

Hotel Nacional de Cuba:

95 YEARS
OF HISTORY,
CULTURE
AND LUXURY



cuba



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EDITORIAL NOTE

Every year, the World Travel Market becomes the stage where global tourism is redefined. This event can be defined as a trade fair, a platform for thought, a showcase for innovation and a meeting point for those who understand that travel is much more than just moving from one place to another – it's about transformation.

In this edition, marked by the rebirth of the sector after years of global challenges, WTM presents itself as a space where ideas become strategies, destinations become experiences, and meetings become lasting alliances. Ministers, operators, entrepreneurs, technologists, academics and communities come together here, all of whom, from their diverse backgrounds, share a common vision: to build more resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism.

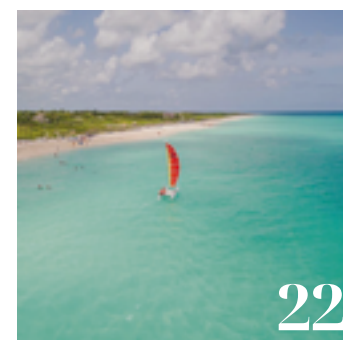
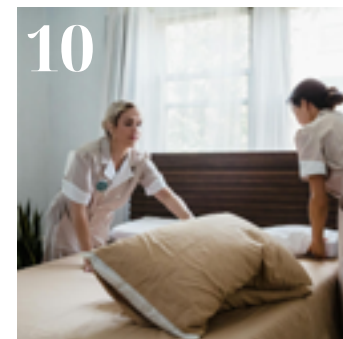
The presence of emerging destinations alongside established powers reveals an industry in constant evolution. From digital solutions that are revolutionizing travel management to regenerative tourism models that restore value to territories, WTM is the barometer of what's to come. It is also a reflection of who we are: a global community committed to dialogue, cooperation and creativity as drivers of development.

TTC presents this issue as a witness and protagonist of that movement. In these pages, we gather the voices that are setting the course, the projects that inspire, and the debates that matter. We want to be more than a magazine: a tool for understanding, connecting and acting.

If WTM teaches us anything, it's that the tourism of tomorrow is not improvised. It is designed with purpose, built through partnerships, and experienced with awareness. And this publication is part of that construction.

Best wishes,

Alfredo Rodríguez,
General Manager



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Hotel Nacional de Cuba: 95 years of history, culture and luxury

Just shy of celebrating its 95th anniversary on December 30, the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, an architectural gem and icon of Cuban tourism, has once again shone on the international stage, receiving awards at the 2025 World Luxury Awards in the Hotel and Restaurant categories.

Since their inception in 2006, the World Luxury Awards have honored the best in the global luxury tourism sector. More than 300,000 international travelers participate in the vote each year, making these awards a barometer of the most demanding expectations in the world of luxury.

Located facing the Malecón and a short walk from the cultural heart of the capital, the Hotel Nacional de Cuba combines the charm of its eclectic 1930s architecture with Havana's vibrant energy. Its monumental structure, open to the sea breeze and defined by arches and columns leading to the central garden, makes it a space where the city's past and present merge.

With 426 rooms distributed across different categories—standard, ocean view, executive, and suites (junior, senior, special, royal, and presidential)—it offers unparalleled flexibility to accommodate everyone from casual travelers to high-level official delegations.

"We have hosted major events, summits of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, meetings of international organizations, and others. We have had more than 13 presidents and presidential delegations stay at the hotel. The infrastructure has helped us and, above all, the service staff with their extensive experience," Deivid Alfonso, the hotel's commercial director, told TTC.

The Hotel Nacional de Cuba safeguards a strong organizational culture. Alfonso speaks for the younger generation joining the tradition of excellence. "From the very first days, you feel that connection, that magic, that sensation, that know-how, because it represents a legacy. We've even had employees

here from several generations of the same family—grandparents, parents, grandchildren—who have carried on that legacy. If it weren't for that, there's no way these pillars, these structures, could stay alive."

The relationship with its surroundings goes beyond tourism. Connections extend to the local community, schools, senior citizen clubs, and to retired hotel staff. At the same time, foreign visitors, guests, event participants, and the general public all pass through its doors.

"We see many young people here in the afternoons who come with their partners, projects that originate here from a business perspective; people come to hold their meetings, their get-togethers, to have a coffee because the space is charming, because they are always welcomed, and because we also boast an offer where quality and price match," says Alfonso, while proudly adding: "We feel part of the community. The Hotel Nacional is not only the leading hotel in Cuba, it is the hotel of the Cuban people."

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Deivid Alfonso/ Hotel's Commercial Director

Heading for its 95th anniversary: Renovation, accessibility and digital transformation

With the upcoming celebration, the hotel has undertaken a comprehensive program of structural and technological renovations. The improvements encompass guest rooms, event spaces and outdoor areas, with a special focus on accessibility.

"We were pioneers in this area, and the challenge now is to sustain this over time. We already have three accessible rooms, complying with the standard that requires at least one accessible room per 100 rooms. We are currently working on completing a fourth, and we want to do so in the context of our 95th anniversary."

In this regard, the hotel aims to meet the requests of groups that primarily arrive through the travel agency Enjoy Travel and the Ibero-American Network for Accessible Tourism. Alfonso identifies the training of their staff as a key strength in this type of work. "Training is paramount—how to communicate, what to say, how to be prepared to handle any situation—it's fundamental, even more so than equipment and all the technology we may have."

Another pillar of this new phase is digital transformation, a project that began five years ago and will extend until the iconic building's centennial, connecting tradition and technology. As part of this process, the hotel has already equipped all rooms with smart

TVs, which will be connected to the digital system to provide guests with more options. The official website, created by professionals from the José Antonio Echeverría Technological University of Havana and the Science and Technology Park, also located in the capital, is now live.

"We are a historic hotel striving for sustainability recognition, and technology is a great help in this. With this digital transformation, we not only want to market the hotel's usual products—accommodation and gastronomy—but we also aspire to offer optional services and allow guests to book excursions and city tours directly from the platform. To achieve this, we are bringing together stakeholders such as travel agencies, transportation providers and others."

