

SCAMS

Well documented *jinetero* (tout) problem aside, Habana is a remarkably safe city – particularly when compared with other Latin American capitals. Stroll through the atmospheric backstreets of Centro Habana or Habana Vieja of an evening and your biggest worry is likely to be a badly pitched baseball or a flailing line of household washing.

But innocents beware. Scams do exist, particularly in the more touristy areas where well-practiced hustlers lurk outside the big hotels waiting to prey on unsuspecting foreign visitors.

One popular trick is for young men in the street to offer to change foreign currency into Cuban Convertibles at very favorable rates. Accept this at your peril. The money that you will be given is *moneda nacional* or Cuban pesos, visually similar to Convertibles, but worth approximately one-twenty-fifth of the value when you take them into a shop.

A second scam is the illicit sale of cheap cigars usually perpetuated by hissing street salesmen around Centro Habana and Habana Vieja. It is best to politely ignore these characters. Any bartering is not worth the bother. Cigars sold on the street are almost always sub-standard – something akin to substituting an expensive French wine with cheap white vinegar. Instead, buy your cigars direct from the factory or visit one of the numerous Casas del Habana that are scattered throughout the city.