



A Timeline of the U.S.-Cuba Relationship Since the Thaw December 17, 2014 - Present

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A Look Back: Top 10 Changes In The Past Year of U.S.-Cuba Relations

1. Presidents Obama and Castro announce rapprochement after a half-century of hostile relations.
2. The free flow of information on the island increases as Cuba expands internet access to 50 areas across the country.
3. More than 25 public opinion polls show consistent majority support from both Americans and Cubans in support of new Cuba policies for trade and travel.
4. Private entrepreneurship surges on the island fueled by increased travel and remittances from the United States.
5. Diplomatic relations are officially restored; embassies are reopened.
6. Cuba and the U.S. sign bilateral accords on civil aviation, environmental protection, and direct mail service. Diplomatic discussion progresses on issues of counternarcotics, migration, property claims, and human rights.
7. Congress begins to move forward with legislation to dismantle the embargo, including historic bipartisan votes in the Senate Appropriations Committee on three amendments favorable to lifting sanctions on Cuba.
8. Leading American companies from across industries overwhelmingly express public interest in operating in Cuba. U.S. companies begin to sign business agreements with Cuba.
9. Five rounds of U.S. regulatory changes ease restrictions on American travel, exports, and financing to Cuba.
10. The First Family, cabinet secretaries, and a bipartisan congressional delegation travel Cuba on an official state visit (March 2016).

Timeline of U.S.-Cuba Relations since the thaw

December 17, 2014: President Obama moves to normalize relations with Cuba ([Washington Post](#)).

- Decision follows 18 months of secret negotiations between U.S. and Cuba and the release of American aid contractor Alan Gross.
- Announcement of plans over the coming months to ease travel and financial restrictions on Cuba.
- Paves the way for U.S.-Cuba to restore diplomatic ties, reopen embassies, and potentially lift the embargo.

January 16, 2015: Departments of Commerce and Treasury announce regulatory changes to Cuba sanctions ([U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)).

- The amendments implement the changes President Obama announced on December 17, 2014.

January 20 – 24, 2015: Roberta Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, travels to Havana for the first round of diplomatic conversations between the U.S. and Cuba ([Miami Herald](#)).

February 27, 2015: Josefina Vidal, General Director of Cuba's U.S. Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, travels to Washington for the second round of diplomatic talks between the two countries ([Reuters](#)).

March 31, 2015: U.S. and Cuba hold first formal talks on human rights ([Reuters](#)).

April 8, 2015: A public opinion poll of Cubans on the island is released; shows that an overwhelming majority of Cubans support an end to the embargo ([Washington Post](#)).

- Nearly all Cubans (97 percent of those polled) believe normalization of the relationship between Cuba and the United States is good for Cuba.

April 11, 2015: Presidents Obama and Castro meet at the Summit of the Americas in Panama ([CNN](#)).

- Marks the first time the two nations' top leaders have sat down for substantive talks in more than 50 years. Both presidents agree it is time to end the embargo.
- The inclusion of Cuba in the Summit of the Americas comes after Latin American countries pressured the United States to allow Cuba to participate.

April 20, 2015: Governor Andrew Cuomo leads delegation to Cuba ([New York Times](#)).

- Governor Andrew Cuomo leads a delegation of New York business owners and politicians to Havana.
- His visit marks the first time a U.S. governor has travelled to the island since the U.S. and Cuba normalized relations.
- The trip includes officials from JetBlue Airways, the Plattsburgh International Airport, Pfizer, MasterCard, and the founder of Chobani.
- The trip leads to an agreement between Cuba's Center for Molecular Immunology and Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York to import a lung cancer vaccine and begin clinical trials in the United States ([The Huffington Post](#)).

May 4, 2015: New Cuba PAC launches ([Miami Herald](#)).

- New Cuba PAC pledges to donate to political candidates who support favorable policy toward ending the Cuban embargo.

May 20, 2015: The Cuban Interests Section in Washington reaches an agreement with South Florida's Stonegate Bank to reestablish banking services, which had been suspended since 2014 ([Reuters](#)).

May 21, 2015: The fourth round of conversations regarding the reestablishment of diplomatic relations takes

place in Washington ([New York Times](#)).

