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Articles, Essays & Sermons

Thirty-five interesting facts about Cuba and its US relations

To commemorate US President Barack Obama's stunning announcement on 17 December 2014 of executive action reestablishing formal diplomatic relations with Cuba, here are a few facts that might surprise.

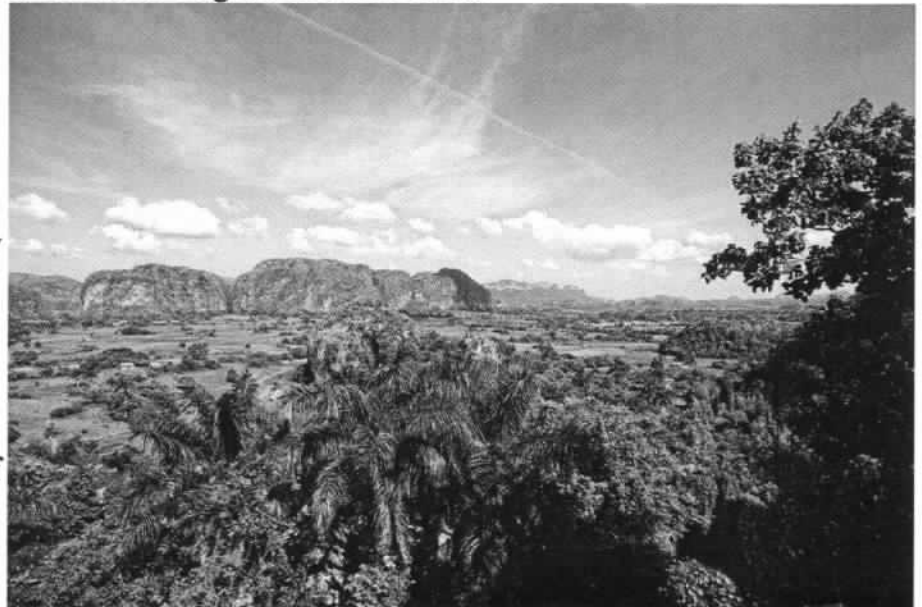
by Ken Sehested

1. The worlds' smallest hummingbird and smallest frog are found in Cuba.

2. Christmas did not become an official holiday in Cuba until 1997.

3. Cuba sent more medical professionals to combat the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa than any other country.

4. In 1820 Thomas Jefferson thought Cuba "the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of States" and told Secretary of War John C. Calhoun that the United States "ought, at the first possible opportunity, to take Cuba."



5. There are no animals or plants in Cuba that are poisonous or lethal to humans.

6. In May 2001 Texas state legislators were the first to officially petition for an end to the US embargo of Cuba. One possible reason: Cuba imports more than two-thirds of its rice, mostly from Asia.

7. Ernest Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea* while he lived in Cuba.

8. The 1898 Treaty of Paris ended the Spanish-American War. The US took control of several Spanish colonies, including Puerto Rico, Cuba, parts of the Spanish West Indies, the Island of Guam in the Marianas Islands, and the Philippines. Cuba was later granted its independence after agreeing to assert the 1901 Platt Amendment into its 1902 constitution. That Amendment guaranteed the US the right to unilaterally intervene in Cuban affairs. In arguing for US Senate approval of the Platt Amendment, Senator Knute Nelson said, "Providence has given the United States the duty of extending Christian civilization. We come as ministering angels, not despots." On the other (losing) side of the debate, Senator George Frisbie Hoar argued, "This Treaty will make us a vulgar, commonplace empire, controlling subject races and vassal states, in which one class must forever rule and other classes must

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El Sincronista—Ya que el amigo Platt nos presentaba una cosa "buena" había que hacerla.

forever obey." Immediately after the signing of the treaty, the US-owned "Island of Cuba Real Estate Company" opened for business to sell Cuban land to Americans.

9. From the air, the island of Cuba resembles a crocodile or alligator and so Cuba is often referred to in Spanish as "El Cocodrilo" or "El Caimá".

10. Cuba has the highest doctor to patient ratio in the world. More than two-thirds of Cuban physicians are women.

11. In October 2014 the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly approved—for the twenty-third year in a row—a resolution calling on the US to end its embargo against Cuba. The US and Israel have always voted against the resolution. Several times Palau and the Marshall Islands have joined the opposition. Some time ago, for three years running, Uzbekistan voted no. There are 193 United Nations member states.

12. Fidel Castro stopped smoking cigars in 1985.

13. Christopher Columbus' first landfall in the Americas was on 28 October 1492, in Barlay, a bay on the northeast coast in what is now the Holguin Province. He thought he was in India—thus *Indians* as the term for indigenous peoples.



Circle of Mercy youth at the Martin Luther King Center, Havana, Cuba, December 2010

14. Hatuey, legendary chief of the Taino people of Ayiti (now Hispaniola, shared by the modern nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic), is celebrated in Cuba as its "First National Hero." Leading the first indigenous resistance to the invading Spanish, Hatuey fled to Caobana (Cuba) to warn the inhabitants. Eventually captured by the Spaniards, he was burned at the stake. Beforehand, a Roman Catholic priest asked Hatuey if he wished to be baptized before dying so he could escape hell and go to heaven. The chief asked the priest if Spaniards went to heaven. Yes, if baptized, came the reply. "Then I don't want to go there, but to hell so as not to be where they were and where he would not see such cruel people." Monuments to Hatuey are located in the Baracoa and in Yara.

15. Havana, Cuba, and Mobile, Alabama, are sister cities.

16. Among the businesses itching to get into Cuba is Major League Baseball, where the sport is a passion and has been since the 1870s.

