additional services (transport, hotel, sightseeing, etc.) after arrival at the airport in Havana.

If you are going on Havana Postlude, the trip ends on August 8th and you can find a detailed itinerary [here](#). Your group will split from the rest early morning on August 5th.

Can you spend extra time in Cuba by yourself before or after the program dates?

YASC and Academic Arrangements Abroad are responsible for all arrangements and the OFAC People-to-People certification for the program dates July 29 to August 5, 2017, as well as the optional Havana postlude August 5 to 8, 2017.

If you would like to spend extra time in Havana, consider joining the postlude! Due to legal restrictions, Arrangements Abroad is unable to assist individuals with extra hotel nights or programming outside of the arranged program.

If you wish to spend extra time in Cuba outside of those program dates, please note that you will be responsible for all arrangements and ensuring that your stay adheres and follows the OFAC guidelines (12 categories of authorized travel)(<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Pages/cuba.aspx>). Please contact the offices of Arrangements Abroad if you have any questions.

Visa and Cuban Health Insurance

HOW DO YOU OBTAIN YOUR CUBAN VISA? (a.k.a. Tourist Card)

When you book a commercial flight from the U.S. to Cuba, your carrier will advise on procedures for securing the documents necessary for entry to Cuba, including a visa and mandatory Cuban health insurance (see next section). Usually, the visa is a blank 2-part perforated form to fill out. Upon arrival in Havana, Cuban immigration will keep one side of the Tourist Card and hand back the other one to be kept safe. You may be asked for the other side when departing Cuba.



OPTION #1: Purchase Online or by phone in advance

- Call CTS (Cuba Travel Services) 1-877-511-2822) or pre-pay online (cubavisaservices.com) and have it shipped in 7-10 business days to a continental US address. The cost is \$85-\$150, depending on the airline and shipping. For our program, select the OFAC Category: "Educational – People to People".
- American Airlines: Use this link to purchase a visa with a record locator/confirmation number (cubavisaservices.com/product/aa-visa-card).
- Delta Airlines: as of November 2016, after you purchase your ticket, call the International Reservations line for Delta Airlines at 800-241-4141 and ask to speak to the "Cuba Desk." The cost for this service is \$50 per traveler. Delta will hold the visa and distribute it at the gate prior to boarding your flight.
- Additional carriers including United and JetBlue have also begun offering routes to Cuba. Please contact your airline to confirm their visa process.

OPTION #2: Get it same-day at the airport for by cash, credit, or debit

Check-in early, recommended 3 hours ahead. Depending on your airline, prices range from \$50-100. You may only be able to do this only before you board the last segment of your trip to Havana.

HOW DO YOU OBTAIN THE MANDATORY CUBAN HEALTH INSURANCE?

Basic health insurance, currently provided only by the Cuban government, is required for all travelers under the age of 80. Typically, this will be handled by your flight service to Cuba. Commercial airlines will either include this insurance in the cost of your ticket, or make it available for purchase. Please confirm with your airline that insurance is included with the purchase of your commercial ticket. Carry your health insurance voucher and/or your commercial flight boarding pass with you to show proof of coverage in case you need to visit a doctor. Please note that the Cuban government does not extend this coverage to travelers over 80 years old. In those cases, we strongly suggest purchasing third-party health and medical coverage. Many US travel insurance policies will also cover trip cancellation as well as much higher limits for medical and evacuation coverage. We recommend that all travelers consider this insurance as a supplement to the mandatory Cuban health insurance.

- For some airlines, including American Airlines, Cuba Ready Stations at the airport are used to verify insurance. At a Cuba Ready Station, you must show your boarding pass and ID, and receive a green stamp

on the boarding pass. This green stamp verifies that you have paid for the medical insurance. The boarding pass with the green stamp should be kept safe and close in Cuba as proof of insurance.

- Travelers on Delta Airlines will receive boarding passes already marked with proof of insurance with their air ticket purchase and do not need to visit a Cuba Ready Station.

Projects

Below is a list of the planned projects and activities. Each of you will be able to participate in the general activities as well as your choice of two of the five projects described below. Project 1 through 5 will only take place on the last 2 weekdays (Thursday and Friday) of the trip.

Project 1 - Reforestation - We will be joined by a group of 30 local Cuban volunteer youths as we plant 1,000 trees in a recently protected national heritage land lying above the Bellamar Caves.

Project 2 – Construction of dry toilets/bus stop shelter - We will contribute to an effort aimed at building dry bathrooms on the grounds between the two small communities of Bellamar and Alcania. Those bathrooms are designed to eliminate blackwater contamination of the aquifers surrounding the Bellamar caves and to effectively reclaim greywater for agricultural use. Most of the work will focus on finishing and painting the walls. Another component will consist of building a bus stop shelter for the two nearby communities.

