

Reinforcement for Cubana: Russian jumbo jet back in service



Cubana's last active Il-96-300 landed in Havana on December 3 for a general overhaul (Source: [Dmitry Terekhov/FR](#))

After a long time, Cubana airline is getting a new addition to its fleet. Last December 3, an Ilyushin Il-96-300 landed in Havana after a 14-month general overhaul. Just a few weeks earlier, a refurbished Tupolev had returned from Russia. This means that the socialist airline once again has its own wide-body aircraft for medium and long-haul flights.

Cubana actually owns four Il-96s, but these have had to eke out a sad existence in the hangar for several years. The lack of foreign currency has delayed the overdue maintenance work for the Russian aircraft. As a result, the first aircraft was retired in 2018 and the remaining three by mid-2021. Since then, most of Cubana's international connections have been served via contracts with external providers that use standard Boeing or Airbus models. Foreign aircraft also have to be chartered for government flights since then. In 2019, Cuba and Russia agreed on a general overhaul of the Russian Cubana aircraft, the implementation of which initially went quiet during the pandemic.

On August 10, 2022, the plane with the registration number CU-T1250 finally left for the manufacturer's plant in Voronezh. There it underwent a "heavy form of maintenance", as the aircraft factory WASO explained on its Telegram channel. In addition to the modernization of cockpit and navigation systems, this usually also includes work on the landing gear and paintwork, according to the specialist portal "[Flugrevue](#)". Project manager Alexander Jarschewski explained that a lot was learned during the work. "The experience with the Cuban Il-96 was very useful both for us and for them," said the WASO employee. Cubana now apparently also wants to get its three remaining Ilyushin 96 aircraft back on track. A "special concept" has been developed so that the next maintenance can be carried out more quickly, which defines the necessary preparatory work on the part of the Cubans in Havana, explained Jarschewski.

The CU-T1250 was built in 2005, its two sister aircraft with the registration numbers CU-T1251 and CU-T1254 were also handed over to Cubana brand new in 2006. The fourth Il-96 with the registration number CU-T1717 was built in 1993 and was previously in service with Russian airlines. It was acquired in 2014.



Ilyushin for long-haul flights, Tupolev for regional flights: The Tu-204E with the registration CU-T1702 returned to Havana on September 18 after completing maintenance (Source: [Cubadebate](#))

The four-engine Ilyushin 96 was once the Soviet Union's most modern wide-body aircraft and was designed to compete with the Boeing 767 and Airbus A330. It can carry up to 300 passengers and has a maximum range of 13,500 kilometers. The maiden flight of the first test aircraft took place on September 28, 1988. In the 1990s, several variants such as the Il-96M/T and Il-96-400 were developed with a larger wingspan and increased payload. Due to a lack of economic competitiveness, it was unable to establish itself on the global market, which is why only 30 of them exist worldwide. However, production was resumed in 2019 after an interruption of several years. An enlarged version with the designation Il-96-500 is to be delivered as a cargo aircraft from 2026. Cubana is the only airline in the world to use an Il-96 for passenger operations. In addition to commercial use, the Il-96 is likely to be used again as a Cuban presidential aircraft.

On September 18, a Tupolev Tu-204E built in 2007 also returned to Cuba after a four-year overhaul. It had taken off for maintenance in Ulyanovsk, Russia, in 2019, but the project was

put on hold for a long time due to a lack of funding. With a range of 4,500 kilometers, it is likely to be used for regional medium-haul routes in Latin America in the future.

Cuba has not had a lucky hand when it comes to procuring new aircraft. Between 2013 and 2015, six Antonov An-158s were acquired ([Cuba Today reported](#)), which were primarily to be used for domestic flights. The modern regional jets were built by Aviant in Kiev as a joint Ukrainian-Russian project. However, when the war broke out, the supply of spare parts collapsed, which is why all six aircraft had to be decommissioned. "We bought the An-158s in Ukraine, but the contract for the spare parts was concluded with Russia," explained a Cubana spokesperson. ([Cubaheute](#))