

# *Cuba Prepares for Increasing Number of Tourists in 2016*

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Havana, February 3 (RHC)-- With the prediction of an increasing number of tourists this year over the 3.5 million received in 2015, the island's tourism sector improves its infrastructure and services.

The year 2015 will bring a significant tourist growth for a destination still suffering the impact of the U.S. economic blockade, said Deputy Tourism Minister Mayra Alvarez on the prime-time TV show *The Round Table*.

Alvarez backed her statements by adding that U.S. citizens are still banned from coming to the island as tourists due to the anti-Cuba U.S. blockade laws. However, she noted that Cuban hotels will see a significantly increase in the number of both international and local vacationers.

With this in mind, the official announced a series of actions to improve and expand accommodations in the country and to guarantee all resources and the necessary labor.

She announced the opening of new hotels and the recovery of some 5,000 hotel rooms in main tourist centers, like Havana, Varadero and the Keys to the north of the island.

Another action aims at achieving a closer relationship with the private initiative in the sector, currently with over 14 thousand private homes offering accommodations and catering.

Diversifying recreational activities, beyond the Cuban sun and beach offer, is another objective of the tourist system, said the official.

Important enough was the new scenario opened after the historic announcement about the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana, which encouraged the visit here of nationals from other nations.

Observers say that some 145 thousand U.S. citizens visited Cuba in 2015 under the 12 licenses approved by the U.S. government.

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