

CUBAN TOURISM BOOM LEADS TO THE LACK OF FOOD



For a few years now, Cuba has been opening its economy. As a result, and thanks to the warmer relations with the U.S., the number of tourists coming to the country has been growing fast. After decades of isolation, Cuban tourism industry reported almost 3.5 million visitors in 2015. The record number of travelers however has caused a serious trouble for the locals - the lack of food.

The goods that Cubans were used to have is not available any more. **The food goes to the rising numbers of tourists that can afford to pay prices which the locals cannot.** The reasons for the dire effects of Cuban tourism boom is, according to experts, not only the U.S. embargo, but also the insufficient governmental planning.

The supply of various goods is not efficient enough and the prices go high. Fresh vegetable, for instance, is so expensive for Cubans, that it mostly goes to private restaurants serving the tourists. Thanks to the increased prices of staples like peppers and onions, as well as limes and pineapples are quite unaffordable for many. It is even hard to find any soda or beer in the shops since most of it is bought in bulk by the restaurants.

The disparity between the prices of food and the salaries is astronomical. The revenues from Cuban tourism greatly benefits the growing private sector. However, most Cubans still work for the state-run companies. For them, buying a pound of onions and of tomatoes would take 10 percent of a standard government salary, which is about \$25 a month.

According to Juan Alejandro Triana, an economist at the University of Havana, **the government has not invested sufficiently in the agriculture for a long time.** The produce planned for 11 million people cannot feed the 3.5 million tourists as well.

President Raúl Castro said in April this year that the growing prices of agricultural products caused by Cuban tourism are a big problem and set price limits for fruits and vegetables. The low prices however do not motivate any farmer to sell the products to the locals but rather to the private restaurants for quite different amounts.

Thus, the price ceilings simply moved goods to the commercial market or even the black market. According to Juan Alejandro Triana, the situation is quite critical. If nothing is done within five years the food will become a national security issue, he said.

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