A symbol of history, culture and Cuban identity

The Hotel Nacional de Cuba is recognized as a National Monument and has been included in the Memory of the World Register by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The cannons of the old Santa Clara Battery, part of Havana's colonial defensive system and

included as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, still rest in its gardens.

The majestic building has witnessed some of the most important events in Cuban history, linking the republican and revolutionary eras, and boasts a long list of illustrious guests, including Gary Cooper, Johnny Weissmuller, Buster Keaton, Errol Flynn, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and José Raúl Capablanca in the 1930s; Fred Astaire, Rita Hayworth, Winston Churchill, as well as Italian-American Mafia bosses and Mexican film stars such as María Félix, Jorge Negrete, and Agustín Lara in the 1940s; Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner, Nat King Cole, and Walt Disney in the 1950s; and Yuri Gagarin, Gabriel García Márquez, Jean-Paul Sartre and his wife, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara in the 1960s.

Since 1979, the hotel has hosted the International Festival of Latin American Cinema every December, serving as a meeting place for contemporary actors and filmmakers.

Another of its world-famous venues is the Cabaret Parisién, considered the second best in the country after Tropicana.

Over time, this icon of Cuban tourism and culture has received numerous awards.



The adventure of exploring Cuba aboard luxury yachts

Right where the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico converge, Cuba stands out as a key point for marine exploration and connectivity. More than 4,000 cays and islets, along with the Island of Cuba and the Isle of Youth, make up the largest and westernmost archipelago of the Greater Antilles. Those seeking adventure and privacy while traveling aboard luxury yachts will discover unforgettable experiences here.

Ranking among the eight largest archipelagos in the world has not guaranteed the Caribbean country one of the most visited nautical destinations in the Americas. María Romeu, a travel agent who has organized around 50 luxury yacht cruises across Cuba over the last decade, has tried to overcome all obstacles and turn this reality into an attraction.

Passion emerges when she talks about the subject. "Cuba offers, especially to the adventurous visitor, everything you can imagine. There are beautiful sailing routes because it is one of the largest, most diverse, and most pristine destinations in the entire Caribbean, for people who truly want to explore."

A sustained commitment to environmental conservation means that approximately 25% of the marine and coastal ecosystems in this territory are recognized as protected areas. This is part of the promotional content

highlighted by CubaPlus Travel, the company Romeu currently works for. Found here are "36% of all coral reefs in the Caribbean basin... the ecosystems are healthier than in any other country," the website's home page states.

As if that weren't enough, Cuba also safeguards a submerged historical heritage. Specialized guidebooks and travel reviews mention the ship graveyards in the Bajo de Zambo area, with more than one hundred wrecks, or in the Bay of Santiago de Cuba, where Spanish ships sunk by American gunboats during the 1898 war lie.

To reach these places with all kinds of guarantees and enjoy exclusive experiences, María Romeu has designed three maritime routes—and announces that another one will soon be available along Cuba's northern coast.

Exclusive experiences

To ensure her discerning clients can experience these wonders, including the nation's history, culture, and people, Romeu weaves a network of connections across the island with state and private stakeholders. "For example, I had a 99-meter yacht, with two passengers on board and 35 crew members, for thirty days off the southern coast of Cuba, just exploring. They never set foot on the mainland. They were British people of very high economic standing."

TEXT: DAILY PÉREZ GUILLÉN



She assures us that their stay went unnoticed. "These people seek privacy and the exploration of unspoiled places. They spent six days in Jardines de la Reina, an underwater national park protected for thirty years. There is every imaginable marine life, between seven and eight species of sharks and crocodiles endemic to Cuba. They then went to Cayo Largo del Sur, and to stock up, we managed to import 600 kilograms of gourmet food through a Belgian company. Everything was packaged in accordance with international regulations and requirements for food transportation. The Cuban entities Palco, Immigration, Customs, and Marinas Marlin collaborated with all the information and paperwork to move these supplies from Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris to Cayo Largo del Sur in 72 hours. This was a wonderful experience in 2023, and we have already repeated it several times."

Other travelers prefer to abandon their luxurious vessels for a few hours or days, explore selected locations in the country, and experience its vibrant culture.

"In Santiago de Cuba, we hosted a spectacular yacht for four days. Its owners wanted a very curated, special trip, as it was one of their birthdays. During that time, we hosted a carnival at El Morro with the Comparsa del Caribe. Four children with two nannies and six other adults were also on board. On one occasion, while the adults enjoyed a private meeting with the city curator and musicologist, Omar López, about the history of Cuban music, the children took a class with the Santiago Ballet. And after the parents danced rumba in an interactive class, we went to the ballet studio and saw their children, both

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girls and boys, performing a scene from The Nutcracker. I think there were six private events in four days."

Among the photos she keeps in her smartphone gallery are dinners held in such idyllic locations as the ruins of French coffee plantations in Gran Piedra, surrounded by flowers in the Ave del Paraíso Garden (Bird of Paradise Flower), where these Asian and many other species are grown. On pristine white tablecloths, silver cutlery, fine crystal glasses, and delicious meals gleam.

"All of this generates income for the private sector, for artists, and for the community at large, and it's very important to me to support these people," she declares.

Cuba, an ideal setting for luxury yachting

Luxury yachting represents much more than sailing; it's an exclusive way of life that combines advanced technology, refined design, and personalized experiences. María Romeu started in this business decades ago.

Although she was born into a family of Cuban origin with nautical traditions, for the first time in her life she came close to modern vessels measuring 70, 80, and 90 meters in length, with helicopters, swimming pools, gyms, spas, and crews of up to 30 people on board.

"I would look at them and think, why don't these yachts go to Cuba? One day, a British billionaire, a very famous financier, arrived with his wonderful boat that often went to that marina, and I asked the captain, do you think yachts like these would ever go to Cuba?" He replied, "Good luck. If you can convince a billionaire to take his yacht to Cuba, I think they'd love it, but I wouldn't even know where to start."

