



## *Little Door to the Twentieth of December*

### **The Caribbean Island (technically) owned by Germany**

History is full of peculiar stories, and this is one of them.

In a state visit to East Berlin in 1972, Fidel Castro made the promise to donate one of the 4,000 Cuban islands to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to highlight the strong relations between the two communist nations. Before the island was renamed to Ernst Thälmann Island, its given name was Cayo Blanco de Sur. Thälmann ran unsuccessfully against Adolf Hitler in the 1932 election for the position of German president. He was the leader of the German Communist Party (KPD) and later arrested by the Gestapo. Before he was shot dead on Hitler's orders in 1944, Thälmann spent a decade in solitary confinement. In 1973, a bust of Ernst Thälmann was erected on the island. On East German state TV, the island was often lauded as a symbol of the close relations between the two nations.

The island is 15-kilometer (9-miles) long, 500-meter (1,640-foot) wide and still has mostly untouched beaches. It is home to several endangered species of fish and coral.

Initially, the GDR had ambitious plans to turn the island into a tourist destination for East Germans, but the project never took off due to the financial problems the nation was facing at the time. It would later become a backdrop for many music videos made by East German singer **Frank Schöbel** (December 11, 1942). In 1998, the bust of Ernst Thälmann was knocked over by Hurricane Mitch.

Since the GDR was absorbed into the BRD, the island would have technically changed hands to the now reunified Germany. However, and this is the important part and why I put "technically" in the title: Germany has never laid claim to the island. Both Cuba and Germany insist that this gift from Castro was 'purely symbolic'.

