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Cuba's INTUR coinage

Roberto Menchaca

Independent researcher

Abstract: The INTUR coins constitute a particular type of coinage created by the Cuban government on behalf of its official institute of tourism. Along with American minor coins, they were used as fractional coins by the foreign tourists visiting the island in the shops and recreational facilities that were set up to satisfy their specific needs. From 1993 Cubans were allowed to use the American currency and were also admitted to the referred touristic establishments. As a result, the demand for the INTUR coins increased. The present article reviews the legal dispositions that authorised the successive strikes and arranges them in a chronological order, which has little to do with the year engraved in the obverse of the coins themselves.

Keywords: Cuba, INTUR, Cuban coins, Tourism

Resumen: Las monedas del INTUR conforman un peculiar subgrupo dentro del circulante monetario cubano que fue creado por el gobierno a nombre del instituto oficial de turismo del país. Junto a las monedas fraccionarias norteamericanas estas monedas fueron usadas por los turistas extranjeros que visitaban la isla en las tiendas y establecimientos turísticos que les estaban exclusivamente reservados. Con la despenalización del uso del dólar en 1993, el pueblo cubano pudo acceder a estos establecimientos, lo cual incrementó la demanda por estas monedas. En base a una revisión exhaustiva de las disposiciones legales que autorizaron las sucesivas acuñaciones de monedas del INTUR, el presente artículo propone un orden cronológico para las mismas que guarda poca relación con el año grabado en las piezas.

Palabras Clave: Cuba, INTUR, monedas cubanas, turismo

The present article intends to shed light on a particular type of coins that were in use in Cuba during the last two decades of the past century. The coins were produced in the name of the “*Instituto de Turismo de Cuba*” or INTUR, which was the governmental institution dedicated to promote and develop the touristic sector in the island. INTUR was created by the Law number 1323 of November 30, 1976 in response to the increasing weight tourism was gaining in Cuba's economy.

Following the communist model of shops set up in the former Soviet Union to satisfy the needs of the foreign tourism, the Cuban government created in the 1980's the chain of shops called “Tiendas INTUR”, to which the access of Cubans was not allowed. Although payments in these shops were accepted in US dollars, the shortage of the latter soon prompted the government to issue a specific currency for use in these establishments. As a result, banknotes called “*certificados de divisas*” were issued by the Cuban National Bank and these were soon complemented with the INTUR fractional coins.

The INTUR coinage is poorly documented and several questions remain open to this date. For instance, no explanation has been given so far to account for the different varieties existing for coins of the same denomination and year. In fact, the same blanks were repeatedly used for striking coins of different denominations (see, for instance, KM#409 and KM#415.3 or KM#420 and KM#421).

Although the INTUR coins were produced in successive batches over a period spanning for more than thirteen years, they only bear one of the years consisting of 1981, 1988 and 1989.

The entire INTUR coinage, including those so far confirmed varieties, can be summarised as follows:¹

One cent:

KM reference ²	Description
KM#409	Obverse: Deer, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1988 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination and number "1". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 2.90 g. Diameter: 17.30 mm.
KM#410	Obverse: Number "1" and denomination. Reverse: INTUR logo, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1988 . Plain edge. Al:Mg:Mn, 97.15:2.5:0.35. Weight: 1.0 g. Diameter: 17.30 mm.

Five cents:

KM reference	Description
KM#411	Obverse: Snail, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1981 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.50 g. Diameter: 19.70 mm.
KM#412.1	Obverse: like KM#411, year 1981 . Reverse: like KM#411 plus number "5". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.50 g. Diameter: 19.70 mm. <i>Two varieties exists: coin alignment and medal alignment</i>
KM#412.2	Obverse: like KM#412.1, year 1981 . Reverse: like KM#412.1 (but number "5" and letters thinner). Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.50 g. Diameter: 19.70 mm.
KM#413	Obverse: Number "5" and denomination. Reverse: INTUR logo, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1988 . Plain edge. Al:Mg:Mn, 97.15:2.5:0.35. Weight: 1.50 g. Diameter: 19.70 mm.
KM#412.3	Obverse: like KM#412.1 but year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#412.1 but with smaller number "5". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.50 g. Diameter: 19.70 mm.
KM#412.3a	Obverse: like KM#412.3, year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#412.3. Plain edge. Nickel clad steel. Weight: 3.46 g. Diameter: 20.0 mm.

Ten cents:

KM reference	Description
KM#414	Obverse: Hummingbird, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1981 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.90 g. Diameter: 21.20 mm.
KM#415.1	Obverse: like KM#414, year 1981 . Reverse: like KM#414 plus number "10". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 3.90 g. Diameter: 21.20 mm.

¹ The respective obverse and reverse sides have been identified according to the technical descriptions reported in the legal dispositions authorising the coinage. As it will be seen later, the years engraved in the coins do not correspond in most cases to those on which the coins were actually struck.

² The coins are identified by their KM coin number following the numbering system used by the Standard Catalog of World Coins, originally written by Krause and Mishler. See, for instance, MICHAEL, T. ET AL. (2019). *Standard Catalog of World Coins 1901-2000, 46th edition*.

