

CUBAN TOURISM PASSES 2M VISITORS MARK



Cuban tourism industry authorities announced 2 million international visitors coming to the island in 2016. The officials believe that Cuba is on the path to a record number of tourists since the beginning of its rapprochement with the United States.

The Tourism Ministry said in a statement that 2 million visitors came to the island by June 12, 27 days earlier than last year. **The figure represents a 12% improvement of Cuban tourism over the first half of 2015.**

Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, Spain, Mexico and Argentina have contributed significantly to the growth in Cuban tourism numbers, according to the data.

Last year, the Caribbean destination received 3.5 million tourists, up 17% over 2014. By the end of 2016 the number is expected to reach 3.85 million visitors.

The amount of visitors from the United States alone had risen 93% by April, compared to the same period in 2015, reaching 94,000 Americans, according to the Cuban Tourism Ministry.

Americans travelling to the island as visitors, due to the embargo in force since 1962, are still not allowed to travel freely.

Nevertheless, the Obama administration, which re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba in July 2015, eased some restrictions and has made provision for an increase in Cuban tourism.

With the rise of the number of tourists, the challenge faced by the authorities is not attracting visitors but managing their arrivals in huge numbers, said Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization, Taleb Rifai, in March at the opening of an event in Berlin.

Cuban tourism industry authorities are undertaking projects to renovate and build hotels to meet the increasing tourist inflow, the second largest source of foreign exchange after medical services.

"In addition to improving the quality of our services and diversifying our tourism product, we are also creating additional hotel capacity in major locations like Havana, Varadero, Cayo Santa María, Jardines del Rey and Holguín," the Ministry stated.

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