Project 3 - The art of photography - This activity will target a group of 20 participants (10 YASC participants and 10 Cuban youths) who will learn the art of photography from internationally renowned Cuban photographer Daylene Rodriguez (www.daylenerodriguez.cult.cu)

Project 4 - Arts and crafts - We will introduce a group of 20 Cuban youths to variety of arts and crafts activities including collage and mosaics.

Project 5 – Environmental Education - A workshop offered by FANJ will provide a detailed view of a wide range of environmental programs in place or under development.

Our **Cultural exchange and general activities** will include everyone and

- Orientation to the activities of FANJ aimed at protecting the environment and the use of Permaculture techniques
- Half-day visit to a the Castillo de San Severino with related African heritage activities including Music and Dance.
- Visit to the Bellamar Caves.
- Artists' Square and artisans of the Balneario Varadero.
- Half-day visit to an organization (Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue) doing impressive work on multiple issue in Cuba's underserved population with a focus on the disabled and the elderly.
- Sports exchange program OR Visit to a health polyclinic OR visit with local artisans
- Visit to a farm (ecological farming).

On the next two pages are lists of the YASC volunteers (not in alphabetical order) with their project assignments. We created these assignments based on the projects you selected as part of the registration process, doing our best effort to provide you with the top choices you might have indicated, on a first-come first-served basis. Slots are very limited in 'Arts and crafts' project because of space constraints at the FANJ facility by the Bellamar caves. Similarly, we could only accommodate 10 of you in the 'Art of Photography' workshop, leaving 10 slots for the Cuban children who will be joining us. **(Is your name missing? See 'Important Next Steps' on page 2 of this newsletter)**

Project Assignments (for August 3rd and 4th)

Reforestation
Blango, Giani
Blango, Jalen
Blango, Samuella
Blango, Teechey
Canilang, William
Cowles, Katelena
Cowles, Celia
Day-Richter, Heather
Day-Richter, Logan
El-Sayed, Marc
El-Sayed, Neil
Gilbert, Zanna
Gorla, Raj
Hardy, Janet
Hazel, Peter
Hoover, Wendy
Horner, Daniel
Little, Peekay
Pathy, Kiran
Pathy, Shailen
Pathy, Shefali
Pathy, Vinod
Robertson, Semi
Sarjant, Alan
Torrance, Emily
Yearwood, Emerson

Bathroom/Bus Stop Painting
Arkell, Sheila
Cowles, Gabriel
Cowles, James
Durham, Miranda
Gaspar, Charles
Graham, Mary Lou
Hazel, Robert
Hymanson, Alan
Johnson, David
Johnson, Maxwell
Labrada, Sebastian
Lee, Lily
Little, Dwight
Palmer, James
Ramsey, Mark
Rose, Deborah
Toh, Boon Lai

Photography with Daylene Rodriguez

FULL

Labrada, Elena (Team coordinator)

Asgari, Maryam

Barber, Hadley

Gamsky, Tara

Letourneau, Amy

Marchiel, Aydin

Perez, Patricia

Possin, Nicole

Samson, Lisa

Stronsky, Isabel

Environmental Education (Workshop)

Blango, Judy

Chew, Wei Yin

Goldberg, Georgia

Harlowe, Jeff

Rosbach, Bill

Singer, Rhonda

Warren, LaShawn

Teaching Arts and Crafts

FULL

Blango, Nikki

Blango, Nontika

Chin, Katherin

Cohan, Mattie

Dal Ponte, Anita

Gaspar, Linden

Lin, Faith

Patel, Janky

Ramsey, Trina

Sangruchi, Aric

Sarjant, Debbie

And, finally, here are some additional travel planning details...

Health information

Consult with your physician and with the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cuba> to determine specific recommendations for Cuba. Though we cannot give you medical advice, we can share the following based on our experience:

- Make sure you are up-to-date on all your vaccinations.
- Know that 'Zika is a risk in Cuba. Because Zika infection in a pregnant woman can cause serious birth defects, women who are pregnant should not travel to Cuba. All travelers should strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites and sexual exposure to Zika virus during and after the trip. For more information, see [Zika Virus in Cuba](#)' (from the CDC web site).
- Consider packing Pepto-Bismol; the CDC and many doctors recommend taking this daily as a preventative measure while traveling.
- Consider bringing an antibiotic in case of a food issue.

And some information purely for your education...

Internet access and content remain severely restricted in Cuba, with only a very small percentage of Cubans, about 5%, enjoying web access at home (Source: BBC news, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35865283>)



Found in Cuba, the Manjuari is a fish not found anywhere else in the world. (Source: <http://cubandivingcenters.com/blog/en/article/the-manjuari-of-cuba-a-living-fossil>)

The United States pays Cuba \$4,085 a month in rent for the controversial Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. Cuba has never cashed the checks. (Source: <https://news.vice.com/article/will-cuba-now-cash-55-years-worth-of-guantanamo-rent-checks>)



Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We look forward to working with you!

Najib El-Sayed

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João Aleixo

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Attachments:

Release forms