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Morning News: Legal Tourism to Cuba on the Rise

Written by **Paul Brady** · December 03, 2014



Looser regulations have spurred a surge in travel to Cuba among Americans, many thousands of whom have visited the island in recent years on special “people-to-people” tours.

The American Express Global Business Travel Forecast 2015 predicts travel prices will increase a few points next year. “With an improving economy and greater corporate confidence, capacity discipline by US carriers, and the recent consolidation of the domestic market, airlines are predicted to raise their long- and short-haul fares in the coming year,” Amex says. “North American hotel rates are expected to trend upwards, buoyed by favorable economic growth, increasing demand, and a lack of new inventory. After an extended period of relative weakness, hotels are looking to capitalize on favorable market dynamics to increase profitability,” the forecast says. Long-haul business-class flights could go up 1-4% Amex predicts, with mid-range hotels up 3-6%. ([Amex](#))

Turkish Airlines is using the drop in oil prices to push ticket prices lower and continue a global branding effort aimed at making the carrier, which already flies to more destinations than any other, the world’s most ubiquitous airline. That strategy stands in stark contrast to what U.S. airlines are doing with fares in reaction to falling fuel costs, which is to say, not much. (Or, to hear Amex tell it, raising them slightly!) Interestingly, both strategies might work, since lower oil prices may give consumers more discretionary income to spend on travel, one analyst says. ([Bloomberg](#) and [Bloomberg](#))

More and more Americans are traveling legally to Cuba. “While traveling to Cuba for tourism remains technically unlawful for Americans, rules loosened by the Obama administration now permit a greater variety of so-called “people-to-people” cultural exchanges,” Ernesto Londoño reports. “Those include tours for art collectors, tobacco aficionados and Americans who want to explore Cuba’s dynamic gay scene, to name just a few. ... In 2012 and 2013, more than 90,000 Americans legally visited Cuba under those programs. That’s more than twice the number that traveled here legally in 2008.” ([NYT](#))

Best Western, which recently launched a BW Premier Collection brand, has announced the first property to be part of the mix, the Hotel Mäster Johan in Malmö, Sweden. ([BW Premier Collection](#))

The planned expansion into the U.S. by the Brazilian airline Azul has started in Fort Lauderdale, with Orlando service beginning on December 15. The airline may start Sao Paulo-New York flights by July 2015, Terry Maxon reports. ([The Dallas Morning News](#))

Finnair has declared itself, once again, the Official Airline of Santa Claus, a distinction the carrier has held since 1983. It will mark the occasion with two Airbus A321s in special Santa livery during the holiday season. Business class passengers will also get a special Christmas menu this season, with “starters such as rainbow trout gravlax, with poached duck and roasted cod as the choices of main course. Mulled wine and gingerbread cookies are also served on flights.” ([Finnair](#))

Uber has launched a carpooling feature to its app in New York City. It’s probably not as revolutionary as the company claims, but it is an interesting idea to let Uber riders share rides. ([Capital New York](#))

Possibly the most insidery thing to ever appear in Morning News: A look at the making of “a new scholarly book, ‘The Discourse of Online Consumer Reviews.’” ([NYT](#))



PAUL BRADY

Paul Brady is *Condé Nast Traveler's* deputy consumer news editor.

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