

# UNDERSTANDING CUBA TODAY



Cuba, once known as the “Jewel of the Caribbean” is located 90 miles south of Miami, Florida, where the Caribbean Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean meet. A little over 42,000 sq miles in length, it is home to more than 11 million people.





IMAGE: PROCLAIM CUBA / 2024





## **PRE-CASTRO REVOLUTION**

Cuba's history is varied and rich. Originally inhabited by the Ciboney Taino people, the island became a colony of Spain during the 15th century after Christopher Columbus landed there in October of 1492. Serving as a launching point for the Spanish Conquistadors, like Hernando de Soto, Cuba developed over the next two centuries as a rich source of sugar cane for the Spanish Empire. Cuba's long history of revolution began in 1868, when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a sugar planter, began the fight for independence from Spain. Others joined Céspedes in fighting for Cuban independence in the decades that followed including José Martí, who was killed in battle on May 19, 1895. A poet and artist, Martí is now immortalized as a national hero and symbol of Cuban independence.

After years of internal struggle and amidst rising tensions between the United States and Spain, Cuba became embroiled in The Spanish-American War in 1898. America, led by legendary figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, invaded Cuba to join in the fight with the indigenous revolutionaries against Spanish rule. After signing the Treaty of Paris in 1898, America gained control of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. Cuba became a protectorate of the U.S. until it gained its independence in 1902. Under the Platt Agreement, the U.S. leased the naval base in Guantanamo Bay that remains under U.S. control today. Through the next five decades, Cuba underwent a tumultuous period of leadership. Power grabs were continual and political corruption reigned. Savvy businessmen in America and Latin America invested heavily in the Cuban rum and tobacco industries, and cities like Havana flourished. However, much of the country was economically depressed and ripe for revolution once again.



IMAGE: LEONIE FAHJEN / PEXELS



IMAGE: SKY UK / NEWS



## POST-CASTRO

In 1958, Fidel Castro and a small group of supporters, including revolutionary Che Guevara, landed their boat, Granma, in the eastern part of the island and led a revolt against the repressive Batista government. Gaining supporters along the way, Castro and his forces gained control of Cuba in 1959. Castro's legalization of the Communist Party, his brutal attack against resistance efforts, the nationalization of industry, and the seizure of U.S. owned land and possessions led to sanctions and trade embargo against Cuba by the U.S. government. Political tensions have remained between the U.S. and Cuba since.

Cuba formed an economic and military alliance with Russia in 1960 that lasted until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Known as the Special Period, Cuba's economy underwent severe depression with massive food and fuel shortages. Since then, Cuba has sought economic alliances with Venezuela, Bolivia and China. Fidel Castro stepped down as President in 2008. He died in 2016. His brother, Raul, was declared President in 2008 and remained in that position until 2016 when he became First Secretary of the Communist Party retiring in April of 2021. The Communist party still remains in power today in Cuba under the leadership of President and First Secretary of the Communist Party, Miguel Diaz Canel.



IMAGE: MEHMET TURGUT KIRKGOZ / PEXELS



IMAGE: MART PRODUCTION / PEXELS



## RELIGION IN CUBA

Cuba is officially a secular state due to Castro's installation of the Marxist-Lenin ideology. Religion was completely eliminated from society, education, and the government, replaced by a belief that all human activity is solely the result of human actions, void of supernatural influence. As such, Cuba's Roman Catholic roots, stretching back to Spanish colonization, were stamped out. Religious holidays were made illegal, and the state was presented as the sole provider for the people. Religious restrictions eased in the 1980s, and Castro legalized the observance of Christmas Day in 1998.

In the 1990s, home churches began to flourish, as no official church buildings constructed after 1958 were permitted. The resurgence of Christianity has been steady, but other religions, including Judaism and Islam, have also grown. Santería, a cult with African origins, developed in Cuba and has spread throughout Latin America and the United States. Today, religious belief persists despite past suppression, and many Cubans continue to seek spiritual truth.



IMAGE: DANIEL SESSLER / PEXELS



IMAGE: JO KASSIS / PEXELS



## **CUBA AND THE PANDEMIC**

Even before COVID-19, Cuba faced poverty, with a weak economy and poor infrastructure driving down wages and food access as utility costs rose.

The pandemic worsened conditions, leading to the July 11, 2021, protests—the first open opposition since 1994. The government responded with harsh crackdowns, issuing 20-year prison sentences and tightening laws to prevent future dissent.

Despite the pandemic's end, conditions have not improved as government attempts to stabilize the economy and revive tourism have proven ineffective. Inflation remains high at 85%, while wages and food access continue to decline, power failures persist due to aging infrastructure, and hospitals struggle with shortages of essential supplies.

Consequently, a mass exodus from the island has occurred, with over 2 million people—more than 10% of the population—leaving the country. The majority of those fleeing are young professionals, severely impacting communities, particularly in the education and healthcare sectors.

# *Mercado Industrial*



# THE WORK OF PROCLAIM CUBA

As Cubans face ongoing hardships, the opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love and share the Gospel has never been greater.

Faith-based organizations like Proclaim Cuba are uniquely positioned to provide resources and programs, as they remain independent of government control. Since 1991, our mission has been to "Reach Cuba for Christ." While 56.2% of Cuba's 11 million people identify as Christian, only 11.3% actively embrace and share the Gospel. For over 34 years, Proclaim Cuba has worked to grow and strengthen God's kingdom through four core pillars: Evangelism, Discipleship, Training, and Community Support. The pillars guide ministry structure to meet people where they are, provide true help and hope, and lovingly build them up in Christian community.





**OVER  
75K** **HEARD THE  
GOSPEL**



**23,110**  
**CUBANS  
DISCIPLED**



**36,636**  
**TRAINED  
FOR MINISTRY**



**16,462**  
**RECIEVED  
SUPPORT**



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We invite you to explore our 2024 Impact Report to learn more about how we are making a difference.







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