Cuba Relection Session Ideas

**As of August 2013**

**Initial Sessions**:

Have everyone in the group introduce themselves by stating what they can offer the group and what they need from the group.

Brainstorm a list of stereotypes that people in the U.S. have of Cuba and Cubans and write it on newsprint. Then brainstorm a list of stereotypes that the group thinks Cubans may have of the U.S. and U.S. citizens and write the list on big paper. If there are stereotypes of U.S. citizens that the group wants to avoid reinforcing, discuss how they might do that. During one of the last sessions of the trip, you are encouraged to come back to both lists and discuss people’s insights.

Take a big sheet of paper and have them write down something that they have heard or seen (on a billboard, etc.) and explain where/when they saw/heard it and why it struck them. This make a nice piece to take back and pin up at their school, church, etc.

What is one emerging question that you have for the rest of your time in Cuba?

**Mid-trip**:

What are your *cucarachas* (cockroaches, things that are “bugging” you in Cuba)? What are your *mariposas* (butterflies, things that are delighting you in Cuba)? Can do in small group, and then report back.

What values, attitudes, assumptions or past experiences do you bring with you that may influence the way you perceive Cuba? What has surprised you so far?

If you had to leave Cuba right now, what one snapshot would you take home to show your friends and family? What would you say about it?

After the U.S. Interests Section: Why do you think the U.S. sees Cuba as a threat? What are the largest U.S interests in Cuba? How does what the U.S. officials said compare and contrast with what other speakers have said?

Ask each participant to share with the group an experience they have had that has helped them to understand or taught you something about the meaning of "democracy" or "freedom." What have you learned in Cuba, up to this point, about Cubans' definition of "democracy" or "freedom"? What does "democracy" include besides elections? What are you taking with you, and what are you leaving behind? What have you learned about different attitudes regarding “social rights” and “individual” or “personal rights” in Cuba and the U.S.?

**Final Reflection**:

Divide the group into 5 or 6 small groups. Assign each group a topic that was covered in the schedule. Examples are Cuban history, human rights, freedom of the press, Cuban economy, Church-State relations, private enterprise, exiles/immigration, and U.S.-Cuba relations. In each small group, ask them to take 30 minutes to discuss:

What was the fundamental position of the speakers or groups we heard discuss your subject?

What did you learn in informal settings (Cuban-on-the-street-interviews, etc.) about this topic?

What contradictions, if any, do you see?

What is your response to any contradictions or to other issues raised?

Re-gather and have each small group report back on their topic for about 30 minutes. Leave another 30 minutes at the end for questions and comments about their learning in Cuba, or about what they are taking home with them from Cuba.

Review the lists you brainstormed about stereotypes at the beginning of the trip. What stereotypes have been broken during the trip, and how?

What is your position on the U.S. blockade/embargo now, and why? What does the U.S. government say about Cuba and why they continue the blockade/embargo?

In small groups discuss: Why does the U.S. government consider Cuba an enemy state and what does it say about what would need to change in order for us to reestablish full relations? What have your experiences been in Cuba related to those things?

What was one thing that confirmed an idea that you had of Cuba coming in? What is one thing that challenged or surprised you about an idea you had coming in?

How do you feel challenged or supported by what you’ve experienced in Cuba?

What is a key contrast or contradiction you’ve encountered in Cuba?

Who are the main actors in U.S. Cuban relations? What do they have to gain or lose from changes in our relations? Brainstorm the main actors, i.e. Cuban people, Cuban government, Cuban-Americans, U.S. people, U.S. government, U.S. business. In small groups discuss what each may have to gain/lose with changes in US-Cuban relations. Who may be allies in working together?

What actions do you plan to take back in the U.S. as a result of this educational experience? You may want to bring paper and envelopes and have each person write a letter to her/himself that you can mail a month after the trip. Another option is to have participants write letters to the MLK Center stating what action they plan to take, which you can photocopy and mail send to them as a reminder. Or, you can buy several postcards, ask each participants to choose one and write on it a message to themselves about something they have learned in Cuba that they do not want to forget, then mail these postcards from the post office across the street from the MLK Center before you leave.

Break into small groups representing different sectors, i.e. women, workers, artists, land/business owners. Answer: what has the revolution done for you? What do you gain or lose from the revolution? What groups support/oppose you? Have small groups report back to the larger group. How might that compare or contrast to how those sectors in the U.S. may be affected by social change movements?

We’ve all had a journey throughout Cuba where we’ve met many people. We’ve learned from them and they’ve touched our hearts. (Review some of the visits you had.) The challenge is how to bring that experience back to others at home, especially the pieces that touched our hearts.

Anecdote – what is one image, concept, phrase or person that you’d like to take back from Cuba to help explain to others what you learned in Cuba? (Focuses more on the heart) Pass a talking stick around the circle to have people share in an uninterrupted way.

Elevator speech – many people who ask you “how was Cuba?!” may not have much attention span to listen to your response. In one sentence summarize what message you want to take home. Give people a few minutes to write, then go around to share.

Action – Cubans have invested a lot in hosting and sharing with us and hope that we’ll act on our experiences to improve U.S.-Cuban relations. Talk about the different ways that we can all take action. What is one action you want to commit to when you return home? Go around and share.

**CUBA BEACH QUEST**

Your time at the beach can be used, in addition to enjoying the beauty of nature, to get some sense about the growing tourist industry in Cuba.

Here are some suggestions of questions to keep in mind as you observe life on the beach:

* Who are the tourists?
* What countries are they from?
* What skin colors to you observe?
* Do you see any Cuban tourists?

