

[Key address by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the Inauguration of Playa Pesquero Five-Star Hotel and Holguin tourism resort. January 21, 2003 \[1\]](#)

Date:

21/01/2003

Distinguished guests and tourists;

Fellow countrymen:

Today, 48 hours after the general elections in which 97.61% of voters elected 609 deputies, we are inaugurating an exceptional hotel, the largest in the country, in the province of Holguín, to the northeastern Cuba, located in a peculiar tourism area with a total of 4799 rooms, that is, including the 550 rooms in the soon to be completed Yuraguana Hotel, allowing for the accommodation of almost 10,000 visitors.

From the first to the last stone, everything has been built with Cuban funds.

What was there on this site before? A big landowner held an enormous estate here, covering 41,400 hectares. Of this area, 13,319 hectares were unproductive, and the rest were graze land, scrubland and sugar cane fields. In 1959, it was practically inaccessible, and health care for those living here was precarious, almost non-existent.

The entire area along the coast and its surroundings, with their natural, historic and archeological wealth, offered one of the greatest tourism potentials in the country, with 41 beaches stretching 58.5 kilometers, 22 bays, 21 caves, six deposits of medicinal mud and mineral baths, 12 currently protected natural areas, and five zones of beautiful underwater scenery and old Spanish ships' wreckage. It was precisely in this area that Christopher Columbus first arrived on Sunday, October 28, 1492.

The Revolution's first efforts in the tourism area were necessarily modest.

Back in 1988, a first blueprint of the master plan was drawn up. Later, the Ramon peninsula, in Antilla, with a 3.7 kilometers beach, Corintia with a 7.8 kms beach and Cayo Saetía, located at the entrance to Nipe Bay; were also included. This has become a paradise of native Cuban flora and fauna, with the addition of 19 exotic animal species, such as antelopes, deer, zebras, buffalo and others. It is a large area in which more than 25,000 rooms can be built avoiding a building density that would threaten the preservation of its natural beauty.

In 1996, the goal was set to reach 5000 rooms by 2003. So far, 18 hotels have been built, with 4799 rooms, including 2,933 rooms, or 61.3% of the total, built in the last six years, a period in which hotel capacity has grown 2.58-fold. The goal set for the first stage has practically been attained. A number of hotels with hundreds of rooms have been built, most of them in the special period.

There are already 1796 rooms in the five-star category, for a 37.4% of the total, while 1690 rooms, or 35.2% of the total, are four-star. That is, 72.6% of the rooms are in these two categories.

The primary tourism markets for this tourism resort in Holguin are Canada, with a share of 36%; Germany, 24%; the United Kingdom, 11%; Italy and France, 7% each; and Switzerland, 5%.

Protection of biological diversity, sustainable development, rational use of natural resources, harmonious insertion of the facilities into the natural environment, protection of the latter, maximum integration with nature, recovery of cultural and historical heritage: all of these have been essential and unwavering components of its conception and development.

There are three Cuban hotel chains currently operating in this tourism area: Cubanacán, Islazul and Gaviota. It was Gaviota that was basically responsible for its conception, planning and development. This hotel inaugurated today belongs to that chain, although a major international firm, Bouygues, and a number of Cuban construction companies with 53 national enterprises were also technically engaged in the construction. For the first time ever, such a turnkey facility has been completed in 22 months, that is, 60 days sooner than foreseen. This translates to 0.55 working days per room, with important savings in building costs, calculated at 99.4 million, including 75.2 million USD.

The average number of construction workers was 892; using 23 new technologies and 37 newly developed types of equipment. The total area of the hotel is 29.41 hectares, with 85,059 square meters of construction, 140 building works, 944 rooms, seven sports fields, five swimming pools, five restaurants, a live entertainment area with 642 seats, a specialized activities club with 184 pieces of equipment, and 775 full-time workers during the high season. At this moment of inauguration, there are 382 workers, of whom 78 are university graduates, 103 are vocational school graduates, 178 are senior high school graduates, and 23 are junior high school graduates. There are 179 who speak English, 43 who speak French, 14 who speak German, and 42 who speak other foreign languages. It is a five-star hotel.

A training program has been developed for the workers of this tourism resort, offered in two different centers. In the last ten years, 5235 youths have graduated in various specialties, while thousands of workers have received training and upgrading courses.

Outside-the-hotels amenities:

The Christopher Columbus Park, located on the north coast of Holguin province, stretches from Gibara Bay to Maita with the purpose of creating and marketing out-of-hotel amenities related to the preservation, recovery, enrichment and sustainable use of natural, historic, social and cultural resources, as a complement to the all-inclusive hotels.

There are plans to create a 101 square kilometers reservation where the natural environment will be protected and the careful management of the ecosystems will allow the animal species there to live free from captivity.

