

CUBAN TOURISM BENEFITS FROM AN INCREASE OF FLIGHTS TO THE ISLAND



Cuban tourism is growing and air links are having a major impact. The trends indicate that 2015 will close with the arrival of more than 3.5 million foreign visitors.

Currently 54 foreign airlines connect the island to more than 60 cities worldwide. **Cuba has 10 international airports and for the island and its tourism air communication is now one of the most significant elements in the transport sector.** This is why many companies are taking advantage of the tourist boom the country has been experiencing since the rapprochement with the United States and the opening of trade to increase or start commercial flights.

In 2014 alone about 3 million tourists visited the island, a record number in its history, and projections for this year are even better. Cuban Tourism Minister, Manuel Marrero, said that last year Cuban civil aviation acquired three new aircrafts and there are negotiations for other equipment for this year in addition to the refurbishment of several terminals. Adding the elimination of airport taxes which has been in effect since May, 2016 promises to be much more successful.

Some 60 cities around the world are currently connected to Cuba and it is expected that there will be new connections in the near future. The first to resume is Iberia Airlines which has had 5 flights per week since June 1.

In addition, direct flights from Beijing, China to Havana with a stopover in Canada have started, and direct flights to the Cuban capital are also being negotiated with the Brazilian Gol airline. Continuing the trend are twice weekly flights by Aerolineas Argentinas and there has also been an increase in the flight frequency of Italy's Blue Panorama which celebrated its 20th anniversary.

For its part, Neos airline has a major development program linked to Cuba with airplanes named after cities in that country. That growing spiral includes new flights by other Spanish companies, Air Berlin, Condor, Eurowind and charter flights from Canada and Venezuela. These flights are being frequently advertised and in mid-June this year it was again reported that airlines from China and Germany are preparing new flights for the island's winter tourist season (November 2015-April 2016).

The Beijing-Havana links will involve Air China flights three times per week with stops in Montreal. This will be the first direct flight between the Asian giant and the Caribbean and Chinese tourists stopping in the Cuban capital will also facilitate a link with the rest of Latin America. In 2014 alone, more than 28,000 Chinese travelled to Cuba, which was a 27% increase over the figures for the previous year.

Meanwhile, Condor will increase its routes between Munich and the eastern city of Holguin with a weekly flight, and the German company will increase the number of weekly flights linking Havana and Frankfurt to four, plus an additional flight from Varadero to Munich. In 2014 Germany ranked second behind Canada among source markets for visitors to the largest Caribbean island.

Another frequent airline boosting Cuban tourism is Copa Airlines, with 20 years of these links, connecting Cuba directly to 72 destinations in 29 countries in the region through the Hub of the Americas in Panama City.

For its part, the **Air France-KLM carrier announced that it will increase its flights to Cuba in October in order to take advantage of the increasing development of the island's tourism industry.** A statement from the airline said that starting in October 2015 it will add an additional Wednesday flight to Havana.

With this new frequency, the airline offerings will increase to 11 flights per week in the winter of 2015, bringing more visitors from France and Europe to the Cuban capital. The company operates its flights on Boeing 777-300 aircraft with capacity for 468 passengers (14 in Business Class, 32 in Premium Economy and 422 in Economy) out of the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris.

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