Years passed, and the idea continued to float in this woman's head, who left her position in the marina to become a professional crew member. "I decided I was going to learn the industry from top to bottom and found a new career as a crew member on super-high-level yachts."



It was then, after a long voyage, in December 2014, that she heard President Barack Obama's statements that temporarily changed the course of relations between Cuba and the United States. "I left everything and, with a cousin, began visiting all the marinas in Cuba. I've spent ten years creating all this."

Between 2016 and 2018, the company managed the voyage of more than 30 vessels of this type through Cuban waters and ports. It also organized a familiarization trip for the International Yacht Brokers Association and brought 27 charter yacht managers to Cuba in early 2017.

Following the intense hurricane season of 2018 and the restrictions imposed by the Donald Trump administration in 2019, which limited travel by US citizens to Cuba, she estimates that only about 20 yachts have booked her services. Given this reality, she redirected all her marketing

to Europe, a strategy that is in line with the trends in this market.

Specialized media outlets claim that this industry is booming, driven by the growth of exclusive tourism, rising global wealth, and a growing demand for personalized experiences at sea. The luxury yacht market was valued at \$8.75 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to \$10.14 billion in 2025. By 2033, it is expected to reach \$17.33 billion, at an annual growth rate of 8.0%. Europe leads the trend with a 47.58% share, according to statistics from the previous year published by Fortune Business Insights.

This high-end tourism generally seeks destinations in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. During the winter season (November to May), when warm temperatures and calm waters are ideal for sailing and anchoring, the Caribbean is the preferred destination. More than 700 islands and cays showcase unique



Regarding nautical infrastructure in the archipelago, the Marina Gaviota Varadero, with more than 1,000 berths, is one of the largest in the Caribbean. The Port of Havana, which also serves as a gateway to unique cultural experiences such as the Cannon Shot Ceremony at La Cabaña Fortress or the Tropicana Cabaret show, is well-equipped to accommodate these luxury yachts. In other areas of the vast island, such as Cayo Largo, Cienfuegos, and Santiago de Cuba, there are other points also equipped for these purposes. A network of anchorages complements these facilities in key locations on the island's shelf.

In communicating these opportunities for adventure and exploration in Cuba and participating in networking events like nautical shows, Romeu sees a goal. These types of events attract merchants, members of professional yachting organizations, captains, as well as representatives from many other agencies dedicated to mapping out routes for luxury yachts.

"It's very important to understand the impact of this level of visitors, because if they are conscious people who come to Cuba truly to soak up or be immersed in the culture and nature, it's with the hope of a new level of tourism, and they also serve as ambassadors," says María Romeu, a woman who thinks of her people and of positioning Cuba as one of the preferred destinations for luxury yachting in the Caribbean. "The most important thing for me is that these types of people come and see and know that they are safe and healthy, that they will be welcomed with open arms."

landscapes and beaches and a very attractive local culture.

In this competitive and exclusive environment, Cuba still offers opportunities and challenges. María Romeu knows them very well.

"Yachting is totally mobile in every aspect. The restrictions that exist in the United States only apply to American owners and yachts, which number eight or ten. The rest of the yachts in the world are not made in the United States, nor are their owners American citizens."

Despite the difficult economic situation Cuba is experiencing, the experienced travel agent assures that the country is better able than ever to promote high-standard tourism.

"During our stays in Cuba, we heavily promote natural products. We work with agroecological farms, offering natural, seasonal, and all organic products. But if they ask for a pear that doesn't grow in Cuba, there are suppliers who import, and you can find pears, apples, and grapes. We hire people who supply restaurants daily, and we can legally provide fresh fish, different types of milk, even gourmet food. There are very few things that are unavailable, such as exotic vinegars or oils. But these crews travel with a chef on board, and we work

closely with them on supplies. They love cooking with what we provide here.

María also makes sure her clients venture ashore. "We take excursions to farms like Vista Hermosa or Marta. At the sustainable restaurant El Cuajani in Viñales, for example, they have an impressive garden where they grow countless different types of tomatoes and are dedicated to edible flowers.

Fuel, a major concern in the country today, is not so much of a concern for CubaPlus Travel. "These are vessels with large tanks that almost never need refueling." In any case, the agency has ensured it has the support of the country's infrastructure for emergencies.



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TEXT: TTC EDITORIAL

Tourism is more than an industry in the Caribbean; it is a way of life, an economic backbone, and, for many, a ticket out of poverty. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, tourism contributed an average of 11.4% to the region's GDP in 2023 and generated more than 2.75 million jobs, representing 15.1% of total employment in the Caribbean. It also plays a key role in boosting employment for women and youth.

According to the World Bank, despite its rise, the leisure industry does not always live up to its potential to provide high-quality, inclusive, and resilient employment in this part of the world.

The institution's recent report, "Rethinking Caribbean Tourism: Strategies for a More Sustainable Future," uses a multidimensional Job Quality Index (JQI) to assess tourism jobs in Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Saint Lucia across four key dimensions: earnings, employment benefits, job stability, and working conditions.

Tourism in the Caribbean: An economic engine with employment quality challenges

The analysis reveals important nuances in the quality of tourism jobs in the Caribbean. While jobs in this sector tend to be of higher quality than those in the primary sector, they generally lag behind the quality of jobs in manufacturing and other service sectors. Saint Lucia stands out as an exception, with tourism jobs ranking first in overall job quality.

Tourism jobs tend to offer similar working conditions (except in the Dominican Republic) and more benefits than those in other sectors (except in Barbados). However, they are less stable.

Quality varies across population groups and locations. For young people, tourism often offers opportunities that are comparable or even superior (in Barbados and Saint Lucia) to those in other sectors, suggesting its potential as a significant entry point into the labor market. However, across the board, young workers continue to hold the lowest-quality jobs compared to older age groups.

Despite being overrepresented in the sector, women consistently face

The Caribbean has an unparalleled advantage: stunning natural beauty, cultural richness, and proximity to key markets. Tourism can remain the region's most powerful development engine, but only if it better serves the people who support it.

lower job quality than men, with larger gaps in tourism compared to other sectors in Grenada and the Dominican Republic. A marked urban-rural gap also persists.

