

RELAXED VISA RULES HELP RUSSIANS VISIT GREECE AND ITALY



Meetings between officials from key European destinations and the Association of Tour Operators of Russia have led to some positive talks about new tourism relationships and a relaxation of visa rules for Russian tourists visiting Italy and Greece. What makes the news even better for travellers is that the US Embassy in Moscow has also vowed to improve services and processing speeds, which is a must when over 250,000 non-immigration visas were dealt with in 2013 and even more are expected in 2014

Russians travellers must note that there are limitations to this relaxed approach and it is not a simple case that any national can get a quick and easy visa or a free pass. One of the key proposals is that there will be free and multiple visas for more vulnerable or target groups of travellers, such as those on benefits, tourist industry specialists and students. In Italy, free visas will be offered to those attending certain events like performances at the Arena di Verona, the opera festival in Macerata, or Rome's 450th anniversary Michelangelo exhibition.

These new visa rules are a great start but Russian officials are looking for more.

While these proposed free visas for cultural visits and students will be greatly received by the small percentage of the Russian population keen to visit Greece and Italy, the bigger picture of Russian visas in Europe is not as promising. Russian tourists are not being welcomed into the whole of Europe with fully open arms; there is talk of a small time-frame for those visa windows in Italy and Greece and calls to other nations to see similar relaxations and rulings have not been as successful. At the moment, a number of other nations have expressed verbal agreements that visa regulations will not alter and it is understandable that Russian officials will want this in writing before they back down.

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