

# Consumer magazines latest sign of Cuba's changing times

HAVANA, CUBA: Two new magazines packed with glossy advertising are set to launch in Cuba, the latest sign of the changing times as the communist island reopens ties with the United States...



For people in Western societies, consumer magazines are the norm, but not in Cuba. With the thawing of relations between the US and Cuba and an opening up of the Cuban economy, however, *Ofertas* might be followed by many more such publications. (Image: Public Domain)

Media houses this week announced the imminent launch of *Ofertas*, a full-colour consumer magazine published by the state, and *OnCuba Real Estate*, a privately run digital magazine devoted to the Caribbean island's budding real estate market.

The launch comes as Cuba's warming relationship with its old Cold War enemy is in the spotlight at the Summit of the Americas this week, where Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro may hold the first substantive meeting between US and Cuban leaders in five decades.

The arrival of magazine ads for cars, appliances and beachfront property highlights the transition under way in the land where Fidel Castro once declared, "I find capitalism repugnant. It is filthy, it is

gross, it is alienating."

*Ofertas*, a monthly, will have 16 colour pages, half of them devoted to classified ads, the other half featuring "useful advice, guidance, tips and suggestions for doing business on the island," said the head of the state-run National Information Agency (AIN), Edda Diz Garces.

It will also run commercial advertising, which has not been seen in the Cuban media for five decades, with the exception of the phone book, where it was recently allowed in the Yellow Pages.

The magazine, which will cost three pesos (\$0.15), follows in the footsteps of *Opina*, a state-run classified ads tabloid that vanished from newsstands in the 1990s, when Cuba spun into economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union, its longtime benefactor.

But *Opina* existed at a time when Cuba had no private sector and its people were forbidden to buy and sell cars or houses.

It essentially ran classified ads for "permutas," or house swaps - the only legal way to transfer real estate at the time - and sales at state-run stores.

There is a much larger, though still limited, space for private enterprise since Raul Castro took over from his big brother Fidel, the father of the Cuban Revolution, in 2006 and took the first tentative steps toward opening up the economy.

Castro allowed Cubans to buy and sell property in 2011, and has increasingly encouraged the development of a nascent private sector.

*Ofertas* will "promote products and services from both state and private entities," said Diz Garces.

The new publication will also have a website, [ofertas.cu](http://ofertas.cu), that will be updated daily, competing with the popular private sites [revolico.com](http://revolico.com) and [porlalive.com](http://porlalive.com).

The .cu domain name will make the site much more accessible in this country where Internet access remains limited and

expensive.

It is easier and cheaper for Cubans to access .cu websites via a sort of national intranet that operates in parallel with the world wide web.

The other new title, *OnCuba Real Estate*, is the latest publication in a stable of private magazines launched by Cuban-American businessman Hugo Cancio.

An online publication, it will "inform readers and illustrate the current reality and development of the real estate market" in Cuba, said Cancio, whose company, Fuego Enterprise, Inc, is based in Miami and has an office in Havana.

Cancio launched the glossy *OnCuba Magazine* in 2012 in both English and Spanish, and a sister publication, *Art OnCuba*, in 2013, targeting US and Canadian audiences with an interest in Cuba.

*OnCuba Real Estate* will be the first publication devoted exclusively to Cuban real estate.

"We hope the United States will be a key player in the Cuban property market, both present and future," Cancio said.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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