Therefore, while the tourism sector offers ample opportunities, especially for first-time job seekers, the nature of these jobs, including insecure ones, makes it difficult for workers to move up the economic ladder or develop resilience in the face of crises.

The study notes that the pandemic exposed the profound fragility of the tourism sector, with the loss of more than 700,000 jobs in the Caribbean in 2020. "Countries must now look beyond

visitor numbers and focus on the sector's real impact on jobs, incomes, and livelihoods. That starts with putting job quality at the center of tourism policy," the World Bank states.

Faced with this reality, the organization suggests that Caribbean governments offer incentives for formalization, such as simplifying business registration and providing tax relief for tourism businesses, especially small and community-based operators; strengthening labor inspections and promoting responsible tourism standards; investing in specific training; strengthening local economic ties; and creating public-private partnerships.



TEXT: DAILY PÉREZ GUILLÉN

PHOTOS: NATURALEZA SECRETA

Archaeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in the South-East of Cuba

25 years on the World Heritage List

On November 29, 2000, the UNESCO added the Archaeological Landscape of the First Coffee Plantations in the South-East of Cuba to its World Heritage List. These ruins were designated as such for being a unique and eloquent testimony to a form of agricultural exploitation in a virgin forest. Coffee production in the southeast of the provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo during the 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in the creation of a unique cultural landscape, exemplifying a significant stage in the development of this agricultural system. Traces of these coffee plantations have disappeared worldwide.

The World Heritage Site covers an area of 81,475 hectares and 171 remains of old coffee plantations in varying states of conservation. This vast territory also includes a network of roads used as communication routes between the different plantations and coffee export points.

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The integration with the environment and the maximum utilization of natural resources within the agro-industrial system are highlighted in the landscape. Experts believe that the main artistic value of these works lies in the aesthetic and formal solutions of their architectural features, expressed in volumes, interior and exterior decorative elements, and the productive and domestic components present in the coffee barracks.

Each of these ancient coffee plantations presents unique features in its housing and/or production system. Amazing gardens can still be found with low walls recreating various geometric shapes, arcades supporting structures at different heights, aqueducts that transported water to different production areas or to homes adapted to the topography, large drying sheds extending into terraces, residential houses and warehouses, bakeries, coffee houses, and other structures.

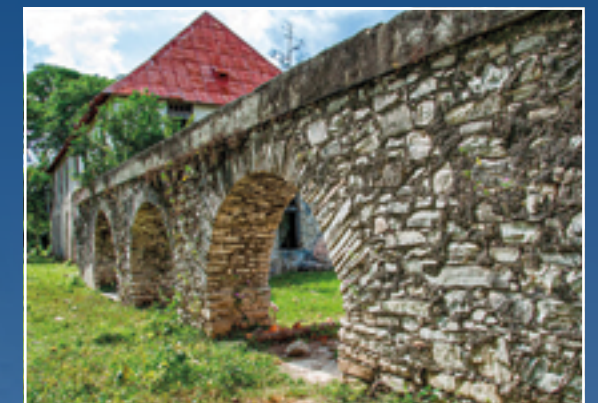
Arriving mostly from Saint-Domingue as a result of the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution in 1791, military personnel, civil servants, artisans, merchants, and landowners

were welcomed in the eastern part of the country, and their cultural influence permeated the art, commerce, industry, customs and more.

Many of those who embarked on the Sierra route were former plantation managers or owners in the neighboring Caribbean nation who acquired new properties in the mountains near Santiago de Cuba.

Samuel Hazard, American traveler and chronicler, recounted in his text "Cuba with Pen and Pencil" what he observed during his stay there in the 19th century: "After the *ingenios*, the *cafetales* are the most extensive agricultural establishments carried on in Cuba, - the latter exceeding the former generally in their handsome appearance and care."

On the one hand, the economic power of their owners and, on the other, the mastery of the engineers, builders, carpenters, and slave labor created these monuments of hydraulic engineering, road engineering, and domestic and productive architecture that today deserve World Heritage status.





The ruins that still stand reveal some of the elements that demonstrate the refinement of the French owners: the existence of fireplaces, carefully polished precious wood veneers, cabinets, music and billiard rooms and libraries, wooden shutters, and Italian-style gardens that took advantage of the uneven terrain.

These buildings reveal the struggle of French and Haitian settlers against nature, which translated into economic progress, even at the expense of African slaves. But they knew how to establish a dialogue to plant, more than coffee trees, a culture of connection with the rivers, streams, springs, and forests of rugged topography that were used for

the material and spiritual well-being of those who lived there.

In the second half of the 19th century, Cuba began its struggle for independence from Spanish colonialism, and many of these haciendas began their path to decline. At the beginning of the 20th century, a new wave of production was recorded, but in the following decades, other productions gained ground in the market, and many gradually deteriorated.

Towards the 1940s, research related to the traces of coffee growers in the eastern region emerged. Several researchers, whose noble interests converged in the Humboldt Group, traveled to these areas and made

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location plans, architectural surveys, and took photographs.

Researcher Fernando Boytel Bambú retraced those steps in the 1960s and restored perhaps the most emblematic of the haciendas, La Isabelica, leading to the creation of a museum there representative of the domestic and productive environment of a 19th-century French coffee plantation.

Later, the Casa del Caribe, the Faculties of Construction and History of the University of Oriente, the Flora and Fauna Office of Baconao Park, and other institutions joined the initiative. On December 30, 1991, the group of 94 coffee-growing settlements located in the province of Santiago de Cuba was declared a National Monument.

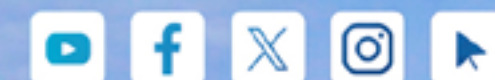
The Office of the City Curator of Santiago de Cuba and the Provincial Center for Cultural Heritage lead the management and conservation of this heritage to this day.

