

CUBA PLANS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FOREIGN TOURISTS



Despite the White House's restrictions, traveling to Cuba remains legal for Americans, who continue to arrive, especially on the large cruise ships of Carnival, Norwegian and other US-based companies.

Under the ruling of the new socialist leader, Miguel Diaz-Canel, and despite the new restrictions decreed by the White House on travels for American citizens, **Cuba has set itself an ambitious goal: to surpass the 5 million arrivals of foreign tourists annually.** The island expects to close this year with 4,750,000 visitors, which will be a record for that sector; but if it does, it will still fall short on the 5 million arrivals, as it happened in 2017, a figure for which it has been prepared for several years and which was considered “attainable”, thanks to the thaw with the United States.

According to statistic, by the second half of November, there had been a drop of about 6.8% in US citizens coming to Cuba. The government of Donald Trump pushed to introduce more Cuban tourist sites and state-owned companies in a "blacklist", increasing the limits on American visitors, because the businesses support financially the communist dictatorship. The list of 26 companies includes hotels such as the Iberostar Grand Packard, and the Paseo del Prado in Old Havana, two treasured locations among accommodations in the capital, as well as much less known and smaller shopping centers on beaches far from the city-center.

Cuban Minister of Justice, Manuel Marrero Cruz, recently said that it was in the country's interest to develop tourism and that the investments should go in the hotel supply. Currently there are 69,514 rooms available, 76% of which are in the category of four or five stars. He said that until 2030 there should be 100,000 rooms on offer in Cuba.

The “goal”, as Cubans call this type of record, has some cards stacked in their favor despite the negative “game” that the United States has been playing. **The local ministry itself announced that Cuba received 703,519 foreign tourists on cruise trips between January and October 2018.** Most of these “cruise tourists” came from the United States as well as Europe. That’s almost 120,000 more visitors in comparison to the peak season of these leisure ships last year.

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