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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Survey Finds 88.2 Percent of Americans Who Visited Cuba in Past 2.5 Years are Now More Supportive of Ending US Sanctions**

Survey of 423 American travelers to Cuba shows the success of US government people-to-people programs in shifting opinions and attitudes toward the island nation

JENKINTOWN, Pa.—February 3, 2014—A survey of 423 Americans who visited Cuba during the past two and a half years as part of U.S.-licensed cultural exchange programs (known as [people-to-people programs](#)) shows that the experience dramatically transformed their opinions of Cuba, its people, and U.S. policy toward the country. Most striking, the survey, which was conducted upon travelers' return, reveals that 88.2 percent of those who traveled on people-to-people programs now say they are more supportive of ending sanctions, many of which date back to the 1960s. That number compares to only 10.8 percent of respondents who say that their travel experience to Cuba had no effect on their opinion. The survey was conducted during the week of Dec. 9, 2013 by [Friendly Planet Travel](#), a people-to-people program operator that has taken thousands of travelers on these cultural programs to Cuba since 2011.

The survey finds that after these exchanges, American travelers to Cuba can now, "More easily separate politics from culture and appreciate people for who they are" (with 67 percent of respondents opting for this response when asked what impact their trip to Cuba made on them). The ability to separate politics from culture also gives these travelers a new opinion of the Cuban government. In fact, before visiting Cuba, 47.8 percent of surveyed travelers say they viewed the Cuban government as "a repressive communist regime that stifles individuality and creativity." After experiencing the culture and people of Cuba, only 19 percent of U.S. travelers surveyed still agree with that sentiment.

Interestingly, only 3.6 percent of travelers surveyed chose to visit Cuba because of a personal or family connection. Rather, 74.4 percent say they chose to travel to Cuba on a people-to-people program because they were "curious about what life was like in Cuba." The biggest surprises that many of these travelers report are the openness and friendliness of Cubans toward Americans, the entrepreneurial drive of many Cubans, and the vibrancy of the arts and cultural scene in Cuba.

An astonishing 81.3 percent of surveyed travelers say they would travel to Cuba again if given the chance, the highest intended return rate ever recorded by Friendly Planet Travel—the company with which the respondents traveled.

“The results of this survey show that the impact of people-to-people travel is undeniable and transformational in the lives of those who travel to Cuba now that restrictions are being eased,” says [Peggy Goldman](#), President of Friendly Planet Travel. “The experience draws people closer together but does not whitewash the challenges that Cuban people face. Our travelers experience the real Cuba, filled with culture, creativity, and art. They also get to see the reality of Cuban living standards, which are often difficult and impoverished. The program changes beliefs and attitudes and allows people to look past politics and into the heart and soul of a culture. In my more than 30 years in the travel industry, I have never seen a single travel experience change so many lives.”

Even more telling than the statistics are the travelers’ own words about their Cuba experience, which they shared in the survey. For instance:

“You will take away so much more than you can imagine from your trip. After you leave Cuba, ask yourself the question ‘How can I make a difference for the Cuban people?’ My answer would be: Tell everyone you can that you, an American, have been to Cuba and it is time that more Americans go and see ... this country and change our attitude.” – Jean Pluchar, traveler on a people-to-people program with Friendly Planet in April 2013.

“We felt like our trip to Cuba was an incredible gift. ... There was so much to see and do and absorb, and the people-to-people interactions were what made it so special. Cuba was nothing like the 51 other countries we have visited in the past.” – Robin Hannigan, traveler on a people-to-people program with Friendly Planet in Jan. 2013.

For more information on this survey, attributable quotes, or to speak to travelers who have experienced these people-to-people programs first-hand, contact Alicia Buonanno at 610-228-2096 or Alicia@GregoryFCA.com.

ABOUT FRIENDLY PLANET TRAVEL

Friendly Planet Travel makes high-quality exotic travel affordable for everyone. Since 1981, Friendly Planet Travel has been arranging all-inclusive escorted discount vacation packages and cruises to the most exciting destinations in the world at the lowest possible prices.

Each year, Friendly Planet Travel offers more than 30 different group travel packages to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South America—at discounts of hundreds of dollars off similar vacations. With no hidden charges, add-ons, or surprises, Friendly Planet Travel vacations include convenient flights and airfare; carefully selected, first-class and superior hotels; knowledgeable, English-speaking guides; many meals; planned itineraries; as well as friendships and memories that last a lifetime.

Friendly Planet Travel offers its extensive, economical travel services to private groups, including universities, religious institutions, alumni associations, and families. Groups who wish to travel together can count on Friendly Planet Travel’s three decades of experience to operate their group travel program expertly and always at the very best possible prices. Visit the company at www.FriendlyPlanetTravel.com. You can also follow Friendly Planet Travel on

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