

Cuba Expecting More Than 200 Cruise Ships in Winter Season



Havana, November 14 (RHC-EFE) -- Cuba is expecting the arrival of more than 200 cruise ships at various ports on the island during the winter season, which will kick off this month and last until April 2015, tourist sector authorities said Thursday.

The season will officially begin on November 21st with the arrival in the port of Havana of about 2,000 cruise ship passengers, most of them from Europe, according to data provided by the Cubatur travel agency and reported on Cuban television.

The state-run agency, which will book more than 75 percent of the cruise ships that arrive during the season, added that among the ports with the most passenger entries are Havana, Cienfuegos in the central part of the island and Santiago de Cuba in the east.

Cruise ship tourism is one of the main areas in which Cuba is trying to diversify its tourist offerings, along with cultural, nature, health, coastal and golf tours.

Cruise ship arrivals to the island plummeted by 89 percent starting in 2006, the year in which Spanish firm Pullmantur shut down its operations in Cuba after being acquired by Royal Caribbean Cruises, a U.S. company.

The sector remained virtually comatose over the next few years but in 2009 it began to perk up and in 2010 it experienced a new surge in activity with the arrival of some 10,000 cruise passengers.

In recent years, the Cuban government has established stable operations with international companies to rejuvenate the sector. Tourism is now the second-biggest economic activity in Cuba, after the export of technical and professional services.

In 2013, the island welcomed about 2.85 million foreign tourists, with Canada being the main sending nation, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany.

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