
Cuban tourism grows 17.6 pct till November

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Even while critics and pessimists have sought to injure its growing popularity as a tourist destination, Cuba ends 2015 with an encouraging development of this sector, able to inject to its economy over two billion dollars a year .

According to preliminary data, from January to November, 3 139 837 people traveled to the country, equivalent to a 17.6 percent growth compared to the figure recorded in the same period of 2014.

That figure exceeds even the total amount of foreigners who arrived in the island last year (3 002 745). And almost confirms already the possibility of breaking, for the second consecutive time, the record of international visitors to Cuba; although for this we will have to wait for the report of the National Bureau of Statistics and Information.

It is true that it has been noted, at the domestic level, the determination to convert Cuba into a major destination in the Caribbean, with promotional campaigns and intentioned actions to raise the quality.

However, an injection has been effective in this tourist boom. A year ago, the presidents of Cuba and the United States announced their intention to move towards normalization of relations. Since then, the flow of tourists to the island has not stopped growing.

Even though the limitation to American citizens traveling to Cuba for tourism and other restrictive measures imposed by the blockade laws persist, only the bilateral approach, after half a century of rupture and tensions, has dispelled fear or doubt of many foreigners to know the "forbidden fruit" in the Caribbean.

For the professor and researcher Jose Luis Perello, belonging to the Faculty of Tourism at the University of Havana, the change in US policy toward Cuba acted as an incentive for all source markets to travel to Cuba.

According to data provided by the analyst to ACN, by the end of November, Canada consolidates its leadership as the main emitter of tourists to the island with an increase of 12.1 percent, followed by Germany (26 percent), United

Kingdom (26.5 percent), France (33.1 percent), Italy (18.3 percent) and Spain (35 percent).

In the summer, from May to September, considering the low season for international tourism on the island, average arrivals increased by nearly 22 percent. In fact, markets which emission was only common on winter months didn't stop growing during this period.

According to Perello, these results, which were not foreseeable in the short term, stress to all components of the tourism value chain, such as the airport, transport, and housing systems, retail network and telecommunications.

On the other hand, the new links will become important source of stimulus for the Cuban economy if both countries are willing to take further actions to facilitate the intensification of those ties where travels gain more space.

However, the laws governing the US blockade against Cuba remain the main obstacle for tourism industry of both countries may be supplemented by the presence of tour operators, investors and vacationers .

In this attractive but challenging scenario, to achieve and maintain high standards of quality in services is and will remain the top priority of the sector; therefore, it is already working to implement policies to achieve Cuban product differentiation, and perhaps reaching, before many expect it and without unfounded fanfare, five million visits in the year.
