

# *Cuba Tourism Fair Registers Record Attendance*

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Havana, May 4 (RHC)- Attendance to this year's Tourism Fair in Havana has been the highest ever, the Cuban Tourism Ministry said today, attracting participants from 53 nations and numerous tourism ministers from the region.

The Havana Tourism Fair has Canada as guest of honor this year, and Canadian Small Businesses and Tourism Minister, The Honourable Bardish Chagger, traveled to Havana for the occasion. Also attending the Havana Fair is Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Cuba Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said during the Fair's opening today that more than 94, 000 Americans had visited Cuba in the first four months of the year, representing an increase of 93% over the same period for 2015. Marrero pointed out that Cuba is the "only country in the world "for which US citizens they can not purchase tour packages. The minister admitted that the latest measures of the US Government to ease the embargo and travel flexibility, which allowed individual visits, along with the expected start of scheduled flights next autumn, "will contribute to a further increase in US travel to Cuba". He also referred to the impact of the new cruise ships will be coming to Cuba from Florida, as is the case of the ship Adonia, the US company Fanthom, a subsidiary of Carnival, which last Monday opened the first regular cruise line linking the two countries in half a century.

Carnival, the largest cruise operator in the world, wants to expand its routes between Cuba and Miami for the 2016-2017 season, and Royal Caribbean, its main competitor, it has already asked the Cuban authorities operate 72 scales between Havana and Miami for next season, between December 2016 and April 2017. In addition, the company MSC, which landed on the island last December with the Opera-the largest ship that has so far called at the island . The minister explained that Cuba is working to put its cruise terminal to assist the arrival of these new ships, besides having already initiated investments to expand the airport terminals Havana.

With the increase of international flights has occurred in the last year, which will be intensified with the start of regular flights with US The pressure of the "boom" of tourism in Cuba, which last year surpassed the threshold of 3.5 million visitors, is strong pressure for the weak hotel infrastructure of the island, which is already working on the restoration and construction new hotel rooms. "The lodging demand is now outstripping supply, but are accelerating investments in new hotels of high standard," said the minister. In the Cuban capital they are rebuilding old buildings in the historic town to turn them into luxury hotels, like La Manzana de Gómez, managed by the Swiss Kempinski chain; Packard, the Spanish Iberostar, or hotel Prado y Malecón, which will operate the French Accor group on the island plans to build 22 new facilities with 7,000 rooms by 2030. "We are also reviewing more than twenty proposals of foreign companies to create new five-star hotels", stated the minister.

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