Recently, the Coffee Culture Interpretation Center (Casa Dranguet) and the joint venture Biocubacafé S.A. announced that they are consolidating alliances to preserve the tangible and intangible heritage of coffee culture in southeastern Cuba.

The Coffee Route guides travelers from around the world through this cultural treasure.

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TEXT: TTC

El Cobre Routes: Another proposal to showcase Cuba

An ecotourism and hiking project has launched in El Cobre, a town in the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, known for being the home of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, Patron Saint of Cuba.

According to the Italy-Cuba Cooperation website (www.italia-cuba.org), El Cobre Routes is an initiative that seeks to contribute to expanding the local sustainable tourism offers, currently limited mainly to visits to the Sanctuary. Its design combines appreciation of the territory's intangible heritage—landscape, nature, history, and culture—with the rediscovery of El Cobre's identity by its inhabitants, the main architects and beneficiaries of the project.

"Support for the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage of El Cobre" was born from a program funded by Italian cooperation through the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Cuba, implemented by the Italo-Latin American International Organization (IILA) and the Office of the Curator of Santiago de Cuba (OCC), in collaboration with the local government and the community of El Cobre.



Although the routes were inaugurated in April 2025 at the El Cobre Cultural Center, the process leading to their identification, preparation, and launch began in 2018, with the first IILA technical assistance mission dedicated to identifying potential areas of work, together with the OCC and local stakeholders, leading to the creation of a proposal for the reactivation of the local economy, which for a long time depended exclusively on religious tourism, especially after the closure of the copper mine in 2001.

The local community participated from the beginning in identifying intervention sectors and potential solutions. Between 2019 and 2024, thematic workshops on entrepreneurship, new economic models implemented in Cuba, cultural heritage, and the creative economy were held remotely, in addition to co-design meetings.

Participants in this experience highlight the sense of belonging expressed by the inhabitants of El Cobre, which was fundamental to the beginning of the process of creating ecotourism routes. Through exploratory walks and co-production meetings, they had the opportunity to reflect on the value of their territory and recover ancestral knowledge that can contribute to community development through responsible and sustainable tourism.

To date, four ecological routes have been identified, two of which have been fully mapped and are available on the Cooperation Program website. Both trails start from the central Agustín Cebreco square, where the Casa de la Cultura is located, a structure responsible for providing useful information and contact with local guides.

The first of these, Bellos Horizontes, comprises a seven-kilometer route along a stone road that led to the town's first church, as well as public places still used by local residents today, and

the plaza where the first settlements built by the miners were established. The route then enters the forest, where the vegetation and endemic birds are the main attractions, until reaching the Beto Pérez spring. The return path skirts the town along a plateau overlooking the Basilica of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre. It stops at the Pozo Azul viewpoint, with views of the old mining facilities, and the Monument to the Runaway Slave, a point of interest on the Slave Route (UNESCO), before concluding at Pozo Azul itself.

Meanwhile, Los Caminos de la Minería (The Mining Paths) is an approximately 14-kilometer round trip. It crosses the old structures of the copper processing plant and continues along the railway line that connected the mines to the port of Santiago de Cuba. Along the way, you can see civil engineering works such as buttresses, drainage canals, and bridges. This area was the scene of numerous operations by the Mambí Army in its fight against Spanish rule, and the foundations of one of the bridges destroyed during the Ten Years' War are still preserved. At the end, hikers find "El Saltadino," a waterfall with a small beach where you can enjoy a swim and rest.

This proposal, as a way to boost local development through the valorization of tangible and intangible heritage and a more sustainable tourism offer, also envisions potential productive activities, either active or yet to be activated, along the routes, such as bars, restaurants, accommodations, farms, and the participation of craftspeople, who could offer other services and products.

However, the success of the initiative depends largely on its visibility: how can we inform the public, both Cuban and foreign, about the existence of the new El Cobre trails and ensure that this translates into direct economic benefits for the population? A challenge that is just beginning.



Hotel Brisas Guardalavaca: An icon of Cuban tourism

31 YEARS OF CELEBRATIONS

Nestled among crystal-clear waters and golden sands, Hotel Brisas Guardalavaca celebrates another anniversary of service, hospitality and tradition. This emblematic resort, located on the northern coast of Holguín, has established itself over the years as a favorite destination for both domestic and international tourists, becoming a jewel of Cuban tourism.

Since its opening, it has been a haven for relaxation and unforgettable experiences. Surrounded by lush nature and with direct access to one of the most beautiful beaches in eastern Cuba, the hotel combines modern comfort with Caribbean charm. Its all-inclusive facilities, varied cuisine, recreational activities for all ages and a staff renowned for their professionalism and friendliness have been fundamental pillars of its success.

During this anniversary, the hotel is preparing special initiatives to celebrate with its guests and employees. Cultural events, live performances, tastings of local cuisine and tributes to long-serving employees are part of the commemorative program. All of this is intended to thank those who have made a history of growth and excellence possible.

Beyond the numbers, what truly distinguishes Hotel Brisas Guardalavaca is its ability to make every visitor feel at home. This spirit of hospitality is, without a doubt, its greatest strength and the reason why generations of travelers continue to choose it year after year.

On this new anniversary, Brisas Guardalavaca reiterates its commitment to quality, sustainable tourism and the



promotion of Cuban culture. Looking to the future, the hotel continues to invest in innovation and continuous improvement, without losing sight of what has made it a Caribbean classic: the magic of a place where the sun, the beach and the smiles of its people create unforgettable memories.

OPPORTUNITIES WITH CUBASOL TO MAKE YOUR EVENTS NOT JUST IMPORTANT, BUT **MEMORABLE**.

CUBASOL, RECREATION AND LEISURE GROUP FOR ORGANIZING MICE SERVICES

CUBASOL is the Cuban leader in non-accommodation infrastructure. The business group comprises the largest local companies in this sector, encompassing gastronomy, commerce, entertainment and transportation. This facilitates the enhancement of a thematic professional event with endless recreational combinations, transforming it into a cultural experience that many organizations seek to inspire their employees, clients, suppliers and even families.