17. Cuba's infant mortality rate is lower than that of the US.

18. In spite of the embargo, the US sends a monthly

\$4,085 check to Cuba as rent for Guantanamo Bay. Cuba has never cashed them.

19. There are at least 3 nightclubs/love music venues paying tribute to the Beatles: The Yellow Submarine in Havana, The Beatles Bar-Restaurant in Varadero, and The Cavern in Holguin. And there is an official statue of John Lennon in Havana, where Lennon is named a “true revolutionary.” However, the Cuban government initially banned music by the Beatles, considering it “decadent” and declared a nationwide ban of Beatles music in 1964.

20. According to a World Wildlife Fund report in 2007, Cuba is the only country with sustainable development, based on its ecological footprint.

21. In 1975 the US Senate’s Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities substantiated eight attempts by the Central Intelligence Agency to assassinate Cuba’s President Fidel Castro. Fabian Escalante, a retired chief of Cuba’s counterintelligence, who has been tasked with protecting Fidel Castro, estimated the number of assassination schemes or actual attempts by the Central Intelligence Agency to be 638.

22. In 1906, the *Chicago Tribune* editorialized, “The possession of Cuba has been the dream of American statesmen ever since our government was organized. . . . We have as righteous a claim to it as the people who are now occupying it.” Leonard Wood, the general who governed the island under US occupation, said that the United States “must always control the destinies of Cuba.”

23. A recent ecumenical retreat for young pastors (35 and younger) hosted by the Cuban Council of Churches had over 40 participants representing 19 different denominations including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Quaker, and several branches of Pentecostalism.

24. US President John F. Kennedy purchased 1,200 Cuban cigars hours before signing the executive order to embargo Cuba.

25. Cuban rum is, hands down, the best around.

26. Cuba’s inclusion on the US State Department’s “state-sponsored terrorism” list has been called into question by numerous sources. The independent Council on Foreign Relations 2010 report says “intelligence experts have been hard pressed to find evidence that Cuba currently provides weapons or military training to terrorist groups. The State Department’s most recent “Country Report on Terrorism” report says “There was no indication that the Cuban government provided weapons or paramilitary training to terrorist groups.”

27. The literacy rate in Cuba is higher than in US.

28. In 1992 Cuba’s constitution was revised to remove the word “atheistic” as a descriptive term. In that same year Rev. Raúl Suarez, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Havana, was the first Christian elected to the Cuban National Assembly. Rev. Suarez, a pacifist and founder of the Martin Luther King Center in Havana, was wounded while driving an ambulance for the Cuban army as it repelled the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by the US.

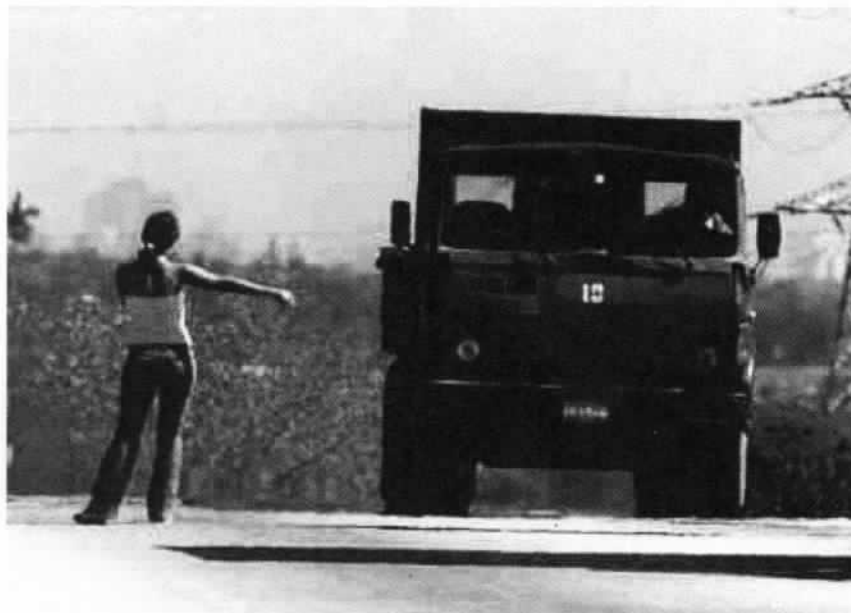
29. Fidel Castro is rumored to be the only Cuban who doesn’t dance well.

30. At any given time some 25,000 Cuban medical professionals are performing national service in underdeveloped countries. Currently there are approximately 500 US citizens studying to be doctors at Cuba’s Latin American School of Medicine. Cuba is often referred to a medical research superpower, though the simplest of medications are often scarce.

31. All Cuban government vehicles are legally required to pick up hitchhikers.

32. Over the years the US Congress has approved a handful of exemptions to the embargo of Cuba, which currently buys (cash only) a half billion dollars worth of agricultural products from US growers.

33. While churches were never closed by the government following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Castro and other leaders' opinions of the church was colored by its close association with the former military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. At the time of the Revolution, US companies owned about 40 percent of Cuba's sugar



cane plantations, almost all the cattle ranches, 90 percent of the mines and mineral concessions, 80 percent of the utilities, practically all the oil industry, and supplied two-thirds of Cuba's imports. Oh . . . and the American crime syndicates had found Batista a welcoming host for their casino and brothel businesses.

34. A June 2014 opinion poll of Cuban-Americans in South Florida revealed that 68 percent favored restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba and 52 percent said the US should end the embargo. Just this week a Washington Post/ABC News poll found that 68 percent of all US citizens support ending the embargo of Cuba. That includes 57 percent of Republicans.

35. The official flower of Cuba is the Butterfly Jasmine.

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