

ARMENIA: TOURISM IS DOING BETTER



Despite the fact that the tourism numbers in Armenia used to be a lot higher, figures of both outbound and inbound tourism rose in 2010.

Rector of the Armenian Institute of Tourism Robert Minasyan questioned the Government's statistics that suggested hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists visit Armenia every year. Speaking at a news conference Mr. Minasyan, who is also chief of the Armenian Travel Agencies Association, stated that according to the government statistics about 600 thousand foreign tourists visited the country last year. In Mr. Minasyan's opinion, **the number of foreign tourists was in fact not higher than 100 thousand.**

Market analyst expressed the same level of skepticism. They believe that official statistics include all individuals who came into the country. The statistics included, for example, thousands of Armenian guest workers and migrants working abroad, but coming back for a short vacation. In Mr. Minasyan's opinion, the criteria on which the authorities based the entry flow of tourists to Armenia have nothing to do with the real situation.

Mr. Minasyan said: "In reality, **the number of tourists visiting Armenia in groups or individually through incoming tour operators remains very modest.** Armenian tourism lacks advertising campaigns that would promote the country as an attractive tourism destination." He reminded that the times when tourists visited Armenia in great numbers (about 650 thousand annually) are gone.

On the other hand, the Armenian Tourism Authorities reported quite positive figures. According to the State Statistics Committee of Armenia, **the number of foreign tourists arriving in Armenia in the first ten months of 2010 rose by 15% and reached 488,000 visitors.** A 19% increase was also reported in the number of Armenian citizens who travel to foreign countries. As a result, the outbound tourist flow in 2010 reached 474,600 people.

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