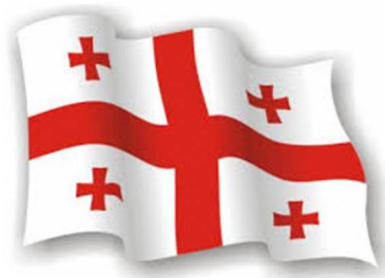


NUMBER OF RUSSIAN VISITORS IN GEORGIA DOUBLES



Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Prime Minister, announced that the number of Russian tourists in Georgia has doubled in past few months.

According to reliable sources, a total of 1.75 million foreign visitors, including around 200,000 Russians have visited Georgia in the first five months of 2013. **In the same period last year Georgia was visited by more than 1.22 million foreigners, from which there was around 100,000 Russian tourists.**

In late 2000 Russia created a new visa regime for Georgia, which cited security threats. Ever since 2008, the two countries have severed their diplomatic ties over a small military conflict concerning the Tskhinvali Region, that is mostly known as South Ossetia (de facto independent republic). Georgia still does not recognize their existence as political entity, which includes most of the area in Shida Kartli. This dispute has been lasting for too long. Currently, Georgians can only apply for Russian visa to visit their closer family, or in emergent humanitarian cases.

The two neighbors' relations are very tense ever since the time that Georgia gained their independence from USSR, but finally began to largely improve after new government in Georgia was elected in late 2012. **One of the main priorities of Georgian prime minister Ivanishvili is to finally normalize the ties with Russians after all those years.** Georgia has unilaterally scrapped Russian visas in February 29 in 2012.

Bidzina Ivanishvili said that Tbilisi and Moscow are improbable to restore their diplomatic ties by Winter Olympic Games, that are held in Sochi (Russia) in 2014. Negotiations are currently ongoing primarily on visa resumption and facilitation of regular flights.

Date: 2013-07-08

Article link:

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