



E TIME



BY KARL VICK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISETTE POOLE

The shortest route from Cuba to the U.S. is 90 miles. But that's across the Florida Straits, and Liset Barrios gets nervous on a boat. So on May 13, she boards Copa Airlines Flight 295, setting off the long way around—the really long way. The journey covered 8,000 miles, took 51 days and, along the way, illuminated an obscure byway in this historic wave of human migration. The U.N. says some 244 million people live outside their home countries, most as legal guest workers in nearby nations. About 21 million are refugees fleeing war or persecution. Several million more—no one knows the precise number—make their way underground, “irregular migrants” trying to stay out of sight en route from a poor place with scant opportunities to a richer one, with more. Liset and her neighbor Marta Amaro, who traveled with her, are in a semiprivileged subset of irregulars. Since they are Cubans presumed by U.S. law to be suffering under the yoke of communism, they would actually be welcomed in America when they arrive—provided they come by land. The problem is that none of the countries close to the U.S. allows a Cuban to enter without a visa.

Photographer Lisette Poole chronicled the journey of two Cuban women, Marta and Liset, during their 8,000 mile migration to the US. The women reached the US before the end of the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" policy, which granted asylum to any Cuban immigrant that reached the United States.

Marta, 52, says goodbye to her friend



[Larger Map](#) So it is that Liset, Marta and the photojournalist Lisette Poole land at 1:39 p.m. in Georgetown, the capital of the tiny South American country of Guyana, the nearest country open to Cubans. Their plan is to get a hotel and scout around for a smuggler, but they don't even have to leave the airport. While disembarking, another Cuban tells them he has a smuggler waiting outside. "It's something that's already there," Liset says, of the river of migrants the women enter at that moment. "And you have to have the luck of being there at the right moment to get into it so that everything flows."

That very night, they ride in a van 18 hours to Brazil—the more direct route toward the U.S., northwest across Venezuela, having been ruled out because the country is wildly dangerous. (The migrant river follows the path of least resistance.) They cross the border into Brazil by canoe, then make their way to Manaus, deep in the heart of the rain forest. There they board a plane to southwest Brazil, saving 22 hours overland, and hire a taxi to the border of Bolivia, a remote corner of which they cross en route to Peru.



Lisette Poole—Redux

Marta rides in a van with Haitian migrants after being detained by Peruvian migration officials on May 24. They were released after an officer took a liking to Liset and decided to let her go.

The bus over the Andes to Lima is \$150. Thus far, each has spent \$2,300 of the nearly \$8,000 the journey will end up costing per person. Most of the way, Liset, 25, pays for Marta. The younger woman has a boyfriend in Chicago, who fell for Liset during a visit to Havana. In Cuba, tourists use a special peso worth 26 times the currency used by ordinary Cubans.

By befriending male tourists with money to spend—an arrangement that often shifted from girlfriend to escort—Liset managed to live relatively well, after once living in a shipping container. Marta, 53, made \$5 a day working in cafeterias, hospitals and, for a time, an asylum. Both women wanted a better life, and then the boyfriend offered to bring Liset north. “Our plan was to help each other,” Marta says.



Lisette Poole—Redux

Marta eats an apple at a rest stop in Ecuador on May 25. She and Liset then took a bus with other migrants overnight to near the Colombian border.

In the way of modern migrants, the women travel with smartphones, touching base with family when they get wi-fi, which the hostel in Lima has. At dusk that day they board a bus toward Ecuador, where Liset talks their way past immigration agents. The first bus in Ecuador is crowded with Haitians, who after the 2010 earthquake also got a temporary dispensation to enter the U.S. There are even Bangladeshis, who began their journey nearly 11,000 miles away.

They cross into Colombia on horseback, negotiate past a military patrol and walk up a hill to a chicken restaurant, where the next coyote—Latin American slang for people smuggler—is waiting. Every move the migrants make is at the instruction of coyotes, who text photos of the next smuggler to the migrants so they know whom to look for at the next stop. “In every country, they would tell you to hide,” Liset says, “but I think it was their way to scare you, so you would feel afraid if you were out of their hands.”



