

MOSCOW AUTHORITIES WANT TO DOUBLE INBOUND TOURISM



Visas and the lack of budget hotels are the main challenges of Moscow trying to lure more foreign tourists.

Entry Visa barriers were one of the crucial issues on the agenda of the first meeting of the Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin with the local tour operators and hoteliers. The Moscow government has ambitious plans to transform the Russian capital into a leading tourist destination.

"Statistics show about 4 million tourist arrivals a year. This is a rather good number, but for a city like Moscow, it is not enough," said Sergey Sobyenin, quoted by Tourprom.ru. According to the city development plan, which should be launched in the near future, **by the year 2016 the number of tourists in Moscow should be almost doubled, reaching about 7 million visitors per year**, said the mayor. According to the chief clerk of the capital, extensive plans should transform the current Moscow into a city comfortable for living, and attractive for inbound tourists.

One of the main reasons deterring inbound tourist traffic are the entry visa obstacles. "Now we have a remarkable and paradoxical situation with visas. People coming from CIS countries don't need any visas and in many cases this only leads to problems with immigration. At the same time, citizens who travel from trustworthy and economically developed countries e.g. in Western Europe, who bring us the money, need to face additional obstacle in the form of entry visa. The problem should be solved not by the city authorities, but on the federal level," said the mayor.

Among other problems Moscow's tourism industry needs to solve is the lack of budget hotels that are extremely popular among tourists. "The hotel business in Moscow is developing in good pace, but we must admit that the quality and amount of hotel rooms are still lagging far behind the European standards," said Mr. Sobyenin.

For example, 290 hotels available cover only about 30 percent of the growing demand of the tourist market. As a result high prices of accommodation are rather a norm in Moscow. "We need to build new hotels in about four times faster pace, and only then prices will go down significantly," explained Mr. Sobyenin.

According to Sergei Shpilko, the head of the Moscow Committee for Tourism and Hotel Business, in the next five years 177 new hotels should be built in the city. However, in 2011 the construction of only three hotels with 636 rooms was launched, and by the end of the year another three hotels should be opened with the combined capacity of 500 rooms.

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