

COLOMBIA: PEACE PROCESS TO ATTRACT 5.2 MILLION VISITORS



The Colombian government is confident that the positive end to its peace negotiations with the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) will give a boost to the tourism sector and enable it to get as many as 5.2 million foreign visitors this year.

This is the statement of Ricardo Cifuentes, coordinator of the Promotion Agency in Colombia's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, who explained **that since the start of the peace process with talks in Havana between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC, there has been an increase in the "sense of security" in the country.**

Consequently, he said that "many tourism markets", a sector that the government considers strategic, "are now looking at Colombia favorably" with a view to invest in the country which has suffered for over half a century of guerrilla conflicts.

Cifuentes made the declaration at a briefing breakfast held in the city of Cartagena de Indias for the Spanish media accompanying the more than 170 participants in the BBVA Route (formerly Quetzal Route) expedition, which has chosen Colombia for its American leg this year.

According to the head of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the Colombian government has a "duty" to ensure that increased tourism investment will result in job creation in the sector. **The authorities in this South American country have set a target of 300,000 new jobs.**

Last year, Colombia received 4.5 million foreign tourists, but the Santos government's target for this year is much more "ambitious," in the words of Cifuentes, who has put this year's target at 700,000 more foreign visitors, amounting to a total of 5.2 million.

Oscar Cabrera, chief executive of BBVA Colombia, is in agreement, and says that when he arrived in the country eight years ago there was hardly any hotel infrastructure, but that now, and especially after the start of the peace talks, "the big brands in the sector are setting up all over the country."

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