Lisette Poole—Redux

Left: Marta walks on a path with other migrants, including some from Haiti and as far away as Bangladesh, while crossing the border from Ecuador into Colombia on May 26. Right: Marta rests following the long hike. The Colombian military had shown up and detained the Haitian and Bangladeshi migrants. Liset and Marta walked freely to the other side.

Colombia, riven by both corruption and conflict, is notoriously difficult, yet the migrants flow on. That night, after a day in a “stash house,” Liset and Marta join a dozen others under the tarp of a truck loaded with potatoes. The photographer Poole rides up front with the driver and a coyote. “They swap migrant stories like camp counselors,” she writes in her notes.

At a motel, the travelers are grouped by nationality. They take a bus to Medellín, wait days, then board an overnight bus toward Panama, tension rising as South America narrows toward the isthmus. They ride motorcycles to a boat, cross an inlet in a two-hour trip, switch to a horse and buggy and shower in a preschool before reaching a camp, where they meet Cubans who were on the jet from Havana.



Note San Francisco 49ers Liset and Marta, with locals who help guide migrants, prepare to board a boat at dawn on June 6, traveling from Necoclí to Capurganá, in Colombia, as they close in on Panama's border.



Lisette Poole—Redux

Marta and Liset rest in the river after a treacherous crossing in the Darién Gap on June 12.

They have run out of road. Panama begins at the Darién Gap, a dense jungle 30 miles wide and 100 miles long. They sleep in camps with guides and young men from Nepal and the Punjab, evidence it's not just Latin Americans trying to enter the U.S. from the south. (So far this fiscal year, 448 Armenians have presented themselves at crossings; the Border Patrol has caught 2,130 Chinese and 1,863 Russians.) The trek is brutal, running over steep hills called Goodbye My City and Hill of Death. "I wanted the earth to swallow me," says

They travel due west, crossing the same curving river again and again. The women are separated, and Poole moves with a group of 50 others. That night the rain washes away her things. Reunited, the three end up, on the sixth day, presenting themselves to Panamanian officials, who check their fingerprints against terrorism and criminal databases then allow everyone to move on.

The Central American leg feels even more chaotic. The coyote in Costa Rica has green hair and laughs as she blows past officers. Marta leaves the group after a quarrel about money. She'll make it to the U.S. herself, 12 days behind Liset and Poole—who enter Nicaragua on horseback, then hike another jungle trail marked by red ribbons on teak trees; people drink water from puddles and sleep standing up. They end up crowded in an SUV with only a narrow band cut in the window tinting, cross a river into Honduras on foot, then enter Guatemala the same way. Mexico is reached on a raft.



Lisette Poole—Redux

After taking buses through Honduras and Guatemala, Liset flew from southern Mexico to Matamoros, near Brownsville, Texas. On July 2, she walks along the bridge over the Rio Grande to present herself to officials and seek asylum.

The next day, Liset takes a flight to Mexico City, then another to Matamoros, where she presents herself to the U.S. agents to the border at Brownsville. There she is given a permit. A day later, July 3, she lands at Chicago's O'Hare airport, the beginning of her American journey.

The boyfriend is late.

<https://time.com/cuba-the-long-way-to-america/>

By Karl Vick, Funded by Kickstarter* and Liset Barrios's boyfriend in Chicago, Marta Anaro, both seek Asylum (Cubans) Photographs Lisette Poole This Is 2016 Just Before Obama Ended wet foot, dry foot,

Katia Is A People Smuggler *there should be a documentary, but it has not showed up yet,

Photographs Lisette Poole This Is 2016 Just Before Obama End Katia Is A People Smuggler <https://time.com/smugglers-inc/>

The road at the end of town in Capurganá, where migrants would pass through at night to enter the jungle before local coyotes changed the route to avoid authorities, on Oct. 3, 2017.

October 3rd 2017 A horse grazes in a palm field, near the border area where Katia works, on Dec. 20, 2017.

Poole's reporting was supported by a grant from the [International Women's Media Foundation](#)

Correction: The original version of this story incorrectly identified Gabriella E. Sanchez. She is a research fellow at the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute. She is no longer a professor at the University of Texas at El Paso.

A new 'freedom caravan' of primarily Cuban migrants is trying to reach U.S.

