

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IN CUBA UNCERTAIN



The future of tourism in Cuba is an issue of many discussions in the country after the death of Fidel Castro, the emblematic leader of the 'barbudos.' The travel sector is an important part of the island's economy and seems to continue its economic development. But far from the image offered to tourists, the locals hope above all to increase their standard of living.

Since the development of the tourism economy is of paramount importance for the disadvantaged country, **many agencies are investing in Cuba, bringing hope to the inhabitants for bright future of tourism.**

The successor of Fidel Castro, Raúl, has indeed set up an 'opening' following long negotiations with the United States. United States airlines can now land on the island. The first commercial flight between the United States and Havana, the capital of Cuba, took place on Monday, 3 days after Castro's death.

Many French investors, notably hotel chains, are continuing to develop tourism infrastructures on the island, which are currently insufficient in the face of an expanding American demand. French companies are extremely present in the hotel industry and are supervising the renovations of Havana's airport, as well as the construction of the new port of Mariel.

Places such as Cayo Coco, with its many clubs, and Varadero, the 'Cuban Cancun,' remain highly attractive for foreigners, but do not reflect the everyday life of locals, who are often deprived of many freedoms. The inhabitants are regularly refused entry to certain bars or hotels 'reserved for tourists.' Some districts without tourists in Trinidad testify to the real living conditions of the Cubans.

Cuba has decided to honor its late leader, promulgating 9 days of national mourning. Many tourist events have been affected, forcing Transat, associated with XL Airways, to cancel its 'eductour' to present the new Lookéa Cayo Santa Maria to hundreds of tourism professionals.

With a biased international vision of Cuban society, the locals must today enhance their assets. The lifting of the American embargo having been almost signed, a massive influx of tourists was expected on the island suggesting better future of tourism in Cuba. But the profits from the industry remain in the hands of foreign investors.

"This new capitalism, different from the Chinese or Vietnamese models, is developing on the ruins of a system that still permeates Cuban society. The people are hardly feeling the reforms. **The daily communist newspaper has remained the same... For many things have worsened,**" explains Ludo Mendès in his book "Cuba No: The Words of the Forgotten" published by Editions Ring.

This secret correspondent of francophone media for 20 years, denounces the terrible daily struggles of Cubans, behind the 'postcard' image offered to the tourists. Nevertheless, the population hopes to reach a new standard of living, but there have been no big strides yet.

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