Despite new limits, Cuba tour operators see a way forward

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Tour operators are saying that the Trump administration's ending of the people-to-people category of Cuba travel will not impact their operations.

The administration on Tuesday imposed major new restrictions on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens, including a ban on people to people travel and travel by cruise ship.

However, many tour operators say their tours do not operate under the people to people category that has been banned and will continue to operate under the assumption that the other categories of authorized travel to Cuba are not affected.

One of them, "support for the Cuban people," is commonly used by Cuba tour operators, including Cuba Candela, which said that its tours remain legal under the new rules.

"Our clients participate in a full-time schedule of activities that enhance contact with the Cuban people and engage in meaningful interactions with the Cuban people, through wonderful immersive cultural experiences that comply with U.S. travel rules," said Cuba Candela CEO Chad Olin. "We continue to operate business as usual, and we continue to guarantee compliance with U.S. law."

Cultural Cuba owner David Lee said, "Removing people-to-people does not affect companies like mine. We only do support for the Cuban people, humanitarian and religious travel on a private custom basis for our clients. These forms are still legal and it's business as usual for us."

Ya'lla Tours president Ronen Paldi said it has been operating tours since 2002 "with other legal provisions, other than [people-to-people]."

Collin Laverty, president of Cuba Educational Travel, was one of several companies that was analyzing the new laws and seeing how their tours would be impacted.

"There are still a number of ways to legally visit Cuba. Commercial flights were left intact and any previously made reservations can go forward," Laverty said. "We will study the new regulations and figure out how to continue to legally take thousands of Americans to Cuba going forward."