

CUBA EXPECTS ANOTHER YEAR OF TOURISM GROWTH



Cuba, which recently surpassed 1 million foreign visitors so far this year, expects to maintain its tourism growth trend throughout 2019. Tourism has become the most dynamic industry of the island's economy.

Manuel Marrero Cruz, Cuban Minister of Tourism, announced recently the arrival of the first million visitors, "five days sooner than in 2018".

The minister's report generated a reaction from Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel who commented: "Continue to grow, keep moving forward, [both] premises to develop."

The president took part in the annual meeting to review the work of the Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) for **last year's performance when the island saw the arrival of 4.7 million visitors, which meant a 6% tourism growth**, and the eleventh consecutive year of records in that index.

Díaz-Canel mentioned the implementation of permanent tasks and measures of high priority for the industry, such as focusing on quality and promoting a detail-oriented culture.

"We have to strive for a single quality, the best possible one, both for international tourists and for nationals: we have to take good care of them all," the president highlighted.

The Cuban leader stressed the need and possibility of seeking a better position in international markets, such as China and Eastern European countries, and emphasized the hotel industry available in the country, with top quality facilities and establishments.

He also mentioned the production lines that haven't been strengthened enough to avoid imports, since "tourism generates a lot to the country, but expenditure per dollar of income is still high".

"We have to import many things that could be produced within the national economy, and that is another thing in which we must seek an important transformation," he added.

The president insisted that the island's tourism activities could stand out from others around the world, based on the distinctive elements of Cuban identity, culture, and heritage.

In January, Díaz-Canel assessed the progress of a foreign investment in tourism, the first sector of the Cuban economy where foreign investment began to be allocated on the island.

Cuban tourism industry includes 27 public-private partnerships with 5,091 rooms in four and five-star establishments.

In this year's Portfolio of Opportunities for Foreign Investment, Mintur has outlined 176 projects including new hotels, recreational centers, coastal and camping facilities.

In Cuba, tourism is the industry with the most investments every year, mainly through external loans, although in the previous year the development plan closed at 92%.

This year, the island expects to receive 5.1 million visitors, which would represent a 7.4% tourism growth.

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