Talk to some people about where they come from and why they chose to vacation in Cuba.

Notice the price of things. How do prices on the beach compare with those you have observed elsewhere in Cuba? Consider these additional questions:

* Who is selling on the beach?
* What are they selling?
* Are there private vendors? If so, talk to them about their businesses (similar to Farmers Market Quest), and probably then buy some small item from them!!
* Did you (or someone else for you) have to pay to get into the beach area?
* If so, was payment in CUCs or Cuban national currency?
* Is there a Tourist Ministry representative or booth?
* Who owns the hotels at the beach? Find out what you can about foreign investment in Cuba’s tourism sector.
* Ask the desk clerk or other hotel employees who s/he works for.
* Do hotel employees get paid in CUCs or Cuban national pesos?
* What else have you noticed of interest during your time at the beach?
* What do you think are the benefits and the shortcomings of the burgeoning tourist industry in Cuba?

**CUBA FARMERS MARKET QUEST**

NOTE: Check with your MLKC guide and/or cooks to see if there is food that can be bought that can be used for meals. That may help group members feel more comfortable engaging in conversation with the vendors in the market.

Instruction: This is a self-guided tour of an agriculture market in Cuba to be completed individually or in small groups. The goal is to give participants the opportunity to speak directly with Cubans in a non-structured setting and to learn more about independent business ownership in Cuba.

Cubans selling or buying in this market will likely be very open to talking with participants. Have participants introduce themselves first; for example: “Hi, I/we am/are from X state in the United States. A group of us are here in Cuba for about X days because we are interested in learning about Cuba and X issues. Would you be willing help us learn by answering a few questions?”

Try to pick vendors who are not busy. Start by asking questions about their stall or shop before getting into more controversial issues of politics or economics of the country. Questions like:

* How has business been?
* How many people are supported by your shop here in the market?
* Are the people working here in your shop all related to one another?
* Do you come here every day?
* What do you do on the days you are not in this market?

After developing rapport, most people are very open to responding to other questions, such as:

* How do the prices you receive in the farmers market compare to the prices you receive from the products they sell to the Cuban government?
* Are the prices regulated by the Cuban government?
* How are you able to sell your products?
* What kind of an income are you able to make?
* What taxes do you have to pay on your earnings?
* What changes would you like to see in the Cuban economy?
* What kind of a farm or cooperative do you come from?
* How has the farming and marketing situation in Cuba changed over the past decade?
* What are you able to buy with your earnings? Basic foods, other necessities, etc.?
* What subsidies do you receive from the Cuban government?

Additional things of which to be aware:

* What do you see? Hear? Smell?
* What do you find striking, if anything, about this market?
* What political symbols do you see in the market?
* What is the age range of people working in the market?
* What is the race of people working and shopping in the market?

We encourage you to share what you learned with others in your group—informally or in one of your reflection sessions.

**MARKET SURVEY**

***Instructions:***

The purpose of this socio-economic tour is to give participants an idea of the cost of basic goods needed by the average family in Cuba. Ideally have your MLKC guide take you to a ration store *(bodega*) and get an explanation of how that works, then to a store that only sells items in CUCs, and another that only accepts Cuban national pesos. Have participants pay attention to what items are available in each place, the quality, the prices, and who else is shopping.

Double check these figures with your MLKC guide:

The average wage in Cuba is equivalent to US$20/month

Exchange rate: US$1 = CUC$1.15 or about 25 Cuban national pesos

U.S. federal minimum wage: US$7.25 per hour

Explore the prices of basic goods and do some calculations that will help participants gauge the actual cost of living in Cuba. Ask them to research the prices of specific items, then calculate the number of hours or days that a worker would need to work in order to purchase such items. Afterwards, ask them to calculate the equivalent cost of the item in dollars.

Price items that you are most likely to use in a day-to-day setting.

For example:

* Food – fresh and canned/packaged
* School supplies
* Toiletries
* Public transportation

After they have checked all of the prices, have them complete the following calculations for each of the items on the list:

Example: If you purchase a notebook that costs CUC$1:

1. Price in U.S. dollars: the price divided by current exchange rate:
* Example: CUC$1 x 1.15 = US$1.15. (A notebook that costs CUC$1 costs US$1.15)
1. Time cost: the price divided by the average monthy salary
* Example: CUC$1 ÷ CUC$20 = about 1 work day

(This figure represents the number of hours an average Cuban must work in order to have enough money to purchase the item – if a notebook costs CUC$1, it would take someone about 1 day of work to be able to purchase it.)

1. U.S. cost equivalent: \_\_\_ hours worked x US$7.25 (U.S. minimum wage) = US$\_\_\_\_.
* Example 8 hours (1 day) x US$7.25 = US$58

(This is the price U.S. consumers would have to pay if they had to work the same number of hours as a Cuban worker in order to purchase the notebook mentioned.)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Price*** | ***US Price***  | ***Time Cost # of hours*** | ***US Cost Equivalent*** |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |  |
| 4. |  |  |  |  |
| 5. |  |  |  |  |
| 6. |  |  |  |  |
| 7. |  |  |  |  |
| 8. |  |  |  |  |

Questions regarding the Market Survey:

* What, if anything, surprised you about the calculations you did?
* Are there any items that you bought that may be considered luxury items in Cuba?
* What are the items in Cuba for which citizens do not have to pay? i.e. rent, school fees, medical bills
* What items were you only able to buy in CUCs? What items can only be purchased in Cuban national pesos? Who has access to each kind of money?