The Naranjo Bay Natural Park. Dolphin and sea lion shows, swimming with dolphins, water sports and seafood restaurant.

Las Guanas Eco-Archeological Trail, covering an area of 16 hectares, features a 1060 meters long trail with fixed and moveable posters providing the necessary information to interpret the surroundings.

The Bariay National Monument Park: features a 19th-century Spanish fort, the reconstruction of the village as it was at the time of Columbus' arrival, a museum about the site, and works related to the encounter of the two cultures. The pre-Colombian ecosystem is also being recreated with the 70 species of flora existing there when Columbus first landed.

The Puerto de Vita International Marina, with 38 moorings, fueling service, food, laundry facilities, washrooms and water sports like diving, fishing and others.

The Chorro de Maita Museum, comprising an indigenous cemetery and a replica of a Taino village.

The Esmeralda Beach Underwater Park, featuring sunken combat weapons and equipment, such as tanks, armored cars, cannons, trucks and others.

Tourism attractions projects:

A narrow-gauge tourist railway connecting Guardalavaca and Gibara. It will stretch 45 kilometers, and use 19th century steam locomotives.

An animal Reproduction Center located in Punta Haite, on the south-southeast shore of Naranjo Bay, will breed the animal species needed to repopulate the forested areas and the bio-parks.

The Roca Azul Biopark, located to the west of the Naranjo Bay, will allow interaction with animals from Cuba and abroad, with participatory, educational and recreational activities. The park will combine ecotourism, agro tourism, boat rides, children's games, historic and artistic routes and contact with exotic animals, among other attractions.

The Cartacuba Park, located on Cayo Jutía, next to the dolphinarium, will house Cuban fauna roaming semi-freely.

Cayo Mono, located south of Cayo Jutía, will be home to between two and three monkey families trained to interact with tourists.

The Buccaneers Trail, located on the Haite peninsula, will recreate the lifestyle and activities of the smugglers who operated in the area during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Sugar Museum, located at the "Rafael Freyre" sugar mill, will recreate the history of the sugar industry, from the times of the old sugar mill preserved on the site to the present day.

The Regional Amusement Park, located at the entry to Naranjo Bay, will include a water park and rides.

The Pesquero Tourist Village, an area where offices, cultural plazas, banks, shops and other facilities will be built resembling a small country village.

The Guardalavaca Shopping Center, with a variety of retail stores and a cultural plaza.

The Guardalavaca Airstrip, for air connections with towns and cities in eastern Cuba, such as Baracoa, Manzanillo, Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo.

The Heliport, located in Estero Ciego, will be used for helicopter tours and sightseeing in the area and elsewhere.

Two Golf courses: one 18-hole course in Playa Esmeralda and another in Pesquero that could offer 36 holes or two with 18.

Investment in tourism in the province has had a positive impact on the development of other fields and sectors of the economy, as well as the construction of works that benefit the local population, including the 916 housing units completed in the communities of Guardalavaca, Aguada La Piedra and Melilla.

Investment in infrastructure between 1995 and 2002 totaled 221.7 million, including 111 million USD.

Some of the most notable works carried out are the following:

* Six waste treatment systems, which also serve 2011 homes in the residential area.

- * Six new water supply systems and the repair of two others, which also supply 1599 homes in the residential area.
- * A water reservoir currently under construction.
- * The recovery of Estero Ciego and Don Lino beaches.
- * Improvement of Pesquero and Guardalavaca beaches.
- * The Holguín International Airport, with the capacity for 300 passenger arrivals and 300 passenger departures an hour.
- * A 750-meter airstrip in Guardalavaca.
- * Road construction in Pesquero, Yuraguana, Cayo Bariay, Cayo Saetía, Estero Ciego and Los Bajos (currently underway).
- * Repair of the Holguín-Guardalavaca and Floro Pérez-Santa Lucía Highways (both currently underway).
- * Five electric power substations.
- * Two 33-kilowatt power lines.
- * Two 110-kilowatt power lines.
- * Electrification of 11 settlements linked to the tourism development area, benefiting 1350 homes.
- * Installation of a digital microwave network in the Gibara-Banes sub region.
- * Installation of a wireless system in Guardalavaca.
- * Digital plant serving Guardalavaca, Estero Ciego, Pesquero and Rafael Freyre, providing 1530 lines, of which 484 are residential and 98 are for public telephones.
- * Installation of the cable television system in the hotels on Guardalavaca beach.
- * Restoration of Los Bajos Beach for the enjoyment of the local population, including the construction of the Fray Benito-Caliche-Los Bajos highway, a children's playground, restaurant, cafeteria, aqueduct and waste treatment system; an electrical power plant, the improvement of the beach itself, locker-rooms and dance floor.

