

RESTRICTIONS LIFTED FOR AMERICAN TOURISTS GOING TO CUBA



It will be easier for Americans to travel to Cuba. On January 16 a number of restrictions were lifted. Thanks to the changes introduced, as of now it will not be necessary to apply for a special permit to travel to Cuba, although one still has to belong to one of the 12 existing categories of persons allowed to travel to that country.

Among the various changes that have come into effect is that travel agencies and airlines will be able to market authorized travel to the island, eliminating the requirement of a special license issued by the Treasury Department. Agents must, however, receive confirmation from the customers that they have the authorization, and must keep this information for five years.

For the American Association of Travel Agents (ASTA), this decision to ease restrictions is "a huge step" towards full liberalization of travel to Cuba. However, their chairman, Zane Kerby, is urging the US government to "break the barriers once and for all".

For its part, the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) indicates that this change in regulations will allow tour operators to offer cultural immersion trips to Cuba. "American travelers will be able to visit the island under cultural programs offered by vendors," he says.

The total elimination of restrictions would allow Cuba to double the number of international tourists it receives. According to ASTA, if this should occur in 2015, two years later the country would get at least two million more tourists from the United States. It must be remembered that Cuba gets more than three million international tourists annually.

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