

# *Cuba welcomes 3 million tourists so far this year*

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Havana, August 16 (RHC)-- Despite Washington's attempts to limit tourism in Cuba, the country has welcomed three million foreign visitors so far this year. The Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) said Thursday in a statement that the arrival of the three million international travelers was "achieved despite campaigns... directed by the U.S. government to prevent the flow of tourists to our country."

"It also demonstrates the confidence and recognition achieved by Cuban tourism as a destination that offers security and hospitality to its visitors," said Minister Manuel Marrero. He noted that Cuba expects to close the year with 4.3 million tourists, although 5.1 million were hoped for.

Tourism Minister Marrero said in July during parliamentary sessions that the U.S. decision to suspend cruise visits from U.S. companies will affect "more than 560,000 Americans during the rest of the year."

In June, the Trump administration began to prohibit travel to the island by private planes, yachts and cruises from the U.S., making the already limited visits from the United States even more difficult.

The MINTUR note said on Thursday that Canada remains the main tourism-issuing market, followed by European countries. Marrero noted, however, that Russia has "the highest growth rate" of visitors to Cuba and has several "development projects for the coming seasons."

In 2018, Cuba received around 137,000 visitors from Russia, a number that has increased by 40.3 percent this year, according to official data, indicating that this may be a transitional period where the country sees an increased influx of visitors from the highly-populated country of Russia, and other Euro-Asian states.

"Once again our country is a Caribbean destination for its nature, heritage, culture, security and hospitality of its people," said MINTUR in a statement.

Cuban tourism authorities have expressed their objective of being a major player in event tourism and making Havana a center for international meetings, which this year celebrates its 500th anniversary.

Tourism makes up 10 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), generating half a million jobs and also major investments in the sector.

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