

# RUSSIA PLANS TO WAIVE VISAS FOR TOURISTS ARRIVING BY TRAIN



Russia's reputation as a notoriously bureaucratic country has always been an impediment to its tourism industry. So in an effort to correct this problem, a new measure may soon be introduced that will allow foreign visitors to visit the country visa free for three days, provided they arrive by train.

According to Rossiiskaya Gazeta, the Russian parliament is currently debating a legislation that would make this possible. The proposed bill is nothing new in itself, however, and is actually similar to another law that was passed in 2009, which allows foreign visitors who arrive through a boat or ferry to remain in Russia for up to three days without a visa.

Experts say that the passage of the first law was the result of an expanding tourism industry in the port city of St. Petersburg, which is located near the Baltic region.

**Russia's state tourism agency, Rostourism, has always supported the easing of visa regulations, as it helps stimulate Russia's tourism sector.** Furthermore, Rostourism spokesperson, Irina Shchegolkova, mentioned that removing visa restrictions for certain visitors will help bring in additional revenue to the economy and help expand the tourism industry.

Russia has numerous international railway connections with various countries in Europe, Central Asia and East Asia. **The bill itself was originally introduced by Rostourism, with the help of other government agencies, and is up for discussion by February 11.**

Aside from the railway bill another similar bill has already passed the first reading in the lower house of the Russian parliament. Like the railway tourism bill, this measure also allows foreign tourists to remain three days in the country visa free, provided they arrived to the country via major international airports.

If both bills were to be passed as laws, they will include several countries whose nationals will be made eligible to enter Russia under the new measures, including all the relevant airports and railway stations as stipulated by the laws.

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