

CRIMEA'S FUTURE AS A TOURIST DESTINATION



There are many question marks hanging over Crimea at the moment, as tensions rise and fall between Russian and Ukrainian governments, troops and protesters, but, with the peninsula showing its support at the ballots for a return to Russia, it seems increasingly likely that the area will be redeveloped under Russian guidance. The resort of Sevastopol may not be the ideal tourist spot right now – understandably, visitors are cancelling their plans and bookings for the season are down – but it is actually one of the area's top sources of revenue, generating \$5-8 billion a year. Once it becomes Russian, however, it is set to become the country's poorest region and this means that it will require some rather large funds from its new government and some clever planning from tourism agencies if they are to succeed in their plan to turn the region into a destination that may rival Sochi.

There are some big plans for the future of Crimea and its seaside resorts.

At the moment, it appears that little has ever been done to modernise Crimea and maintain its position as a tourist destination since it fell out of Soviet control, despite the current status of the tourism industry, and this is most clear in the number of hotels need to be brought into the 21st century. The president of the Association of Tour Agents of Crimea and Sevastopol mentioned the figure of a billion dollars a year for a “significant effect” on the regions prospects and some of the large scale ideas being put forward are the creation of a bridge over the Kerch Strait and the prospect of creating more interest in the region by leaning upon its rich clay and minerals to create tourist-friendly spas.

There are also some less desirable and more pressing items on the agenda, yet officials remain hopeful.

All this talk of improved hotels, new five-star facilities and attracting more foreign tourists is taking the issue away from the real priorities. A lot of effort will have to be put into an attempts to transform the region, quite literally from the ground up, because there is a severe lack of infrastructure. This means redeveloping many of the basics, like roads and power lines; creating more air routes to offer a stable link between the peninsula and major Russian cities, especially if it is to be opened up for domestic tourism as well as international; and dealing with the environmental issues that also limit the areas current appeal. Many agents are calling for desperate work on improved garbage collection and treatment before any other strategies are carried out.

Officials are encouragingly optimistic that this unfortunate, but unavoidable, dip in tourist numbers is just a temporary setback, one that will be forgotten once the skirmish is over and Crimea is settled as a Russian territory once more. Many believe that despite the need for a deeper overhaul of the region that some may have presumed, seaside resorts like Sevastopol, and Crimea in general, can become a top resort for domestic and international travellers in Russia and fulfill the potential that has been lying dormant all these years.

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