

# CUBANS WELCOMED IN LOCAL HOTELS



After the changes the new Cuban leader, Raul Castro, has recently made, Cubans are nowadays allowed many things they were prohibited during the rule of Fidel. The inhabitants of the “Island of Freedom” can now stay in their hotels and use other tourism facilities. Cubans were prohibited from using these facilities since 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. After the USSR collapse, the country’s government had to open to foreign tourists to earn some hard currency. The hotel guards however did not let in anyone who looked Cuban. This practice ended now and everyone is able to use the hotels, gyms, hair salons and other facilities. According to the Cuban tourism officials at Varadero, Cubans would now be also allowed to walk the beach without restrictions.

The so called “tourism apartheid” has ended. Also, when a foreigner visits Cuba they can meet their Cuban relatives in the hotel they stay which was not possible during the “tourism apartheid”. There is nevertheless a hitch in it, only few Cubans can afford to use the tourism facilities. The average monthly wage is about \$20 and a one-day stay at a hotel like the Ambos Mundos costs approximately \$183. Analysts thus say that the end of restrictions has an important but rather symbolic meaning for Cubans.

Cuban tourism industry generates more than \$2 billion a year in foreign exchange and approximately 60 per cent of Cubans have access to hard currency. They gain it from relatives working abroad or through work with foreigners. Now they can legally spend it on services that were previously meant only for foreigners. The Raul’s reforms do not concern only tourism facilities. Cubans can nowadays buy DVD players, computers, cell phones or rent cars. This development may possibly eliminate the dual-currency system. Cubans are paid in pesos but the services and products in question can be bought only for convertible pesos, which are worth 24 times the regular ones.

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