

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Habana is an ostensibly safe city, and violent crime is rare. A heavy police presence on the streets and stiff prison sentences for crimes such as robbery and assault have acted as a major deterrent to potential thieves and kept the dirty tentacles of organized crime firmly at bay.

That is not to say that incidents do not occur. Indeed petty crime against tourists is on the rise in Habana, with bag snatching by youths mounted on bicycles a particular worry.

Keep your money belt on you at all times making sure that you wear it concealed – and tightly secured – around your waist.

In hotels always use a safety deposit box (if there is one) and never leave money/passports/credit cards lying around during the day. Theft from hotel rooms was particularly rife in Habana at the time of writing, with the temptation of earning three times your monthly salary in one fell swoop often too hard to resist.

In bars and restaurants it is wise to always check your change. Purposeful overcharging, especially when someone is mildly inebriated, is tediously common.

Visitors from the well-ordered countries of Europe or litigation-obsessed North America should be subconsciously aware of crumbling sidewalks, manholes with no covers, over-enthusiastic drivers, veering cyclists, carelessly lobbed front door keys (in Centro Habana) and badly-pitched baseballs (almost everywhere). Waves cascading over the Malecón sea-wall might look romantic, but the resulting slime-fest has been known to throw Lonely Planet-wielding tourists flying unceremoniously onto their asses.

For more popular scams see the boxed text, p114.