

JetBlue Airways opens Havana ticket offices

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03/09/2017



JetBlue Airways opened two ticketing offices in Havana on Friday, the latest U.S. company to signal confidence in the Cuba market and to shrug off new tensions with the island nation under President Donald Trump.

American Airlines and Delta Airlines opened offices earlier this year.

Friday's opening comes despite an ongoing diplomatic spat between the old Cold War foes and a noticeable pause in bilateral meetings since Trump took office.

Beginning in December, some U.S. diplomats and family members based in Cuba suffered physical harm from a still-to-be-determined acoustic source. There have been no recent incidents.

Two Cuban diplomats based in Washington were asked to leave until the issue is resolved.

The only other U.S. corporations with a significant physical presence in Cuba are Google, which has servers and a showroom, and Marriott International, which operates a Sheraton Four Points in Havana and last month said it would open a second hotel in 2019.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama, as part of his efforts to normalize relations, authorized direct flights in 2015 after a half-century hiatus.

“I am delighted to inaugurate this ticket office a year and a day after making history ... with the first commercial flight from the United States to Cuba,” Robín Hayes, JetBlue’s chief executive, said, upon opening a downtown ticketing office. The second office is at Havana’s international airport.

Trump in June rolled back parts of Obama’s historic opening to Cuba, saying his predecessor negotiated a “terrible and misguided deal.”

Embassies, established in 2015, remain, as do direct flights, but the revised approach includes stricter enforcement of a longtime ban on Americans going to Cuba as tourists. Among changes are limiting visits to 12 existing categories of non-tourist travel and a ban on the use of hotels and other facilities owned by Cuba’s military.

Cruise ships are permitted, the administration said, but not independent visits by solo travelers and families under the popular people-to-people travel category, which Trump charged was being used to violate the tourist ban.

According to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which monitors bilateral business, the three largest U.S. cruise ship companies have announced more than 280 sailings to Cuba through 2019.

Some 300,000 Americans, excluding those of Cuban descent, visited Cuba in the first six months of 2017, more than twice last year’s number during the same period, according to the Cuban government.

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