

# FIRST RUSSIAN TOURISTS ARRIVE IN CUBA, BYPASSING SANCTIONS AGAINST MOSCOW



The first flight of the Russian company Nordwind Airlines arrived on October 5 in Varadero, Cuba, after seven months of interruption to this tourist destination due to sanctions hitting Russia after the invasion of Ukraine, reported the official Cuban agency. The Cuban tourist agency Cubatur received the Russian tourists of this first flight, "as part of a trip that marks the resumption of tourist flights from the Russian capital" to Cuba.

The number of Russian tourists who arrived on this flight had not been specified.

Nordwind Airlines had been working for months to find a route that avoids the U.S. and European airspace, according to the Russian tour operator Pegas Touristik.

**Officials also did not specify the route taken by the Nordwind Airlines aircraft.** In March 2022, the European Union closed its airspace to Russian companies, one of several economic sanctions hitting Russia after beginning the war in Ukraine.

Besides the Russian tourists, Havana is looking for more unusual markets to attract visitors, like Kazakhstan. "Tourists from Kazakhstan can reach Cuba through European countries, such as Germany, France, and Spain. The airlines of these countries have regular flights to Cuba. They can also do it through Turkey, Istanbul," explained Juan Carlos Escalona, the Cuban tourism councilor. According to official data, **Cuba welcomed one million foreign tourists in August**, figures much lower than those of the same period in 2019 and well below the aspirations of the Government, which forecast 2.5 million vacationers by 2022.

In the first seven months of 2022, nearly 835,000 tourists arrived in the country, an increase of 590% over the same period of the previous year, according to official data. The island's hotels however report an occupancy rate of just 14%, according to official figures, during the first half of 2022.

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