

CUBA'S TOURISM CRISIS: NUMBER OF TOURISTS GOES DOWN



The visitor numbers in Cuba continue to fall significantly. According to ONEI statistics, only 419,863 international visitors arrived in the country in the first seven months of 2026. This is 37.2 percent of the number of tourists recorded in the same period of the previous year. Consequently, Cuba has lost nearly 709,000 foreign tourists during the past year.

In terms of travelers, who also count as natives, the deficit is even more significant. If in the first seven months of 2025, there were 1,590,303 visitors, then in the corresponding period of 2026, this number is 794,492. **Thus, the deficit amounts to about 787,773 less visitors in the first seven months of the year.**

The number of tourists from Canada, which has traditionally accounted for the largest share of all visitors, decreased by 350,737 in the first seven months of the year. The number of Cubans traveling abroad and returning to the country is also down, by 52,021 visitors. Moreover, the number of American tourists has decreased by 39,944 during the same period. The number of tourists from the following countries is also down: Russia, Mexico, Argentina, Spain, China, Colombia, and France.

This decline in Cuba's tourism is not limited to just the last seven months. The number of visitors declined by nearly 9% year-on-year in January. By the end of June, the deficit compared to the same period of the previous year amounted to 60.7%. In particular, in the first half of the year, only 387,591 international tourists arrived to Cuba, compared to 985,606 in the first half of 2025. May, in particular, showed a significant decline, as only 30,883 international tourists arrived to the country. Thus, adding the number of tourists for July, which amounts to 32,272, the total for the first seven months of 2026 is 419,863.

A decrease in the number of tourists this year is associated with significant changes in the hotel sector of the Cuban economy. In particular, in 2026, seven international hotel groups have left the country. According to a report published on July 28, the main reason for this exodus is the tightening of U.S. sanctions against hotels associated with the military company GAESA, which owns a significant share of Cuba's hotels. Specifically, Blue Diamond Resorts sold 62 hotels with more than 12,900 rooms in late May. Iberostar sold 18 of its 28 Cuban hotels in June to reduce its presence in the country. According to a press release on July 24, Meliá Hotels International ended its management of 34 hotels in Cuba. Thus, almost 46% of all rooms previously managed by foreign firms have been liquidated.

At the end of July, Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz pointed out that, according to preliminary estimates, 73% of all hotel facilities in Cuba are closed. In addition, Marrero said that about 25,000 hotel employees are currently in protective unemployment. The ONEI statistics show that in the first quarter of 2026, the occupancy rate was only 21.5%. Previously, in the first five months of the year, it was recorded that the number of visitors was below 10% of the total number of rooms.

The acute shortage of electricity, which interferes with transportation and turns off hotel air conditioning, is another factor that reduces the number of tourists. In addition, Cuban hotels are excluded from the booking systems Booking, Expedia, and Trivago and are not available in the

Global Distribution Systems (such as Galileo, Worldspan, and Sabre). These factors significantly affect the visibility of Cuba as a tourist destination.

The most significant factor holding back Cuba's tourism development, according to Havana, is the U.S. policy of sanctions and embargoes against Cuba, including the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and the designation of the country as a state sponsor of terrorism. However, an objective analysis of the situation shows that there are more factors that have a negative impact on the development of Cuba's tourism. These are inadequate infrastructure, poor service quality, a shortage of goods, and transport issues. Moreover, electricity is often in short supply, and hotels do not have enough staff. Finally, the structure of the hotel sector is quite monopolized, as most of the capital belongs to enterprises associated with the military industry.

Thus, despite a slight increase in the number of tourists in July, the overall number of foreign visitors is still below those of previous years. Specifically, in the first seven months of 2026, the total number of visitors is 419,863, which is about 22.6% of the 1,810, 619 tourists in the same period of 2025. **The trend of declining numbers of visitors will have an even more significant impact on the total result for the year 2026.** This is because in the past seven months, only about 22.6% of the number of tourists for the entire year of 2025 arrived in the country. For the corresponding period of the previous year, 1,810, 619 visitors arrived.

With more than half of the year gone, only an unprecedented increase in the number of tourists for the remaining five months can return the situation to balance. Moreover, the data for the first seven months of the year indicate a tendency for further decline in the number of tourists for the year. This is due to both the insufficient share of visitors from traditional source countries and the significant number of vacant hotel rooms.

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