

GOA'S INBOUND TOURISM BOOSTED BY RUSSIAN TOURISTS



Goa, a coastal country in western India, has become very popular among tourists from Russia recently. Tourism Authority in Goa and number of Russian tour operators and travel agencies cooperate to maintain or even increase the flow.

According to the forecast made by local tourism experts, **about 3,500 tourists from Russia will land on the Goa's coast every ten days.** Ralf de Sousa, a spokesperson for Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), has pointed out that while the tourism industry in Western Europe is still recovering from the recession inbound tourism from Russia has grown significantly in the country.

At the beginning of the century, Russians were not interested in Goa much. However gradually, Goa has become more appealing and **Russia, despite being 5,000 kilometers far from its shores, has become the fastest growing source of tourists for the coastal country.** Mr. Swapnil Naik, the head of the Tourism Authority of Goa, confirmed it by saying that the Russians started coming in smaller numbers (939 tourists on 11 flights a year). Nevertheless, due to Russian severe winters and an aggressive marketing strategy applied by the Government of Goa and local tourism authorities, the figures of inbound tourism from Russia has changed. There are now 11 charters per week and new added routes with 225-300 tourists on board a plane.

Mr. Naik stated that the Tourism Authority works closely with a large number of tour operators and travel agencies in Russia. Its management is actively exploring the map of the Russian Federation. The sudden interest in geography stems from the fact that **tourists from more and more new Russian regions are beginning to arrive in Goa.** In addition, the officials from the Office of Tourism have announced that Goa has simplified visa procedures for Russian tourists this year: the waiting time should not exceed four days, even in peak period.

On the other hand, **Russian tour operators have pointed out that the number of offered flights to Goa from Moscow and the regions is much higher than anticipated demand.** For example so far this year, Moscow has reported a 50% increase in number of available seats compared to the last year. The increase in the regions is lower, about 20%, but still alarming. It is apparent that the already tough competition among tour operators is going to get even worse in November. The manager of travel company 'Sunrise Tours' noted that the competition between operators for Goa will be extremely severe this season, especially because new players have entered the tourism market.

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