The development of tourism has positively impacted the development of the region's economy through the creation of 13,470 new jobs, 8046 of them directly and 5424 indirectly related to the sector, and the revitalization of life in other sectors.

To this it should be added that in the year 2002, the provincial tourism sector purchased 68% of its required inputs from national industries, which translates into 49.6 million dollars worth of sales for national producers. This figure was higher than in 2001, when the share for national industries was 67%.

The Ministries of Agriculture, of the Food Industry and of Fisheries, all combined, have taken in 120 million dollars in the last 10 years through sales to the tourism sector.

A number of cultural functions related to tourism have been developed, including the Ibero-American Culture Festival and the Romerías de Mayo celebration. There have been projects undertaken to

decorate hotel rooms with works by Cuban artists and writers, as well as regular performances featuring local talent from the province in the different tourism facilities.

Here are some other noteworthy statistics from the province: health and education before and after 1959.

Health care:

- * In 1959, at the time of the triumph of the Revolution, there were only 166 doctors; today there are 4820.

- * Seven dentists; today there are 740.

- * 40 nurses; today there are 5,840.

- * 23 health care facilities; today there are 2229.

- * 538 hospital beds; today there are 5638.

- * The health care budget in 1959 was only 98,000 pesos. Today it is 119.5 million.

- * Life expectancy was 50 years; today it is 76.57 years.

- * Infant mortality under one year of age, 80 per 1000 live births; today it is 7.33.

- * In 1999, the "Carlos J. Finlay" Center was created for research and treatment of hereditary ataxias. The purpose of the center is to promote scientific research and social and community medical care.

- * There is a provincial center for the treatment of chronic kidney ailments, with 25 beds.

- * A program has been developed for kidney, liver and cornea transplants.

- * One of the most important health care projects undertaken by the Revolution in this province, the "Lucía Iñíguez Landín" Hospital, of which the first two stages have been completed, began to provide service in 1998. It has 330 beds, and will eventually have 600.

- * Work is currently underway on four important medical projects:

- o The "Lucía Iñíguez Landín" Hospital Regional Neurological Restoration Center.

- o The construction of the third stage of the "Lucía Iñíguez Landín" Hospital.

- o The training and upgrading of personnel for the future establishment of a Cardiovascular Surgery Center.

- o The continued development of techniques for cancer treatment in the "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin" Hospital.

Education:

- * In 1959 there were only 386 schools; today there are 1530.

- * Only 19,000 children and adolescents attended school, a mere 9.8% of the school-aged children and adolescents at the time, who numbered 194,213 in total. Today, 206,800 attend school.

- * There were 1288 teachers; today there are 19,542.

- * There are also 50 daycare centers, with a capacity for 8486 children, benefiting 9164 mothers.
- * There were no universities in the province. Today there are five higher education centers, with a total enrollment of 12,160 students, of whom 6498 are in daytime courses.
- * The education budget was 2.5 million pesos; today it is 154 million.
- * The school retention rate is 99.5% and the pass rate is 96.8%.
- * A total of 24,139 professionals have graduated from the universities, at a current rate of 1700 new graduates a year.

Tourism development nationwide:

The international tourism system in Cuba comprises 44 main entities. Of these, 33 are directly run by the Ministry of Tourism, eight by Gaviota, and three by the Historian's Office.

The Ministry of Tourism has six hotel companies: Cubanacán, Gran Caribe, Horizontes, Islazul, Turismo y Salud, and Las Terrazas; three recreation and restaurant entities; two transportation companies; five receptive and travel agencies; two tourism store chains; two water sports chains; and 13 logistics and support entities.

The Gaviota Group manages a hotel chain, a non-hotel services entity, a travel agency, two transportation companies, one retail store chain, a water sports chain and a support and services entity.

The Havana City Historian's Office combines accommodation and non-hotel services in a single company, complemented by a travel agency and a transportation company.

Additionally, the Campismo Popular campsite agency has three facilities geared to international tourism.

In 1990, Cuba received 340,000 foreign tourists, with international tourism revenues totaling 243 million USD.

In the year 2000, with 1,773,986 international visitors, gross revenues totaled 1.948 billion dollars; in 2001, with 1,774,541 visitors, 1.846 billion dollars came into the country; and in 2002, with 1,683,716 visitors, 2 billion dollars. The forecast for 2003 is 1.9 million international visitors, with a proportionally higher amount of revenues.

In 1990, Cuba ranked 23rd among the 25 top tourist destinations in the Americas; in 2001, it occupied the ninth place.

A total of 13.6 million visitors were received between 1990 and 2002.

Cuba has become the leading Caribbean destination for Canadians, Italians and Spaniards, and ranks number two for Germans.

The tourism industry's share in the country's total foreign revenue rose from 4% in 1990 to 41% in 2001.

The number of rooms for international tourism has more than tripled, from 12,900 rooms in 1990 to 40,000 today.