PLAZA AMÉRICA COMPLEX, VARADERO

Plaza América is the most important convention center outside of Havana, and boasts the complete infrastructure for hosting congresses, events, trade shows and meetings. It is equipped with modern technology, including a wireless audio system, an interpretation system with up to 8 channels, a variety of multifunctional spaces complemented by catering services, and a prime location on Cuba's most popular beach. It has a trained and specialized staff capable of meeting all the expectations of those who choose to hold their events at these facilities.



MEETING SPACES

Multiple spaces are available with capacity for everything from conferences to small gatherings.



GIFTS FOR ATTENDEES

A network of stores throughout the country specializes in Cuban gifts and items promoting Cuba.



MUSIC AND DANCE SERVICES

Contracting of small and large-scale music and dance performances, soloists, instrumentalists, technical services and costume design.



GROUND TRANSPORTATION

A large and modern fleet of buses of various sizes is available for transporting participants, as well as a fleet of all-terrain vehicles (4x4).



CATERING SERVICES

Restaurant services are provided throughout the country. Spaces are available for business breakfasts and dinners.



LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Activities are offered for registered participants, as well as their spouses and guests.



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Sargassum-free Cuban beaches: Caribbean refuges with crystal-clear waters

TEXT:
RACHELL
COWAN
CANINO

As the Caribbean faces record-breaking sargassum accumulation, Cuba is emerging as a destination with preserved beaches where visitors can enjoy clear waters and golden sands without the threat of the pesky brown algae. The island's western and central coastlines maintain optimal conditions thanks to ocean currents and environmental management strategies.

According to studies, the massive arrival of sargassum in the Caribbean is linked to climate change: rising ocean temperatures, altered currents and nutrients derived from human activities. When these algae decompose, they generate hydrogen sulfide, which causes headaches, eye irritation and impacts marine ecosystems.

Countries such as Mexico and the Dominican Republic have implemented containment barriers and an intensive cleanup, but Cuba stands out for the stability of its coastal environments in key areas, thanks to its geographical location and monitoring policies.

Among these beaches, Varadero stands out in number, as the island's main sun and beach destination. With 22km of white sand, this iconic destination reports minimal algae presence in 2025. Its hydrodynamic profile—protected by the Gulf Stream—deflects sargassum masses eastward. Hotels like the Iberostar Selection Varadero, certified for its sustainability, implement daily monitoring and early waste removal.

A little further toward the center of the island, the beaches of Cayo Santa

María, Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo stand out for their turquoise waters. These remain clean due to local currents that carry sargassum out to sea. CITMA biologists monitor the area using satellite images to activate rapid cleanup protocols if any approach is detected.

On the other hand, the beaches east of Havana (Guanabo, Bacuranao, Mar Azul, among others) are also in a privileged position. After isolated reports in March, management programs reduced the impact. Specialized cleanup and the strategic placement of natural barriers keep these urban beaches operational. Cuba has integrated sargassum management into its Civil Defense Directive 1, classifying it as an environmental risk.



In the far east, Guardalavaca stands as a historical and natural treasure. This tourist destination combines crystal-clear waters and white sand with a coral reef just 100 meters from the coast, ideal for diving and snorkeling. Its location on

the northeastern coast benefits from currents that carry sargassum away, while hotels in the area implement daily surveillance to remove waste in a timely manner.

South of the Isle of Youth, Cayo Largo del Sur is home to some of the most pristine beaches in the Caribbean, with 24km of fine sand and turquoise waters. Its Paraíso and Sirena beaches are immune to sargassum thanks to currents that divert the algae toward the high seas, a phenomenon supported by early warning systems. This paradise, accessible only by plane or boat, operates under an ecotourism model.

Tools such as the Official Sargassum Monitoring Map, updated daily with citizen collaboration, allow for the prediction of arrivals in several countries

in the region. Furthermore, pilot projects in cooperation with environmental associations explore sustainable uses of collected seaweed, from fertilizers to construction materials.

While destinations in the region rely on “sargassum traffic lights” to redirect tourists, Cuban beaches offer intact biodiversity with coral reefs and premium experiences with hotels in heritage cities that complement the sun and sand offerings with culture and history, as well as the absence of health risks from decomposed sargassum and a commitment to sustainable practices.

For travelers seeking the authentic Caribbean without ecological disturbances, the island confirms that paradises still exist, where the sea remains a blue mirror.

A Cuban Destination Reborn

TEXT: TTC



All-in: A new concept to enjoy Cayo Santa María

This winter season, the Gaviota Tourism Group is launching its new All-In concept in Cayo Santa María, a tourist destination located in north-central Cuba. According to company executives, the goal is to redefine the All-Inclusive concept in this Caribbean destination in order to enrich its offers.

From now on, guests will be able to enjoy all the services of the Plazas (The One Collection, Plaza Gallery, and Plaza Dunas) at no additional cost, each offering different experiences and themes.

These tourist plazas are spaces close to the hotels, designed as additional recreational options for travelers. They offer restaurants, shops, bars, spas, nightclubs, bowling alleys and ice cream parlors, among other services.

The announcement was made during the seventh edition of the Destinos Gaviota 2025 Tourism Trade Fair, an event that served to showcase the renewal of Cayo Santa María.

This region, known for its sun-and-beach tourism attractions, is establishing itself as the ideal destination to showcase the evolution of Cuba's tourism offers. The development promoted by the Gaviota Tourism Group has reached a network of 20 accommodations and more than 12,000 rooms, most of which are managed by international chains such as Meliá, Iberostar, Royalton Hotels & Resorts, Roc, Valentin, Archipelago, and Vila Galé. The exclusive hotels have been designed to offer maximum comfort and elegance, perfectly integrated into the natural surroundings.

Cayo Santa María is distinguished for its pristine, protected nature and the relaxing experience it offers for those seeking rest, luxury, and natural beauty in this area of extensive beaches ideal for swimming, sunbathing, or simply taking in the fresh air.



The One Collection: Another Gaviota star product

The One Collection is the name of the new product that the Gaviota Tourism Group is launching this high season on Cayo Las Brujas, in north-central Cuba.

