

ONLINE TRAVEL HAS GREAT POTENTIAL IN RUSSIA



With the growth of international travel markets, online traveling is seeing an exponential rise in popularity. In Russia alone, over \$60 billion were spent in 2012 for traveling abroad. Travel booking websites are becoming more and more popular and the online travel market is regarded by experts as highly important.

Experts say that while Russians love to travel, which is evident with the amount of money travelers spent last year on the industry, language often becomes a barrier. While the younger generations of Russians are keener to travel independently, majority of the travelers look for package travel deals. Travel websites strive to facilitate easy transition for their travelers, building up the trends of better domestic travel, independent foreign travel as well as migrating to online bookings for travel.

Currently, the biggest market for online travel sites lies in flight bookings. **Hotel accommodations come at a second, while the overall online market in itself is only 10%, being a very small fraction.** However, the growth of sporting events in Russia is currently driving up the interest, as more and more public and private sectors are looking to invest more money in travel infrastructure. The FIFA Cup, the Sochi Olympic Games and the currently on-going Kazan Universiade all help matters, giving rise to construction of new 4 stars and 5 stars hotels, fast-speed trains, new airlines and more.

According to statistics, the larger portion of all money spent on travel in Russia comes from domestic travel; its estimated that there are about 40 million domestic trips a year, as compared to about 25 to 30 million abroad.

While a few years back Russians choose only packaged tours to countries like Turkey and Egypt, there has been a shift in interest as more people are now choosing to travel independently to explore more countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Cuba, as per experts. And because these trips require a lot more planning, there has been a significant interest in turning to online bookings because it gives access to more information and caters to a well-planned vacation.

The latest data show that about 12% Russians have international passports and out of that, 10% have traveled abroad. That is about 15 million Russians who have traveled abroad at some point of time, and out of these, about a third chose the internet to book their tickets, hotel accommodation or package tours. From budget travels to those looking for great deals and even advanced travels, online travel sites are now offering high quality services that fill in the gaps that come along with independent travel, making a customer feel a lot more comfortable.

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