

CUBAN OUTBOUND TOURISM REVEALS AN INCREASE



About 519,000 Cubans traveled abroad undergoing 889,000 trips during the first eight months of 2019, an increase of more than 20% over the same period of 2018 according to figures from the island's Foreign Ministry published last week in the state media.

The increase reflects the relaxation of travel restrictions to countries such as Nicaragua and Panama, the latter being the preferred destination of Cubans for shopping tourism. The growth of outbound tourism has been reported **despite the closure of the U.S. embassy in Havana, and the reduction of the visa validity for Cubans visiting the U.S.**

In the almost six years since the 2013 immigration reform came into effect - which among other things, put an end to the need of an exit permit to leave the island - more than 1.1 million Cubans made 4.6 million trips abroad.

Of the total trips, 1.6 million headed for the U.S., a country in which a large part of the Cuban diaspora resides, and where 364,000 of them traveled to, said Ernesto Soberón, Director General of Consular and Cuban Affairs Resident Abroad (DACCRE).

“Although the number of nationals traveling abroad increased, the number of those who leave the country to settle permanently in other countries decreased in percentage,” said the official, without further details.

On the contrary, said Soberón, resettlement or repatriation requests (applying for residency) increased from 2013 to date, a period in which 57,000 petitions have been filed, with the vast majority (36,000) from the U.S.

A total of 551,908 Cubans traveled abroad for personal reasons in 2018, 20.13% more than the previous year, according to official data from the Ministry.

The immigration reform of 2013, approved during the mandate of former president Raúl Castro, included the removal of the mandatory exit permit for Cubans, and relaxed travel restrictions for emigrants who seek to return.

This regulation also extended the time that a Cuban may stay overseas without losing their right to return, which went from 11 to 24 months, while the time allowed to visit the island for emigrated Cubans increased from 60 to 90 days.

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