Conceived as a facility of just 67 rooms, 43 of them with ocean views, high standards and adults-only accommodation, it forms part of The One Gallery, a space where art, culture and hospitality merge with the sun and beach options that distinguish this tourist destination.

The company defines this facility, which will feature a specialized butler service, as "a space that celebrates elegance, authenticity and the experience of living the exceptional." A plaza with a nightclub, bowling alley, spa, shops, themed restaurants and spaces for artistic performances are also among the options guests can enjoy.

During the cocktail reception to present The One Collection, representatives from travel agencies, tour operators, and the specialized press toured its facilities and enjoyed the privileged views and services that distinguish it among the 20 Gaviota-owned hotels in the Cayo Santa María tourist resort.

During the 7th edition of the event known as Destinos Gaviota, the group announced its intention to "revive Cayo Santa María," as one of the most emblematic tourist destinations in the Caribbean archipelago, with this and other new features.



Training for new tourism professionals

TEXT: JOSÉ LUIS PERELLÓ



Tourism is no longer what it was two decades ago. Traveler demands have changed, and with them, the profile of those who lead this sector. Today, tourism professionals are not just guides or itinerary managers: they are creators of experiences, innovators and agents of social transformation.

A recent UNESCO report highlights a worrying lack of tourism skills among both students and teachers. Universities in Latin America and Europe already incorporate courses on sustainable tourism, social innovation and digital promotion into their curricula.

Tourism security expert María Luisa Cortez warns that Bolivia has unique resources but lacks professionals capable of fully utilizing them. "The profile of the new tourism professional is that of an innovator. We have to create new perspectives on tourism. We have natural and cultural resources, but we lack innovative professionals," she states.

The new professional must be a cultural bridge, an interpreter of diversity, and a guarantor of visitor safety. They must know how to communicate, but also how to design strategies that position destinations in a competitive and digital world. For example, Argentina's National Parks Administration (APN) approved new regulations that redefine specialties and establish the procedures for accreditation, renewal, and oversight of guides in protected areas, confirming that it will maintain the requirement for accredited professionals.

The objective of the new regulation is to streamline procedures, simplify processes and strengthen tourism as a driver of regional employment. Therefore, it establishes a diverse classification of guides, including tourism guides; trekking guides at different levels; high mountain and mountain skiing guides; guides for specific activities, such as horseback riding, biking, rafting, kayaking, canoeing, rowing, flora and fauna observation, fishing and sport

hunting; and site guides, which include members of indigenous communities and residents with knowledge of the territory.

Cortez also believes that new professionals should focus on digital and tourism marketing. They should also have extensive knowledge of all aspects of graphic design and master the regulations that govern the sector. Versatility, she points out, will be key to serving seasoned tourists who demand quality, speed and personalized experiences.

New professionals do not limit themselves to showing landscapes, but rather construct authentic stories that connect identities. Their work boosts local economies, shares the history of sites, strengthens cultural self-esteem, and creates experiences that go beyond the visitor's stay.

The need for professionals with this profile is growing worldwide. Costa Rica, a pioneer in ecotourism, trains its guides with knowledge of biology and digital technologies. In New Zealand,

students work alongside indigenous communities to design authentic and responsible experiences.



“Queens of Bartending 2026” in Havana

TEXT: YOANNA CERVERA

Cuba will host the first Women’s World Cocktail Championship, “Queens of Bartending 2026,” from March 7 to 10 at the Meliá Cohiba Hotel in Havana. This unprecedented event, endorsed by the International Bartender Association (IBA), will bring together the world’s 30 best bartenders.

The selection of Cuba as the host city recognizes its centuries-old cocktail tradition, with a Bartenders Association that exceeds 1,600 members, 30% of whom are women, and which has been instrumental in preserving classics like the mojito and the daiquiri. “We suggested to the IBA that we create a global event, and they accepted. Could there be a better venue than Cuba?” stated Eddy Naranjo, president of the Cuban Bartenders Association, recalling that the proposal arose after the success of a women’s championship held on the island in 2025.

Participants will compete in four categories: aperitif, long drinks, sparkling drinks, and after dinner, culminating in a superfinal where they will create a unique cocktail with Havana Club products—the main sponsor—and present it in English.

“It’s not just about mixing ingredients; it’s about telling a story and honoring the legacy of cocktails,” explained Rider Fuentes, vice president of the organizing committee, about this competition that will determine the first “World Cocktail Queen.” The prizes include recognition for the best cocktail in each category, the most refined technique, and the most promising cocktail made by a bartender aged under 24.

With the help of the Havanatur Grou., as the official host, a program has been designed that will allow delegations to enjoy the attractions of the Caribbean destination, with visits to Havana Club distilleries, tours of Havana, and events at iconic bars. “We want them to experience the essence of our cocktails,” Fuentes added.

The event coincides with International Women’s Day on March 8, reinforcing its message of female empowerment in mixology. Cuba plans to present its candidate in December after an elimination process.



Connectivity in the Caribbean

New Aerogaviota connections between Cayo Santa María and Havana

Aerogaviota launches a new line of scheduled flights between Cayo Santa María and Havana, designed to facilitate tourist travel and boost trade between the two destinations. Flights operate twice weekly for \$90, operating on Wednesdays and Sundays, allowing for flexible planning for both short-term and extended stays.

This new air route represents a comfortable and efficient alternative for those wishing to enjoy the natural wonders of Cayo Santa María, or immerse themselves in the rich cultural life of the Cuban capital.

Air France returns to Punta Cana in January

The Punta Cana Group and Air France signed an agreement to reestablish direct flights between Paris and the Dominican Republic.

The route will resume operations starting January 13, 2026, as confirmed by the Dominican Ministry of Tourism.

This agreement was signed at IFTM Top Resa, the International and French Travel Market held in Paris, and includes the development of three weekly flights connecting Charles de Gaulle Airport with Punta Cana International Airport.



