

# *Cuba to end 2018 with new record high in foreign visitors' arrivals*

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Havana, December 26 (RHC)-- Cuba will close 2018 with a new record high in terms of foreign visitors' arrivals, welcoming 4.75 million travelers, a senior official from the country's Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) has said.

"Despite sanctions imposed by Washington, which limit travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba and a sharp drop in tourists' arrivals in the first half (of the year), we expect to finish this year with a new record-high figure of international visitors," Michel Bernal, MINTUR's development director, told reporters in Havana.

The figure represents a 1.3-percent increase from 2017, when the Caribbean island was affected by hurricane Irma, which caused economic losses worth 13 billion dollars, he said.

He added that Canada continues to be the top market of visitors to Cuba despite a 2-percent drop in tourists' arrivals, while the U.S. comes in second, particularly Americans traveling on cruise ships that increasingly dock at Cuban ports.

Other traditional markets of tourists to Cuba, among them France, Germany, Spain, the U.K. and Italy

experienced a decline in the number of arrivals, while Russia became the most dynamic source country with a 30-percent increase, compared to 2017.

Meanwhile, Jose Daniel Alonso, MINTUR's commercial director, said Cuba is plans to welcome 5.1 million visitors in 2019, a 7-percent increase from this year. He added that the country will work to attract tourists from emerging markets like China, Turkey, Eastern Europe and other Asian nations.

Tourism is the second source of foreign currency income to the Cuban economy, surpassed only by the provision of professional services abroad.

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