May 29, 2015: United States removes Cuba from state terror sponsors list ([POLITICO](#)).

- President Obama informs Congress of his decision in mid-April; Congress has a 45-day review period.
- Some congressional Republicans oppose the move; however, they do not make any effort to block the decision.
- Cuba had been on the list since 1982. Being listed subjects a country to U.S. restrictions on such things as foreign aid and defense sales.

June 18, 2015: Cuba expands Wi-Fi access across the island ([NBC News](#)).

- 35 Wi-Fi hotspots are created.
- Previously, Wi-Fi was only available at tourist hotels at hourly prices that would amount to nearly a quarter of the average monthly salary for Cubans.

July 2015: United States restores diplomatic ties with Cuba ([CNN](#)).

- On July 1, President Obama announces that the U.S. and Cuba would reopen their embassies nearly 55 years since they first closed.
- On July 20, diplomatic relations are officially re-established; Cuban embassy holds flag-raising ceremony in Washington. Engage Cuba hosts private dinner between Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez-Parrilla and American business leaders.
- On July 22, Engage Cuba hosts a briefing at the White House for the Cuban-American community about U.S.-Cuba relations.

July 23, 2015: Senate Appropriations Committee approves three amendments favorable to lifting sanctions on Cuba ([Reuters](#)).

- The amendments would end restrictions on travel to Cuba, allow private financing for agricultural sales to Cuba, and lift restrictions on ships docking at Cuban ports.

August 14, 2015: Secretary of State John Kerry presides over the flag-raising ceremony at American embassy in Havana ([BBC](#)).

- Sec. Kerry's visit marks the first time in 70 years that a U.S. Secretary of State has visited Cuba.

September 11, 2015 and November 6, 2015: Cuba-U.S. Steering Committee holds its first and second meetings in Havana and Washington, D.C., respectively ([Miami Herald](#)).

- The committee, first announced by Secretary of State John Kerry and Cuba Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez during the opening of the U.S. embassy in Havana in August, meets to discuss opportunities for cooperation between the U.S. and Cuba on issues including direct mail service, human rights, environmental protection, and human trafficking.

September 18, 2015: Obama administration further eases travel and business restrictions against Cuba ([Wall Street Journal](#)).

- The announcement expands telecommunication opportunities in Cuba and allows certain American businesses to establish offices and bank accounts on the island.
- Cuban businesses and residents are now able to set up offices and bank accounts in the United States.

September 19, 2015: Pope Francis arrives in Cuba ([Al Jazeera](#)).

- The Pope visits Cuba before coming to the United States. During his visit, he lauds the normalization process between the two countries.

September 2015: Telecommunications contracts begin to be signed on the island.

- Verizon begins to offer voice and data roaming in Cuba through a third party ([CNBC](#)).

- Sprint signs an interconnection agreement with Cuba's state telecoms monopoly Etecsa ([Wall Street Journal](#)).

September 28, 2015: Governor Asa Hutchinson leads Arkansas delegation to Cuba ([Reuters](#)).

- Governor Asa Hutchinson asks Congress to lift restrictions that prevent U.S. food companies from selling to Cuba on credit.
- In 2000, the U.S. authorized cash-only agricultural exports to Cuba, which brought \$30 million in sales to Arkansas annually. Since Cuba prefers to buy on credit, sales have fallen.

September 29, 2015: Presidents Obama and Castro meet on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly ([ABC News](#)).

- For the first time in more than 60 years, a U.S. president meets with a Cuban president on U.S. soil.

October 6, 2015: Secretary of Commerce Pritzker makes official trip to Cuba ([New York Times](#)).

- Sec. Penny Pritzker becomes the second U.S. cabinet official to visit the island since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.
- Sec. Pritzker tours Mariel, the site of a \$1 billion investment to create a major shipping hub in Cuba.

October 14, 2015: Nine state governors sign onto bipartisan letter supporting end to Cuban embargo ([AL.com](#)).

- The governors of Alabama, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia and Washington write letter to Congressional leadership highlighting the harm that the embargo has done to American agriculture exports.

October 27, 2015: Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas visits Cuba to discuss security and trade issues with Cuban government officials ([Los Angeles Times](#)).

