

TOURISM IN CUBA FALLS SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS



The tourism industry in Cuba is facing a tough time this year. The high season has recently begun, and it is not meeting expectations. According to the latest data released by the national statistics agency ONEI, the island received 1.81 million travelers by the end of September, a 68% increase compared to the previous year's figure. However, this is only 55% of the level of 2019, which means that the country's self-imposed target of 3.5 million foreign guests by the end of the year is unlikely to be achieved.

Tourism in Cuba reported the latest data. As of September, the largest share of visitors to Cuba were from Canada, with 709,000 guests. Cubans living abroad followed with 269,000 visitors, and Americans (mainly visiting family) were counted at 126,000.

The number of visitors from Russia increased by 77% compared to 2020, with a growth of 120,000 visitors. **Western European countries also saw increased visitors, though the percentage increase was lower.** France saw the largest increase in tourists, doubling the number of guests from 20,000 to 45,000. German tourists increased by only 26%, with 49,000 visiting this year.

As a result of the relaxation of travel restrictions due to the end of the Corona pandemic, many airlines resumed their connections to Cuba last year. However, the bookings have fallen below the airlines' expectations, so some have reduced their services for this winter season. Since October 28, the Spanish airline Iberia has been operating only three weekly flights to Havana. Iberojet, a competitor of Iberia, has discontinued its Madrid-Santiago de Cuba route and will serve the Havana route for the last time in January 2024. However, there are plans to offer a new connection to Santa Clara next summer.

Several U.S. airlines, including JetBlue, Delta, and United Airlines, have reduced their services to Cuba due to changes in regulations and restrictions. However, the reason for the reduction in services differs for each airline. **They are all waiting for the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue temporary exemptions for commercial flights to Cuba.**

On the other hand, American Airlines announced 82 weekly charter flights at the Cuban trade fair FIHAV for the upcoming winter season, and they succeeded in doing so. Depending on demand, the airline will connect Miami with various Cuban provincial capitals, such as Camagüey, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba, and Varadero. Since the Joe Biden administration lifted the previous restrictions, these cities are now accessible once again, which has boosted tourism in Cuba. Previously, the Donald Trump administration restricted flight connections from the USA.

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