

Ashley Turner Doyle Charleston SC : How Will Normalization of Relations with Cuba Change Travel?

The possible lifting the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba, which has been in place since 1961 could mean big changes in store for the travel industry.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The changes that will take effect after Obama's move toward normalization of relations with [Cuba](#) are not entirely clear, but tour operators are relatively sure it will be an improvement for them.



Courtesy Ashley Turner Doyle, LP publications

Lifting the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba, which has been in place since 1961, will be up to Congress. But Obama has signaled his interest in pursuing that course.

Exactly how the changes will go into effect is still uncertain.

"There isn't any clarification on what Obama said," Peggy Goldman, president of Friendly Planet [Travel](#), told [Ashley Turner Doyle](#) for Travelwriters.com, "but I did receive an update from OFAC [The U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control, which regulates all travel to Cuba]. They put out a little note that says they will be amending the regulations. It was bureaucracy speak, but in essence they said it will take a couple of weeks for any change to take place. OFAC expects to issue its regulatory amendments in the coming weeks, and none of the announced changes takes effect until the new regulations are issued."

That means the use of credit cards, or the purchasing of rum or cigars is not yet legal.

"But the type of trip we will be able to offer will grow in breadth," said Goldman. "It won't be possible until the embargo is lifted for you to book a flight and spend a weekend in Cuba. That's in the future. But we should be able from these changes to be able to send people in a variety of new ways, and I am hoping that that means we will be able to bring the cost down. With the lifting of some of these restrictions it will make it possible to have programs that are less cost intensive, with fewer services so people will be able to go and enjoy the island without having to pay a fortune."

Meanwhile the travel industry is expressing jubilation. Demand for travel to Cuba has been volcanic and any lessening of restrictions will make it possible to accommodate more of that demand.

Not only does the travel industry stand to be one of the leading benefactors of the relaxation of restrictions in trade with Cuba, it can take a little of the credit for helping to bring about a new policy in which the U.S. government sees engagement as a better way than exclusion for helping bring about democratic reform in Cuba.

"When I was listening to Obama give his speech today, I got all weepy," said Goldman.

"For us in travel industry who have been involved in this People to People program, it's a huge vindication of the time, effort and money that we've put into building these programs, because he said today that the engagement between Cubans and Americans is critical. And we've been seeing that all along.

"The Cubans have been meeting Americans, not just their relatives who live in Florida, but Americans from New Jersey, Denver, Sioux Falls and Minneapolis and all over country, and in very intimate situations. You meet with them where they live, where they work, where they play, and you converse with them, you listen to music together."

The People to People programs have laid the groundwork in the sense that Cubans and Americans have been getting to know each other – and they like each other.

"We know this from the reaction of Cubans that we talk to over the years of this program," said Goldman. "They tell us, 'This has really opened our eyes about Americans.'"

"Cubans really like us. They've understood that we're really nice and decent and generous people and we're interested in them. And they on their side are interested in us, and they're dying for an opportunity, for a little crack at the good life. These people really struggle. This is such a wonderful thing that's happened, I think for all of us."

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