- Mayorkas becomes the highest cabinet-level secretary of Cuban descent to visit the country.

November 2, 2015: Cuba hosts annual international trade fair ([Reuters](#)).

- It is estimated that 50 U.S. companies attend the fair.

November 18, 2015: U.S. and Cuba sign historic environmental pact ([Associated Press](#)).

- The agreement marks the first accord between the two countries since the announcement that they would be normalizing diplomatic relations.
- The accord will protect nearby fish and marine life living off the coasts of both countries and allow U.S. and Cuban scientists to collaborate on research.
- Cuba's marine ecosystem is considered one of the best preserved and most diverse in the world.

November 19, 2015: Debit cards become available for use in Cuba ([USA Today](#)).

- MasterCard and Stonegate Bank (based in Ft. Lauderdale) announce that their cards are now active for use in hotels, restaurants and other stores in Cuba.
- They become the first financial institutions to take advantage of new business openings with Cuba.
- Americans travelling to Cuba will be able to use these cards at 10,000 merchants that accept the cards.

November 29, 2015: Governor Greg Abbott leads a delegation of Texas agriculture and ports officials and local businesses to Cuba ([Dallas Morning News](#)).

December 8, 2015: U.S. and Cuba hold the first round of discussions on mutual property claims ([Wall Street Journal](#)).

- The two governments begin negotiations over U.S. individuals' and companies' properties that were seized after the 1959 revolution; Cuba also presents counterclaims of economic damages stemming from the embargo.

December 11, 2015: U.S. and Cuba move to re-establish direct mail service ([Washington Post](#)).

- The agreement between the State Department and Cuban officials will establish a pilot program to provide direct mail flights between the U.S. and Cuba.
- Previously, all mail between the two countries was delivered through a third country.
- If the pilot program is successful, the two countries will discuss expanding it permanently.

December 16, 2015: The U.S. House of Representatives forms the bipartisan Cuba Working Group ([POLITICO](#)).

- Ten bipartisan members of the House of Representatives come together to voice their support for ending the Cuban embargo.
- The members of Congress who have joined the working group represent a wide array of industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism, that would benefit from business relations with Cuba.

December 17, 2015: On the one-year anniversary of President Obama's announcement to normalize relations with Cuba, the two countries agree to start commercial flights ([ABC News](#)).

- U.S. airlines will now be able to negotiate directly with the Cuban government to plan routes to the island.
- Establishing direct flights will bring thousands of daily visitors to Cuba and help spur economic development relations between the two countries.
- The State Department announces that authorized travel by Americans to Cuba has increased 50% since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

December 18, 2015: U.S. government appropriations funding bill passes on a bipartisan vote without any restrictions on U.S.-Cuba policy, despite threats from some House Republicans ([Roll Call](#)).

January 3, 2016: Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe travels to Cuba with a 30-member delegation of businesses and educational institutions ([Washington Post](#)).

- Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Havana sign a memorandum of understanding for academic exchange programs and research collaboration – the first for a Virginia university.
- Officials from the Port of Virginia and the Port of Mariel formally pledge a working relationship.

January 26, 2016: U.S. Departments of Treasury and Commerce announce a third round of regulatory changes in trade, exports, and travel with Cuba ([Reuters](#)).

- The new measures make it easier for U.S. companies to film movies, finance exports and do business with Cuba on public infrastructure projects.

January 31, 2016: Cuban state telecommunications company announces it will launch its first broadband home Internet service ([CBS News](#)).

- Restaurants, bars, and cafes will also be eligible to apply for service.
- 30 more Wi-Fi hotspots will be added in 2016.
- The Cuban government's goal is to reach 50% household broadband penetration and 60% mobile penetration by 2020.

March 15, 2016: U.S. Departments of Treasury and Commerce announce a fourth round of regulatory changes in financial services, exports, and travel with Cuba ([New York Times](#)).

- "People-to-people" travel for U.S. citizens can be done on an individual basis.

- Authorized financial transactions are expanded (e.g., use of US dollar, U-turn payments).
- Cuban nationals can open U.S. bank accounts.

March 15, 2016: First direct mail service between the U.S. and Cuba resumes ([USA Today](#)).

