

SPAIN ENJOYS AN INFLUX OF RUSSIAN TOURISTS



In 2012 Spain saw a promising change in fortunes as Russian visitor numbers rocketed and this seemingly unlikely group overtook the British tourists in some of the more popular North-Eastern resorts.

The Russian visitor numbers are significant for two reasons – 2012 was the first year that they surpassed 1 million – 1,206,227 to be precise – and this is double the amount from 2010. There are a number of possibilities being cited for this large increase in Russian tourists. Some suggest that the rise in direct flights is partly responsible while others highlight the new visa rules and the increased interest to explore the world that is now seen in the middle classes.

Additionally, there is the notion that as these travel-hungry Russians browse potential destinations they are becoming drawn to Europe over the troubled Arab favorites such as Egypt and Tunisia. Either way, **Russian tourists are eagerly soaking up the culture and history of cities like Madrid and over half of them travel to Catalonia.**

Shopping trips to these major cities are high on the itineraries of many visitors because Russian tourists have an appreciation for the variety and low cost of the goods on offer. As a result, they are also beating their British counterparts on the spending front, with an average of 159 Euros a day spent by Russians compared to just 93 by the British visitors. Their willingness to spend makes these tourists highly popular with the Spanish resorts while the relationship between the two countries has been strong for many years.

Spain has played its own part in the strong connection between the two nations. It is not just the appeal of the country that makes Spain such a popular destination with the Russian market; the links between the two nations go back decades because Spain was one of the first countries to go for the new Russian market after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Additionally, this relationship has been enforced by the work of the Spanish tourism and hospitality industries as they appreciate the importance of this influx during such a troubling economic period and use the opportunity to their advantage. **In response to this increase in Russian activity, as well as an appreciation of their spending power, Spanish resorts are attempting to become more Russian-friendly** by encouraging their staff to speak the language and adding Cyrillic translations to signs and menus.

The strong relationship and increase in numbers could be highly beneficial for Spain. The large increase in Russian visitors is clearly an interesting development because Spain has been a popular holiday destination for decades yet the numbers still rise. Whatever the reasons for their visit, this Russian influx has to be good news for Spanish tourism. Spaniards may be less inclined to take a city break because of the recession and 26% unemployment rate and European visitor numbers may be decreasing, but the Russian market could be the boost the country needs and it is no surprise that hotels are taking advantage of this development in any way they can.

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