

# HIGHEST NUMBER OF RUSSIANS OBTAINED U.S. VISAS



The Mutual visa agreement signed between the U.S. and Russia in 2012 increased the visa validity period for citizens of the two countries to three years. According to the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, the number of U.S. visas issued to Russians last year rose to 250,000. This is a record increase of up to 15% from that of the previous year.

Referring to the September 2012 deal, McFaul said that **in 2013 alone, over 30 percent of Russians who obtained U.S. visas did so without having to go through an interview.**

A number of issues have strained the relationship between these two countries, which are former foes in the Cold War. Some of these issues include the Russian government offering Edward Snowden, a U.S. fugitive asylum, and the U.S. government passing the Magnitsky Act, which allows Sanctions against abusers of human rights in Russia. Despite these issues, the two countries have made notable advancement on the visa rules for citizens of both countries.

According to McFaul, the waiting time of an interview for Russians seeking U.S. visas is the shortest of all time. He also encouraged Russian citizens to take advantage of the low cost (only \$160) for the three-year-visa, by applying for visas before the “spring hot time”.

**Previously, the average validity period for visas issued to citizens of both countries was one year for individuals traveling for business, tourism, humanitarian activities or home stay.** Thanks to the 2012 mutual agreement, this has been extended to three years.

In addition, it also eliminated the need for Americans to obtain a Federal Migration Service’s approval through a formal invitation from a Russian citizen when traveling on home stay or for business. This process took months. Right now, a U.S. citizen traveling to Russia on the same purposes only requires a simple invitation that can be prepared in a day. Moreover, the invitation need not be sent by mail, as was previously a requirement. Citizens can now send copies by fax too.

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