The bulk of the capital invested in the sector is Cuban.

Most of the investments in hotels have taken place in eight tourism areas, where 92% of the total number of rooms are concentrated. These are the City of Havana, Varadero, Jardines del Rey, Santa Lucía, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba, the south-central coast (Trinidad-Cienfuegos), and the Los Canarreos Archipelago.

In 1990, there were 17 four- and five-star hotels. Today, there are 102 hotels in these categories, with 26,000 rooms, representing two-thirds of the total hotel capacity.

There have also been considerable efforts made to expand non-hotel services, providing tourists with a wide array of options, including restaurants, retail stores, tourist transportation, live music venues, museums, specialized clinics, water sports, other sports, facilities for conventions and conferences, cultural functions, etc.

Cuba offers a wide range of destinations and a great many possibilities for travelers. The friendliness and hospitality of its people, the interest sparked by the Revolution, the country's achievements in various fields and the paths followed in its social development: these are all major attractions and will become even more so, along with the high quality of its health care services and security, the protection of the environment, and the spirit of solidarity and cooperation with the islands of the Caribbean and other tourism destinations in the region, which boast excellent natural resources and facilities for multi-destination travel.

Direct employment in the tourism sector has grown in recent years from 54,000 to 100,000 jobs, while indirect employment (corresponding to national production for tourism, according to recent studies) rose from 30,000 to close to 200,000. In total, over 200,000 new jobs have been directly and indirectly created.

University graduates make up 20% of the work force in the tourism industry. At the beginning of the last decade, it was estimated that there were only 2,500 university graduates working in tourism. Today, there are 20,000, eight times more, thanks to the priority placed on tourism in the allocation of highly qualified human resources, as well as the workers coming from other sectors, particularly in the most difficult years of the special period.

In 1994, the different entities responsible for the training of tourism workers were integrated into a single system. The current training system is made up of 19 schools throughout the country, with a faculty of 1000 professors and instructors, and a total of 108,332 graduates in different areas during these years.

Since the year 2000, travel packages in the euro zone have been sold in this currency. The euro has been circulating in Varadero since June of 2002 and in Jardines del Rey and Cayo Largo since November of that year, with great acceptability; this practice will be gradually expanded.

Cuba participates in the main international tourism fairs, with stands and promotional campaigns in specialized publications with a wide circulation in Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Mexico.

The Congress of the International Federation of Tourism Journalists and Writers (FIJET) was organized and held in Varadero.

The annual convention of one of the world's biggest tour operators, TUI Inside, was also held in Cuba, with 600 travel agents in attendance.

There are 12 Cuban tourism promotion offices operating abroad, in Montreal, Toronto, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, the United Kingdom and Russia.

Sixty percent of the tourists who come to Cuba must travel on long-distance flights, which means that

between 14 and 16 hours pass from the time they leave their homes and the time they check in their hotels. The development of various tourism destinations in the country and the time factor for the tourists has been the main reasons for increasing the number of international airports in recent years. The country's airport capacity has expanded three-fold between 1990 and 2002.

Presently, there are 11 international airports, following the recent inauguration of the newest one in Jardines del Rey.

A total of 61 airlines fly to Cuba, 23 with regularly scheduled flights and 38 with charter planes.

In 2002, a total of 1,677,643 visitors were received through the country's airports.

Cubana Airlines transports 17% of international tourists.

The tourism development during these years has required the country to make a great effort in terms of investment.

From 1990 until today, some 27,000 new hotel rooms have been built, along with other constructions related to technical infrastructure, non-hotel services and supporting facilities.

Technical infrastructure investments involving electricity, water supply, sewage systems, communications, paved and unpaved roads have totaled one billion in all, including 363 million USD; 500 million have been invested in airports; and 783 million, including 300 million USD, have been invested in supporting and non-hotel services.

Tourism has created a demand that has contributed to the revitalization of other sectors of the country's economy. The policy implemented has been aimed at supporting national production intended to meet the requirements of tourism, while observing their competitiveness, stability and quality.

In the early 1990s, national producers could supply only 12% of the purchases made by the tourism sector. In 1999, they covered 51% of those needs, and last year, as was already said, they managed to meet 68% of the demand of tourism entities.

It is with great optimism and confidence in the shining economic future of the country that we are inaugurating this hotel and this tourism area today, for peaceful, safe and healthy tourism that can be enjoyed by children and families, young people, adults and senior citizens; for tourism aimed at wholesome recreation, culture and leisure; for tourism without casinos and gambling; for tourism without unemployed people and beggars; for tourism without drugs and crime, in the country that is advancing with giant steps, unstoppable, towards the highest possible degree of comprehensive general culture.

Long live our homeland!

Long live progress!

Long live peace!

Long live humanity!

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