KM#416 **Obverse:** Number "10" and denomination. **Reverse** INTUR logo, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year **1988**. Plain edge. Al:Mg:Mn, 97.15:2.5:0.35. **Weight:** 2.0 g. **Diameter:** 21.20 mm.

KM#415.2 **Obverse:** like KM#415.1 but year **1989**. **Reverse:** like KM#415.1 but with smaller number "10". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. **Weight:** 3.90 g. **Diameter:** 21.20 mm.

KM#415.2a **Obverse:** like KM#415.2, year **1989**. **Reverse:** like KM#415.2. Plain edge. Nickel clad steel. **Weight:** 3.98 g. **Diameter:** 21.50 mm.

KM#415.3 **Obverse:** like KM#415.2, year **1989**. **Reverse:** like KM#415.2. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. **Weight:** 2.90 g. **Diameter:** 17.30 mm (reduced size).

Twenty-five cents:

KM reference	Description
KM#417	Obverse: Orchid, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1981 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 6.30 g. Diameter: 24.10 mm.
KM#418.1	Obverse: like KM#417, year 1981 . Reverse: like KM#417 plus number "25". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 6.30 g. Diameter: 24.10 mm.
KM#419	Obverse: Number "25" and denomination. Reverse INTUR logo, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1988 . Plain edge. Al:Mg:Mn, 97.15:2.5:0.35. Weight: 2.50 g. Diameter: 24.10 mm.
KM#418.2	Obverse: like KM#418.1 but year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#418.1 but thinner number "25". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 6.30 g. Diameter: 24.10 mm.
KM#418.2a	Obverse: like KM#418.2, year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#418.2. Plain edge. Nickel clad steel. Weight: 6.21 g. Diameter: 23.70 mm.

Fifty cents:

KM reference	Description
KM#420	Obverse: Coconut palm, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1981 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 11.30 g. Diameter: 29.90 mm. <i>Varieties exists as per the presence or absence of waves surrounding the coconut palm</i>
KM#461	Obverse: like KM#420 but year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#420 but with number "50". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 11.30 g. Diameter: 29.90 mm.

One peso:

KM reference	Description
KM#421	Obverse: Morro castle, legend "INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TURISMO", year 1981 . Reverse: INTUR logo, denomination. Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 11.30 g. Diameter: 29.90 mm.
KM#580	Obverse: like KM#421 but year 1989 . Reverse: like KM#421 but with number "1". Plain edge. Cu:Ni, 75:25. Weight: 11.30 g. Diameter: 29.90 mm.

Resolution number 197 of March 25, 1982 approved by the Cuban National Bank authorised the first strike of these coins due to the scarcity of American fractional pieces in the INTUR shops. According to the referred disposition, the INTUR logo would appear in these coins. The institutional

logo had been created by the Cuban artist Armando Alonso Alonso, who won a public contest held in July 1978 for that purpose. In fact, all the INTUR coins minted afterwards carried said logo although it was replaced in 1984 by a different one also created by Alonso. Interestingly, while the original logo comprised a sun next to the palm tree, this feature was never engraved in the coins.



Figure 1: INTUR's original logo

The coins were struck in the denominations of five cents (KM#411), ten cents (KM#414), twenty-five cents (KM#417), fifty cents (KM#420) and one peso (KM#421). Even though the resolution authorising the coinage dates from 1982, the coins exhibited the year 1981 in which they were actually minted. The denominations chosen resembled the American system rather than the vigesimal-based Cuban system. It must be reminded that these coins were to be exclusively used in the touristic shops to complement the existing American fractional coins. The fact that these coins had not been originally devised for domestic use explains the total absence of revolutionary consigns or images of national heroes, which are so common in the traditional peso currency. In place thereof, most of the INTUR coins exhibited floral or animal motifs. The fifty cents coin was produced in two varieties: one comprising many waves surrounding the coconut palm tree in the obverse, whereas only a few waves are present in the second one.



Figure 2: The two obverse varieties of the 1981 fifty-cent coin (KM#420)

An error was detected soon after these first coins were placed in circulation: the respective denominations were only expressed in text format. As most of the tourists visiting the island did not come from Spanish-speaking countries, they experienced problems to figure out their actual nominal values. To solve this problem, a second group of coins was minted in the denominations of five cents (KM#412.1), ten cents (KM#415.1) and twenty-five cents (KM#418.1), which were the most demanded in the aforementioned shops. These coins as well as all that followed afterwards carried a numeral indicating the nominal value in addition to the latter being written in Spanish. Incidentally, the high demand of the five-cents denomination provoked the strike of a third batch of these coins (KM#412.2). The latter are very similar to the KM#412.1 type except in that a thinner format was used to depict the legends and the number "5".



Figure 3: Respective reverses of the five-cents coin varieties KM#412.1 (left) and KM#412.2 (right)

It is not easy to ascertain when these second and third batches of coins were actually minted. However, a good guess can be made when account is taken of the Resolution number 90 of March 28, 1986 issued by the Cuban National Bank. Its purpose was to provide a legal framework to “..all INTUR coins that have been struck so far..”, including those belonging to the aforementioned second and third batches. It can therefore be assumed that these coins were produced in different periods between 1982 and 1986. In fact, said resolution authorised, albeit *a posteriori*, the strike of 488.463 twenty-five cents coins (KM#418.1), 494.325 ten cents coins (KM#415.1) and 761.163 five cents coins (including both KM#412.1 and KM#412.2).