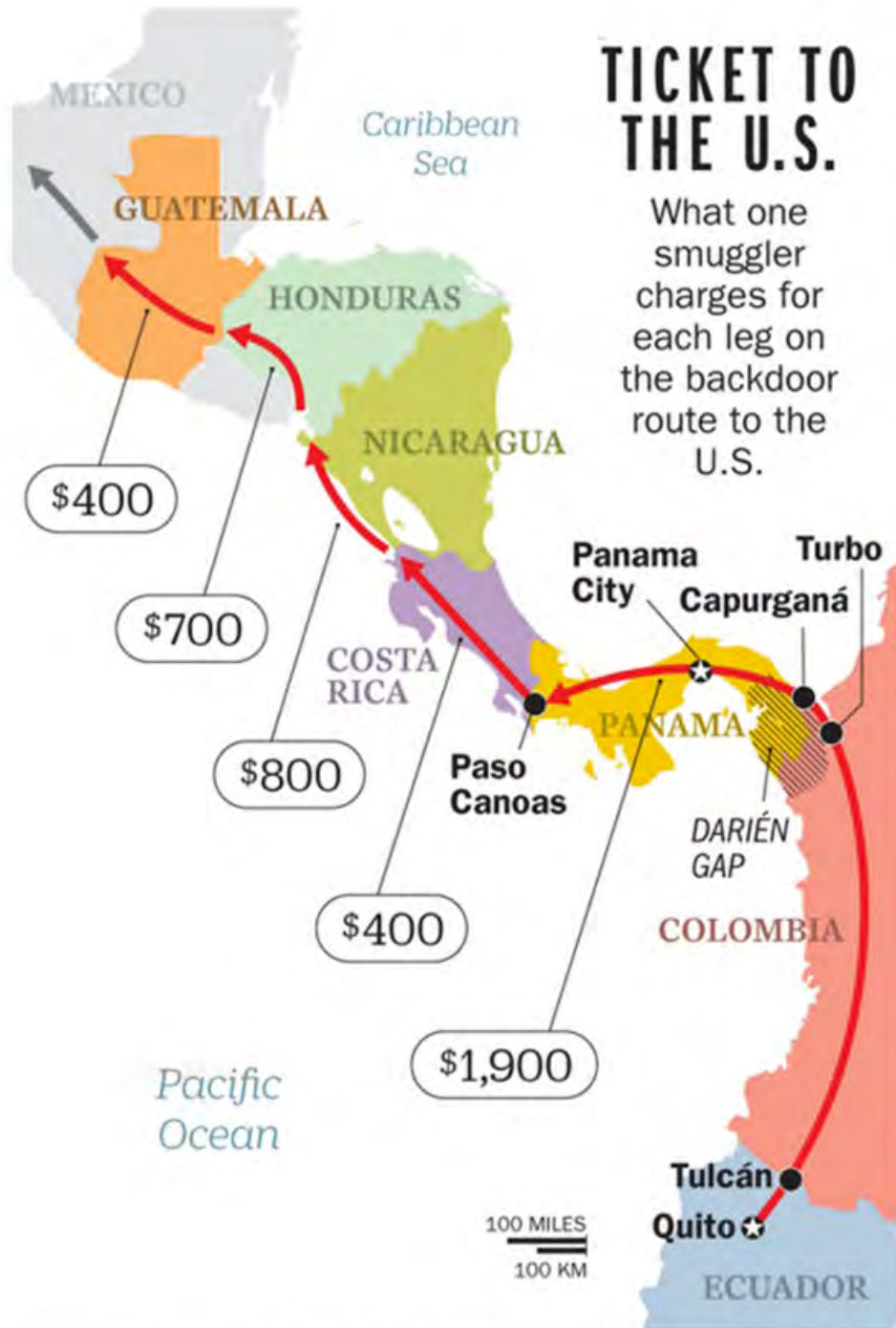
<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article226266180.html>

[By Mario J. Pentó](#) February 14, 2019 04:04 PM, Updated February 16, 2019 08:10 PM

Read more here: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article226266180.html#storylink=cpy>

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/48-days-photographer-captures-8000-mile-journey-cuba/story?id=46918018>
WatchObama Administration Ending 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' Policy for Cubans

Honduras—are consumed by the cost of drivers, food, shelter and bribes.



