

CUBAN TOURISM MINISTER: HURRICANES CAN'T STOP US



The Cuban tourism industry is a vital part of the island's economy. However, tourism is quite a fragile industry. The hurricanes Ike and Gustav have caused severe damages to the country's tourism infrastructure, which consequently affected the industry itself. Particularly the tourism resorts in Holguin, Las Tunas, Camaguey, and Pinar del Rio were damaged. Ike has caused approximately \$4 billion damage and Gustav \$3 billion.

Nevertheless, Cuban officials claim that despite the destruction caused by hurricanes the tourism will increase by 13 percent this year. According to the Cuban Tourism Minister, Manuel Marrero, it is expected that a total of 2.3 million tourists will visit the country in 2008. The damages caused by the storms are being repaired and according to the minister the sector will be fully restored and prepared for the international tourist season. The minister also noted that this year Cuba will offer more hotel rooms and better comfort than in 2007.

The tourism industry is vital for the Cuban economy. The sector generated US\$2.2 billion in 2007 and there were 2.1 million foreigners visiting the island the same year. It is also a vital hard currency earner. The most important consumers of Cuban tourism products are the British, Canadians, Italians and Spaniards.

It is, however, not the natural disasters that cause the biggest problems to the Cuban tourism industry and economy as a whole. The biggest enemy of Cuban development is according to the Cuban officials the US which through economic, trade and financial blockade undermines the Cuban economy.

However, tourists from other parts of world travel to the island anyway as it has lots to offer. It has beautiful beaches and wonderful diving opportunities. It is also an ideal destination for people with interest in culture as it is home to numerous museums as well as historic building. The country is also home to nine World Heritage Sites

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