

# CUBA BRIEF



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## THE CUBA TRAVEL BAN

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- American tourists will not bring democracy to Cuba. Over the past decades hundred of thousands of Canadian, European and Latin American tourists have visited the island. Cuba is not more democratic today. If anything, Cuba is more totalitarian, with the state and its control apparatus having been strengthened as a result of the influx of tourist dollars.
- The assumption that tourism or trade will lead to economic and political change is not borne out by empirical studies. In Eastern Europe, communism collapsed a decade after tourism peaked. No study of Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union claims that tourism, trade or investments had anything to do with the end of communism. A disastrous economic system, competition with the West, successive leadership changes with no legitimacy, anti-Soviet feeling in Eastern Europe and the failed Soviet war in Afghanistan were among the reasons for change.
- There is no evidence to support the notion that engagement with a totalitarian state will bring about its demise. Only academic ideologues and some members of Congress interested in catering to the economic needs of their state's constituencies cling to this notion. Their calls for ending the embargo have little to do with democracy in Cuba or the welfare of the Cuban people.
- The repeated statement that the embargo is the cause of Cuba's economic problems is hollow. The reasons for the economic misery of the Cubans are a failed political and economic system. Like the communist systems of Eastern Europe, Cuba's system does not function, stifles initiative and productivity and destroys human freedom and dignity.
- As occurred in the mid-1990s, an infusion of American tourist dollars will provide the regime with a further disincentive to adopt deeper economic reforms. Cuba's limited economic reforms were enacted in the early 1990s, when the island's economic contraction was at its worst. Once the economy began to stabilize by 1996 as a result of foreign tourism and investments, and exile remittances, the earlier reforms were halted or rescinded by Castro.

- The assumption that the Cuban leadership would allow U.S. tourists or businesses to subvert the revolution and influence internal developments is at best naïve.
- Money from American tourists would flow into businesses owned by the Castro government thus strengthening state enterprises. The tourist industry is controlled by the military and General Raul Castro, Fidel's brother.
- American tourists will have limited contact with Cubans. Most Cuban resorts are built in isolated areas, are off limits to the average Cuban, and are controlled by Cuba's efficient security apparatus. Most Americans don't speak Spanish, have but limited contact with ordinary Cubans, and are not interested in visiting the island to subvert its regime. Law 88 enacted in 1999 prohibits Cubans from receiving publications from tourists.
- While providing the Castro government with much needed dollars, the economic impact of tourism on the Cuban population would be limited. Dollars will trickle down to the Cuban poor in only small quantities, while state and foreign enterprises will benefit most.
- Tourist dollars would be spent on products, i.e., rum, tobacco, etc., produced by state enterprises, and tourists would stay in hotels owned partially or wholly by the Cuban government. The principal airline shuffling tourists around the island, Gaviota, is owned and operated by the Cuban military. Carlos Lage, the czar of the Cuban economy, reiterated that the economic objective of the Cuban government is "to strengthen state enterprises."
- Once American tourists begin to visit Cuba, Castro would restrict travel by Cuban-Americans. For the Castro regime, Cuban-Americans represent a far more subversive group because of their ability to speak to friends and relatives on the island, and to influence their views on the Castro regime and on the United States. Indeed, the return of Cuban exiles in 1979-80 precipitated the mass exodus of Cubans from Mariel in 1980.
- Lifting the travel ban without any major concession from Cuba would send the wrong message "to the enemies of the United States": that a foreign leader can seize U.S. properties without compensation; allow the use of his territory for the introduction of nuclear missiles aimed at the United States; espouse terrorism and anti-U.S. causes throughout the world; and eventually the United States will "forget and forgive," and reward him with tourism, investments and economic aid.
- Since the Ford/Carter era, U.S. policy toward Latin America has emphasized democracy, human rights and constitutional government. Under President Reagan the U.S. intervened in Grenada, under President Bush, Sr. the U.S. intervened in Panama and under President Clinton the U.S. landed marines in Haiti, all to restore democracy to those countries. The U.S. has prevented military coups in the region and supported the will of the people in free elections. While the U.S. policy has not been uniformly applied throughout the world, it is U.S. policy in the region. Cuba is part of Latin America. A normalization of relations with a military dictatorship in Cuba will send the wrong message to the rest of the continent.

- Supporting regimes and dictators that violate human rights and abuse their population is an ill-advised policy that rewards and encourages further abuses.
- A large influx of American tourists into Cuba would have a dislocating effect on the economies of smaller Caribbean islands such as Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and even Florida, highly dependent on tourism for their well being. Careful planning must take place, lest we create significant hardships and social problems in these countries.
- Since tourism would become a two-way affair, with Cubans visiting the United States in great numbers, it is likely that many would stay in the United States as illegal immigrants, complicating another thorny issue in American domestic politics.
- If the travel ban is lifted unilaterally now by the U.S., what will the U.S. government have to negotiate with a future regime in Cuba and to encourage changes in the island? Lifting the ban could be an important bargaining chip with a future regime willing to provide concessions in the area of political and economic freedoms.
- The travel ban and the embargo should be lifted as a result of negotiations between the U.S. and a Cuban government willing to provide meaningful political and economic concessions or when there is a democratic government in place in the island.

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