- The U.S. Postal Service now offers full-range service.
- President Obama's letter to a 76-year-old Cuban woman is among the first batch of mail.

March 20 - 22, 2016: The First Family of the United States visits Cuba on an official state visit ([New York Times](#)).

- A bipartisan congressional delegation accompanies President Obama.
- Business deals between U.S. companies such as Starwood and General Electric are struck with Cuban counterparts.
- Presidents Obama and Castro give remarks and answer questions at joint press conference.
- President Castro hosts an official state dinner.
- President Obama meets with Cuban dissidents, civil society organizations, and Cuban entrepreneurs.
- First Lady Michelle Obama tours local art spaces and speaks with university students.
- President Obama delivers a speech at the National Theater in Havana, which is broadcast on national Cuban television and radio.
- The First Family, the U.S. congressional delegation, American business leaders, and Cuban government officials attend an exhibition baseball game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban National Team.

May 2, 2016: Carnival Cruise Line's Adonia ship becomes the first cruise to dock in Cuba in nearly 40 years ([CBS News](#)).

- The Cuban government dropped a longstanding ban on Cuban-born people returning to their homeland by sea, a step that allowed 16 Cuban-Americans to make the journey from Miami.
- Carnival Cruise Line – a member of Engage Cuba's Business Council – used its Fathom brand to bring 704 passengers under a "people-to-people" travel license.

May 16, 2016: The U.S. and Cuba hold a fourth round of official diplomatic discussions in Havana ([Reuters](#)).

- The countries aim to reach new agreements on cooperation in law enforcement, health and agriculture over the coming months.
- The two sides discussed holding future dialogues on human rights and property claims.

May 24, 2016: The Cuban government announces its plan to legalize small and medium-sized private businesses ([Associated Press](#)).

- The decision is part of a master plan for social and economic development approved during the Cuban Communist Party Congress in April 2016.
- The government currently allows private enterprise by self-employed workers in several hundred job categories.

June 10, 2016: The U.S. Department of Transportation authorizes six U.S. airlines to schedule roundtrip flights from the U.S. to Cuba ([NPR](#)).

- The passenger flights are approved for nine cities outside of Havana and are expected to start in fall 2016.

June 13, 2016: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Cuban government sign a memorandum of understanding to encourage cooperation on health matters ([The Huffington Post](#)).

- HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell and Cuban Minister of Public Health Roberto Morales Ojeda meet in Washington, DC and agree to work together on global health issues, including infectious diseases like Zika, and the medical challenges that come with aging populations.

June 16, 2016: U.S. Senate Financial Services Committee approves four Cuba-related amendments in favor of lifting the travel ban and trade embargo ([USA Today](#)).

- Amendments regarding American travel to Cuba, the extension of credit to Cuba for agricultural goods, U.S. telecommunications companies in Cuba, and transport regulations are passed.

June 20, 2016: U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Chief Maria Contreras-Sweet visits Havana ([Cuba Headlines](#)).

- Contreras-Sweet meets with Cuban Foreign Trade and Investment Minister Rodrigo Malmierca and with Cuban deputy ministers from the Domestic Trade and Labor and Security Ministries.

July 7, 2016: The U.S. Department of Transportation awards eight airlines flight routes to Havana ([USA Today](#)).

- The decision gives 10 U.S. airports at least one weekly non-stop flight to the Cuban capital.

July 13, 2016: The U.S. State Department and the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs hold a third round of regulatory dialogue in Havana ([Xinhua](#)).

- The dialogue focuses on migratory issues.

July 28, 2016: The U.S. and Cuba hold a second official round of talks in Washington on claims ([Wall Street Journal](#)).

- The talks mark an accelerated negotiation process to settle the claims.

August 31, 2016: The first U.S. passenger flight to Cuba in over fifty years to Cuba lands in Santa Clara ([Fortune](#)).

- Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx is among the passengers on board JetBlue Airways Flight 387.

September 12, 2016: The United States and Cuba hold the inaugural Economic Dialogue in Washington, D.C. ([State Department](#)).

- The delegations discuss trade and investment, labor and employment, renewable energy and energy efficiency, small business, intellectual property rights, economic policy, regulatory and banking matters, and telecommunications and internet access.

