

U.S. Citizens Take Strong Interest in Cuba

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HAVANA.- The influx of U.S. tourists to Cuba is one of the topics that draws much attention from journalists specialized in tourist issues, as evidenced at a meeting recently held here.

As stated by professor Paolo Spadoni, of the Augusta University (Georgia, USA), if restrictions on the travel of U.S. citizens to Cuba were lifted, about 3.5 million of them would visit the island.

Spadoni addressed about 65 communicators -mainly from Latin America - present at the 13th International Journalism and Tourism Seminar, held from June 25 to 29.

The meeting, held at Havana's José Martí International Journalism Institute, gathered representatives from 12 nations, including the host country.

During his talk, the U.S. professor noted that over one million U.S. visitors could come to the island in the short term if the travel restrictions imposed by the government of president Donald Trump were lifted.

His lecture, entitled "The Impact of the new measures taken by the current U.S.

government on tourism in the Caribbean,' dealt with topics that went from the actions taken by former U.S. president Barack Obama to the intensification of Trump's measures against Cuba, and its impact on the Caribbean region.

The specialist opened his talk by analyzing the start of the normalization process between the United States and Cuba, on December 17, 2014. In this sense, he referred to the changes made by Obama in relation to the economic sanctions, and the subsequent 'warming of the thaw'.

He also talked about the development of international tourism in Cuba, the business possibilities for both countries and the impact of the measures taken by Trump, which intensified the restrictions Washington has imposed on Havana for over 50 years.

Spadoni recalled that Cuba's main economic source of income in the first half of the 1990s was the sugarcane industry, and then tourism, to which the provision of professional services is now added.

He stressed that tourism continues to be an important source of liquidity and reserve.

The professor also mentioned that Canada is Cuba's first issuing market - 1,134,225 visitors came last year- followed by the United States -more than one million including Cubans who reside in the U.S. This data show the potential Cuba has for the U.S. visitors.

The measures taken by Obama eased the U.S. restrictions on travel, remittances, trade, investment, bank and financial operations, among others.

However, these measures didn't have a chance to attain much progress in practice, because of Trump's restrictions.

Nonetheless, the 12-category measure is still in force for those who want to come to Cuba from the United States, while the number of cruise ships continues to increase, the expert said.

The seminar also dealt with issues related to the country's heritage, technology and tourism, the hotel business and other topics of interest.

The Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) General Manager for Development, José Daniel Alonso, referred to topics related to the sector and stated his confidence on receiving 4.7 million foreign visitors by the end of 2018 - a figure reached in 2017.

Communicators from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Argentina, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico and the United States

attended the meeting, in addition to the host country.

After three days of theoretical sessions and talks, the participants toured tourist places in Havana and facilities of Varadero resort.

The 14th edition of the seminar, to take place in late June 2019, is expected to welcome a higher number of Cuban and foreign press.

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