

Why do we have to wait until Fidel's ghost finally meets up with Che's before the ban on US citizen travel is lifted? Everyone knows it has been sidestepped, evaded, ignored, avoided and violated every day for decades. Anyone can get to Cuba from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean or through any number of air or sea bookings.

Also, U.S. charitable, social, academic and music groups easily get permission to make cultural forays into Castroland. The only people who seem to be forbidden by the nearly half-century-old ban are tourists. It has been particularly frustrating for seniors, who can remember when Cuba was a very desirable travel destination.

A friend of mine, a popular U.S. celebrity known for his cigar smoking, did a short video news bit as he toured some of Cuba's famous cigar-making plants. Nobody condemned him for what could have been an illegal trip. However, government records show two online smokers were fined \$999.45 and \$510 collectively for buying Cuban cigars on the Internet.

The U.S. Feds still crack down on people and organizations who break the long-standing law. Last year, online agency Travelocity was fined \$182,750 for its violations. Did the guilty agency send just one grandmom and grandpop down to Cuba to deserve such a high fine? No, according to U.S. Treasury snoops, Travelocity broke the law 1,500 times between 1998 and 2004. You do the math, but I'm sure the little Travelocity advertising gnome won't lose any sleep ... nor much money ...over it.

On the other hand, Cubans trying to escape the oppressive political regime still come to the U.S. in small boats and rubber rafts. Maybe if we let a few legal U.S. tourist dollars circulate around the beautiful tropical island, Cubans would decide to stay home and be able to earn decent incomes from the revived tourists trade.

Warning: If you're a U.S. citizen, before you make any plans to travel to Cuba, illegally or otherwise, check with current State Department rules.