

CUBAN TOURISM SLOWLY RECOVERS BENEFITING FROM CRUISE INDUSTRY



With over one million Canadian tourists and more than 4 million international visitors in total, the last month of this year starts with hardships and shortcomings, a set of common struggles for the Cuban tourism.

The beginning of the high season foresees a recovery of tourist influx from European markets.

Cuban sun-and-beach destinations have undertaken a course of action, listed under the so-called “Tarea Vida” (“Life Task”), a project that allows visitors to enjoy the best conditions in over 200 beaches that the Cuban coast has to offer.

November, also known as the start of the high season for Cuban tourism, closed with a 14.7% growth in the tourism indicators, and 51% increase in cruise arrivals. In these results, traditional European markets such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Russia, Netherlands and Portugal showed significant growth.

American visitors remain in the second position, followed by Canadian tourists, despite the sharp decline in air travel resulting from the restrictions imposed by the current US government, and that have worsened in recent weeks.

For this market, the most viable way to visit Cuba is through cruise ships, which have reported more than 575,000 American passengers so far this year. However, in November, there was a noticeable recovery of flights to the island, which, added to the number of cruise passengers, represents a double-digit percentage growth.

To conclude, the sum of all international arrivals to Cuba until the end of November, register over 4,270,000 visitors; a figure higher than the 4,256,853 arrivals recorded in the same period of 2017.

For Cuban tourism, tourist arrivals have been favored by the increasing performance of the cruise tourism model, which showed a 49% growth compared to the previous year. In this sense, November closed with over 790,000 foreign visitors who traveled by this means of transport.

The cruise industry, with travel itineraries in the 36 Caribbean destinations, continues to grow significantly. In the latest report of the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA), released in October 2018, the association informed that these Caribbean docks, as a whole, saw the arrival of 25,189,900 cruise passengers, a 6.2% increase compared to the previous cruise season. To these arrivals, it would be necessary to add the 4,395,900 passengers that also disembarked in the destinations.

The key to increase expenditure of cruise passengers in the visited destinations is linked to the offers on land. In this sense, new tours with greater added value in relation with the interests and motivations of cruise tourists, sale of quality souvenirs and crafts with a high level of authenticity, security and safety in the visited destinations, and conservation of the environment are the essential factors for a destination to enter in this much globalized and ever-growing market.

On average, for the 36 destinations in the Caribbean, tourist expenditure per passenger who disembarked and reserved tours was \$48 USD. The emergence of Cuba in cruise tourism, with its undeniable cultural, historical and heritage sites and attractions, together with an exuberant and preserved nature, is urged to incorporate greater value to the offer on land. Being the destination in which cruise passengers reserve more trips and tours, the average expenditure per tourist is lower than others. **Most cruise passengers disembark at the destination and 73% purchase guided tours.** This demonstrates the need to renew and update the offer for trips and tours, adding places, products and amenities, with well-trained guides, capable of turning rigorous and artificial walks, into real, breathtaking trips.

The boom in cruise tourism has become the fastest growing model for the travel and tourism industry worldwide. This form of tourism will depend on the creative capacity and better offers in the destinations included in the cruise itineraries, in order to bring in more revenues to local administrations.

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