September 14, 2016: Florida International University releases a poll of Miami Cubans showing strong support for U.S. policy of normalization with Cuba ([WLRN](#)).

- The poll shows almost two-thirds, or 64 percent, of Miami-Dade's Cuban cohort back normalization.
- 69 percent back re-establishment of diplomacy relations.
- 63 percent now oppose the embargo, the highest level of support for lifting the embargo since the FIU poll began in 1997.

September 30, 2016: The U.S. and Cuba hold the fourth Bilateral Commission in Washington, DC ([Cuba Business Journal](#)).

- The Cuban delegation is chaired by the director general for the U.S. in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Josefina Vidal Ferreiro; the U.S. delegation is chaired by the State Department's Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere Mari Carmen Aponte.
- The U.S. and Cuban delegations discuss the way forward on issues such as agriculture, health, environmental protection, economic engagement, science and technology, civil aviation, regulatory affairs, claims, culture and education, law enforcement, nonproliferation, trafficking in persons, human rights, maritime borders, and migration.

October 3, 2016: Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards travels to Cuba with a delegation of state industry leaders ([Associated Press](#)).

- Gov. Edwards signs MOUs related to ports and agriculture.

October 6, 2016: United States Trade Representative Michael Froman makes an official two-day visit to Havana ([Global Times](#)).

- Froman meets with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez; Minister of Foreign Trade & Investment Rodrigo Malmierca; and with deputy ministers for Communications; Agriculture; and Science, Technology and Environment.

October 7, 2016: Second Lady of the United States Dr. Jill Biden visits Havana ([Washington Post](#)).

- Dr. Biden visited a teachers' college and toured Havana's historic center.
- She also attended a friendly game between the U.S. and Cuban men's national soccer teams.

October 13, 2016: State Department officials travel to Havana to have formal bilateral discussions regarding human rights ([State Department](#)).

- Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Tom Malinowski and Acting Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Mari Carmen Aponte co-chair the dialogue.

October 14, 2016: President Obama issues a directive to formalize normalization with Cuba, issues a sixth round of regulatory changes ([Reuters](#)).

- The presidential directive aims to render the executive action on Cuba "irreversible," regardless of the next Administration.
- The new regulatory changes allow Cubans to buy certain U.S. consumer goods online, open the door to Cuban pharmaceutical companies to do business in the United States and let Cubans and Americans engage in joint medical research.
- The cap on the amount of Cuban rum and cigars that Americans can bring back to the U.S. is lifted.

Timeline of Engage Cuba Key Actions & Accomplishments

June 16, 2015: Engage Cuba officially launches ([New York Times](#)).

- Engage Cuba releases [television ad](#) on CNBC, Fox News and MSNBC calling on Congress to end the embargo.

November 17, 2015: Engage Cuba partners with the Atlantic Council to release a poll from America's "Heartland" voters profiling their opinions on Cuba ([Reuters](#)).

- The poll's findings show bipartisan support in "Heartland" states – Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee – for restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba, lifting the travel ban and ending the embargo.

December 7, 2015: Engage Cuba launches Tennessee State Council ([The Tennessean](#)).

February 17, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Ohio State Council ([Crain's Cleveland](#)).

February 25, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Louisiana State Council ([The Advocate](#)).

March 28, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Minnesota State Council ([CBS Minnesota](#)).

April 11, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Arkansas State Council ([Arkansas Democrat-Gazette](#)).

May 23, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Georgia State Council ([Southeast Farm Press](#)).

June 3, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Iowa State Council ([Iowa Radio](#)).

June 16, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Texas State Council ([Waco Tribune-Herald](#)).

June 28, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Alabama State Council ([AL.com](#)).

June 29, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Mississippi State Council ([Associated Press](#)).

July 7, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Idaho State Council ([Associated Press](#)).

August 2, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Colorado State Council ([Denver Post](#)).

August 3, 2016: Engage Cuba launches New Mexico State Council ([Albuquerque Journal](#)).

September 19, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Kansas State Council ([The Wichita Eagle](#)).

September 19, 2016: Engage Cuba launches Missouri State Council ([The Kansas City Star](#)).