

# Cuba Enjoying Tourism Increase



From the first glance, Cuba does not seem to be a highly attractive destination for potential visitors: the state-run Cuba bank offers poor exchange rates for euros, while the cost of eating out is high even by European standards. Nevertheless, the exotic image of the island has done wonders for local tourism.

Figures prove that the island has been enjoying an influx of visitors. The majority used to be Germans, yet the growing number of Canadians, British, Italians and French tend to arriving. Perhaps, the news of Fidel Castro's illness is tempting people to come, some wanting to witness the last socialist regime before this chance is taken away.

The number of conferences related to tourism on the island has been increasing considerably in recent years, reaching an annual peak of 300. Sergio Pimientel, a representative of the Cuban Convention Bureau, stated that 20,560 participants came to Cuba in 2003, the last year's figure reached 35,208, while between July and September this year Cuba welcomed 20,552 conferences' participants. Such forums are medicine, sport, culture, science, or technology related. 288 conferences are to be held next year.

Mr Pimientel expects a national record number of travelers to visit Cuba next year. He quotes 2.5 million people as a target figure, with 2.32 million visits achieved in 2005. The above include both conference participants and other tourists.

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