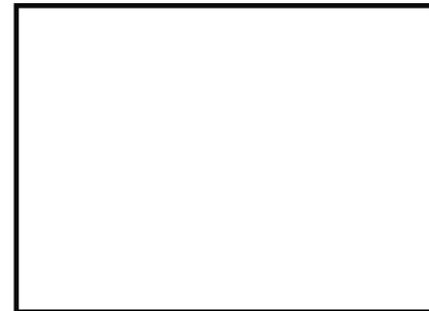


GRAMMA



Cuba surpasses 2017 tourist arrival estimates

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Beach resorts are one of the most popular modalities in Cuba.

The country has received four million visitors thus far this year

Yisel Martínez García

• CUBA has received four million inter-national visitors thus far this 2017, and is set to end the year with 4.7 million. These figures represent clients and tour operators' confidence in Cuba as a safe and healthy destination, according to Ivis Fernández, Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) representative in Matanzas.

The four millionth tourist arrived to Varadero's Juan Gualberto Gómez International Airport on November 6, two months before the same figure was reached in 2016.

"I have visited five times and I love Cuba, above all its cities. I also like the fact that it's safe and peaceful," stated French visitor Antonio on arrival to the island.

"For us at the airport, it's an honor that clients choose to spend their vacations in the

province of Matanzas, and of course in the Varadero resort," stated María Elena Oviedo, head of the Juan Gualberto Gómez airport's business department.

"Varadero has shown its ability to recover following recent weather events which severely affected the country's northern zone. Since Hurricane Irma, the number of travelers to this tourist resort has gradually grown, averaging at about 20,000 clients a day," Ivis Fernández added.

Work is currently underway to prepare for the start of the upcoming 2017-2018 winter season, with an estimated 1.6 million visitors expected to visit the resort by the end of the year.

"We have worked to try and prepare the country for the high season, and will be ready to meet the demands of the expected growth

when the period begins on November 15. Today, all the facilities affected by Irma have been restored and we are working on others which are key to the development of this tourist destination.

"These include an international hotel, groundworks on a plot of land called the Oasis, where two new big hotels will be built, and the opening, at the end of this year, of a brewery, which will be one of our most attractive and novel offers for clients who decide to choose to visit a destination like Varadero," explained, the Mintur representative in Matanzas.

Meanwhile, the Varadero International Airport has been undergoing repair and refurbishment works since May in preparation for the winter season; with paint-works, maintenance, restoration and repairs

undertaken across the entire terminal, stated the head of its business department, María Elena Oviedo.

The airport, which opened in 1989, receives an average of half a million passengers every year, while its efficient and high quality service, means that it only takes around 18-25 minutes between visitors landing and leaving the airport.

Although Canada continues to be the main emissary market of tourists to Varadero, Cuba's most important beach resort, significant growth has also been seen among the German, French, British, Russian, Spanish, and Italian markets.

There are currently 67,769 hotel rooms in Cuba, a figure which should increase to 68,200 by the end of this year, with plans to build 100,000 more by 2030. •

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