

CUBAN TOURISM DECLINES



The tourism industry is growing world wide, but not so in the Republic of Cuba. The island economy has witnessed a fall in the number of tourists coming here. The number of visitors fell to 2.2 million last year from 2.3 million in 2005. The main reason for the drop in the number of tourists visiting Cuba last year is the high prices. One of the main problems is the growing price of jet fuel. Not many tourists were afraid of the political turmoil around ailing Castro. In fact, a tour operator in Havana reported only one cancellation due to this fears. On the other hand, some tourists were scared away by the dengue outbreak, which led to the fumigation of Cuban cities with smoke to kill mosquitoes. Visitors also complain about theft of luggage at airports and hotels. Nevertheless, the prices and inadequate services remain the main reasons for drop in the numbers of visitors. Tourists thus find Cancun and the Dominican Republic as better places to go.

Cuba is losing money due to the US embargo. This embargo prevents prospective American tourists to come to the island and it also forbids trade between the two countries. Cuba estimates that it loses some US\$7 billion per year that would be, if it were not for the embargo, brought by the American tourists. There was also a drop in the number of Canadian tourists coming to Cuba. Canadians made up 27% of Cuba's arrivals. The biggest drop is in numbers of visitors from Europe. There were declines of 10% to 20% in the number of visitors from Italy, France and Germany, and a 45% decline from Spain.

Nevertheless, the Cuban authorities want to improve the tourism industry. There are plans for huge investment in the tourism related infrastructure. In fact the Cuban government wants to spend up to US\$200 million over the next three years to upgrade more than 200 resorts, marinas, golf courses and theme parks. The government will also improve the road infrastructure and update the airport at Havana.

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