Open Skies between Argentina and El Salvador

With the addition of El Salvador, Argentina has reached Open Skies agreements with 27 countries, including Brazil, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Canada, Panama, Uruguay, Paraguay, Mexico, Colombia.

Argentina and El Salvador are the latest to have signed an agreement to facilitate air transport, which, according to the signatories, seeks to boost tourism, increase flight frequency and attract investment to the sector.

French airline Air Caraïbes to launch a new direct route

The connection, which will operate twice weekly to El Catey Airport in Samaná, Dominican Republic, adds to the company's current services in the Caribbean. Air Caraïbes will also strengthen its route between Paris and Punta Cana with an additional weekly flight.

In this way, the airline consolidates its presence in the Dominican Republic. It currently flies seven times a week between Paris and Punta Cana, and during the winter season it maintains three weekly flights to Santo Domingo.



Cuba prepares to welcome the world to its most iconic coastal gem

TEXT: TTC

The resort of Varadero will host the two most important tourism events in the country in 2026: the 44th International Tourism Fair (FitCuba) in May and the 8th Destinos Gaviota Tourism Trade Fair in September. Both events will transform the Caribbean country's most important tourist hub into a showcase of the innovation, hospitality and natural beauty that characterizes this destination.

FitCuba, with Canada as its guest country, will focus on the sun and beach product, which is the top preference among travelers when choosing a vacation spot in Cuba. Destinos Gaviota, meanwhile, will offer an immersive

experience for tour operators, with an emphasis on business tourism and direct experience of each space managed by the host group.

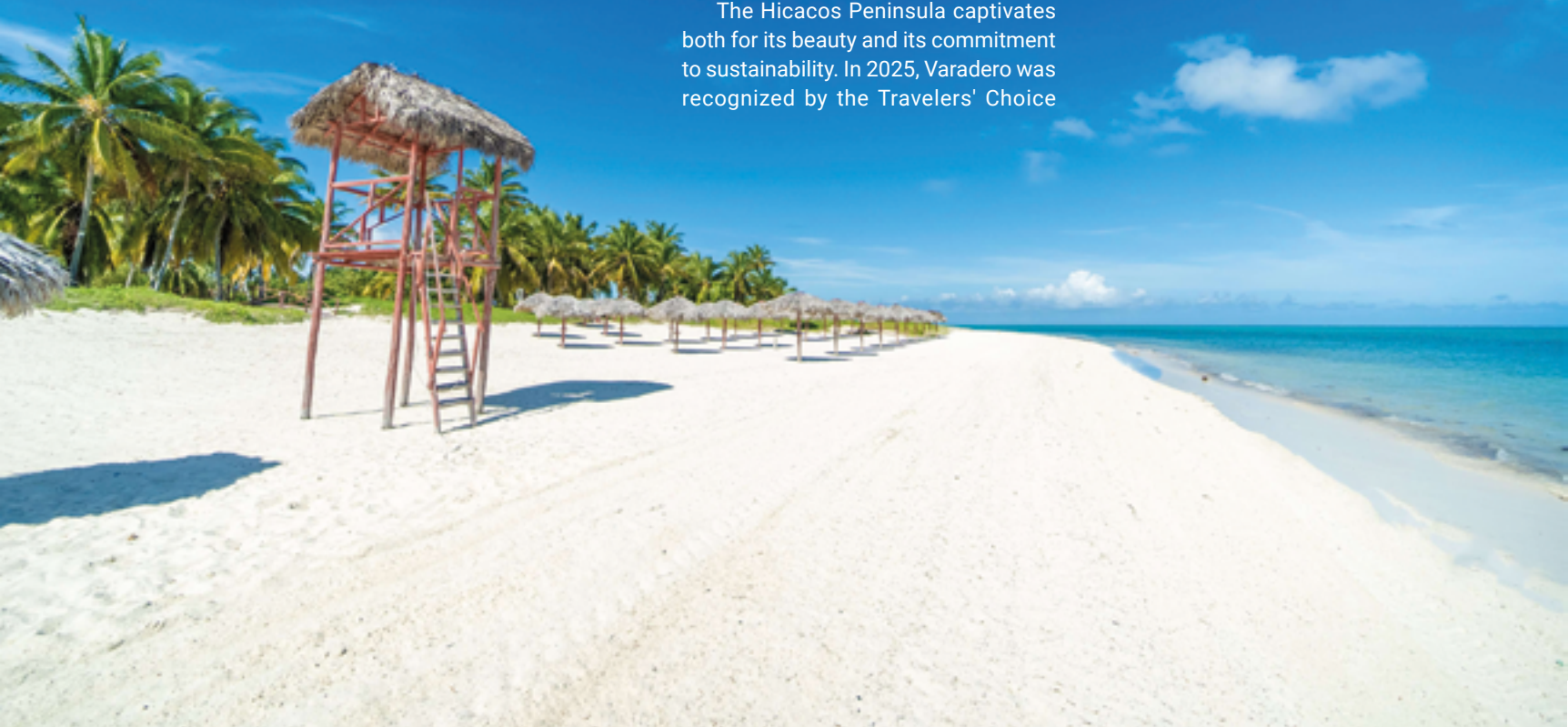
Beyond the numbers and the agendas, Varadero presents itself as a destination that has it all: more than 20 kilometers of white-sand beaches, warm, crystal-clear waters, more than 50 hotel facilities ranging from luxury resorts to boutique accommodations, and a solid infrastructure for MICE tourism (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions).

The Hicacos Peninsula captivates both for its beauty and its commitment to sustainability. In 2025, Varadero was recognized by the Travelers' Choice

Awards as the sixth best beach in the world and the second best in the Caribbean, an award that consolidates its reputation as a destination of excellence.

"Varadero is ready to continue uniting cultures, ideas and tourism passions," stated Luis Martínez de Armas, Ministry of Tourism delegate in Matanzas. "It's a recognition of what this destination represents: the place where excellent tourism and Cuban authenticity come together by the sea."

With a unique blend of hotel tradition, constant renovation and the natural charm that only Cuba can offer, 2026 will be the year Varadero shines brighter than ever.



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