The one-cent denomination was not introduced until 1988. The coins were produced in the traditional Cu-Ni alloy (KM#409) and their obverses exhibited a deer, which was modelled after a sculpture located at the entrance of Havana’s zoological park. The sculpture had been created in 1947 by the renowned Cuban artist Rita Longa Aróstegui. However, the already deteriorating economic conditions forced the production of these coins to be stopped and the non-used blanks were utilised six years later to strike coins of a different denomination: the 10 cents pieces with reduced format (KM#415.3).

The deteriorating situation in the former Soviet Union and the eastern European countries in 1988 obliged the Cuban authorities to enforce a number of austerity measures preparing the country for the imminent collapse of the communist bloc. The strike of INTUR coins using the cheap aluminium alloy already employed in the production of the minor Cuban fractional peso coins can be regarded as one of the initiatives taken to reduce costs. The coins were struck in the denominations of one cent (KM#410), five cents (KM#413), ten cents (KM#416) and twenty-five cents (KM#419).

Interestingly, these were the only INTUR coins produced outside Cuba. The coins were minted at the Czechoslovakian facility of Kremnica with coin alignment, which was the standard used by this mint to produce all Cuban coins from 1961 till 1990. In contrast thereto, the rest of INTUR coins were produced with medal alignment by the “*Empresa Cubana de Acuñaciones*”, as the Cuban mint was then called. However, it has been confirmed the existence of a variety of the five-cents coins with KM#412.1 having coin alignment.

Coinciding with the cease in 1990 of the operations carried out by the Kremnica mint for Cuba, the use of aluminium to produce INTUR coins was abandoned and the corresponding designs were never re-used.

Another resolution of the Cuban bank, number 89 of March 27, 1989, authorised the strike of new coins using the Cu-Ni alloy in the denominations of five cents (KM#412.3), ten cents (KM#415.2), twenty-five cents (KM#418.2), fifty cents (KM#461) and one peso (KM#580). It is worth mentioning that the one-peso coin of 1989 is the scarcest of the whole INTUR series.



Figure 4: Obverse and reverse of the 1989 one-peso coin

Resolution number 205 of August 20, 1992 confirmed that the INTUR coins had identical value to the corresponding American fractional pieces.

A new episode of the INTUR saga came directly as a result of the enactment of the Law-Decree 140 dated August 13, 1993, which removed all hitherto imposed legal bars on the possession and use of American dollars by Cuban nationals. From then on, Cubans also had the possibility to buy in the INTUR shops and hence the demand for the currency used therein increased.

A new strike of 590.000 ten-cents coins (KM#415.3) was subsequently authorised by the Cuban bank with the Resolution number 116 of May 4th, 1994. The coins were produced using the remnant of blanks not used in 1988 for the production of the one-cent coins (KM#409). That's the reason why both types of pieces share the same technical specifications. Despite that the aforementioned disposition ordered the coins to exhibit the minting year 1994, the pieces finally produced bore the year 1989. That was caused by a curious legal problem. Resolution number 116 was only approved after the INTUR had ceased to exist. Law-Decree number 147 of April 21, 1994 had set up the Cuban Ministry of Tourism as legal successor of the INTUR. In order to circumvent this problem it was decided that the year depicted in the coins to be minted would be that of the last year in which a “regular” strike was performed (i.e. 1989).

To cope with the growing demand for fractional coins in the touristic establishments a last emission of INTUR coins was authorised by the Resolution number 204 of August 25, 1994. The coins thus produced corresponded to the denominations of five cents (KM#412.3a), ten cents (KM#415.2a) and twenty-five cents (KM#418.2a). The legal disposition acknowledged the aforementioned legal problem as it stated that the coins “...*would exhibit the logo of the extinct INTUR.*”. Once again, the actual year of strike 1994 was replaced by 1989 in the obverse of the coins. Contrary to what the resolution stipulated, the projected use of the Cu-Ni alloy was abandoned in favour of a nickel clad steel alloy. It is to be noted that the production of convertible coins using said alloy started precisely in 1994 with blanks supplied by the Canadian company Sherritt International. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that these INTUR coins were also minted using blanks supplied by said company, which was then one of the major foreign investors in Cuba.

The steel coins constituted the last batch of INTUR coins ever produced. One year later, the convertible peso coins started to circulate and gradually assumed the role played so far by the INTUR coins, although the latter continued in use still for some years. Once the amount of convertible currency in circulation was deemed sufficient, the Resolution number 73 of August 28, 2001 finally ordered the demonetization of all INTUR coins on October 15 of that year. After retaining some complete collections for numismatic purposes, most of the coins kept in the vaults of the Cuban Central Bank were melted. The operation was mainly carried out in the furnaces of the Havana factory known as “Antillana de Acero”.

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