“I can’t charge them more, because they’re already crying about the price,” she says, “and if I charge \$100 more per country...” Left unsaid: Someone will undercut her. “I can’t,” she says with a shrug.

<https://time.com/smugglers-inc/>



SlideShow 81 Days

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/48-days-photographer-captures-8000-mile-journey-cuba/story?id=46918018>

Liset arrives at Chicago O'Hare International Airport to be reunited with her boyfriend, Joey, *who she met in Cuba back in January and paid for her trip to go to the United States, July 3, 2016*. Poole is currently fundraising on Kickstarter to turn the project into a photo book styled as a classic travel guide. More Poole has a personal interest in the women's journey as a Cuban-American herself. Her mother left for the United States in 1969, and Poole grew up in the U.S. with a constant awareness of the immigration issues that affected her family.

"Living and working in Cuba, I always imagine what kind of life I would have had if I'd been born here," Poole said. "I imagine what kind of person I would be, what my goals would be, and I question whether I'd have the courage to do what Liset and Marta did."

Marta and Liset's journey began in Havana with a plane ticket and the name of a human smuggler, known as a coyote, scribbled on a piece of paper. After flying to [Guyana](#), the two navigated through South and Central America following routes that many immigrants traveled before them. Poole departed with them, documenting

the complete experience as Marta and Liset joined groups of other immigrants, illegally crossed borders and were detained by law enforcement.

The women journeyed on planes and buses, but also traveled many miles by foot. Their route crossed through Brazil and Peru before heading north through Colombia. The ever-changing immigrant group then traversed through the Darien Gap, a roadless jungle swamp on the Panama-Colombia border, and into Central America.

information can be found [here](#).

48 Days: Photographer captures 8,000 mile journey from Cuba to US





For Poole, the journey was not without incident. In Costa Rica, Marta and Liset had a falling out over money. Liset had been funding their trip and was unable to continue paying for herself as well as Marta. Liset planned to move ahead and send back money for Marta once she could gather more funds.

"At the prospect of being left behind Marta was enraged. (She) fought with Liset and told the men running the stash house that I was a journalist. I'd been keeping quiet there, it was one of the places I didn't feel safe having the coyotes know who I was," Poole said.

The stash house was a remote shelter where immigrants were housed along the migration routes. Poole was able to talk her way out of the situation and continue on with Liset and other migrants. The two parted ways with Marta, who would end up joining the next group.

Poole continued on, photographing the resolve and resourcefulness of migrants attempting the journey. Her reportage gracefully blurs the line between straight documentation and personal insight through her experience.

"There was one moment in Nicaragua (after the Costa Rica incident) where we were without food or water or even sleep for a few days," Poole said. "I was getting delirious and so was Liset. We helped each other during that time, and we got through it together."

Poole and Liset crossed the U.S. border into Texas, followed by Marta 12 days later. The two women rekindled their friendship and lived near each other in Miami before moving around to other places in the U.S. Poole has since returned to Cuba, but is continuing her work with Liset and Marta and documenting their new lives.



Poole is currently fundraising on Kickstarter to turn the project into a photo book styled as a classic travel guide. More information can be found [here](#).

"I hope that by looking at my work and experiencing the journey of Liset and Marta, readers would relate to them and be able to put themselves in their shoes as two people who wanted a better life," Poole said. "There are significant global issues causing migration and it isn't a matter of personal choice so much as a consequence of greater forces at play."

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/48-days-photographer-captures-8000-mile-journey-cuba/story?id=46918018>



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Lisette Poole

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Liset and Marta at Marta's home in Mariano, Havana. The two are old friends from the neighborhood. Mariano is a marginalized neighborhood of Havana.



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Lisette Poole

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Photographer Lisette Poole chronicled the journey of two Cuban women, Marta and Liset, during their 8,000 mile migration to the US. The women reached the US before the end of the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" policy, which granted asylum to any Cuban immigrant that reached the United States. Marta, 52, says goodbye to her friend Sunamy as she holds her grandson. The



Like 0 Tweet

Liset and Marta land in Guyana and meet other Cubans who introduce them to local coyotes.

48 Days: Photographer captures 8,000 mile journey from Cuba to US



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Liset after crossing into Colombia sees people being arrested, local military decide to let her and Marta continue on.