

CHINA PLANS TO TURN LENIN'S BIRTHPLACE INTO RED TOURISM DESTINATION



China seeks to develop Ulyanovsk, a Russian city, into Mecca of tourism as part of the multibillion dollar ideological tourism industry. A memorandum of understanding for creating “red tourism” zones in Ulyanovsk, revolutionary politician Vladimir Lenin’s birthplace, is to be signed in the summit to be held on June 28 by Russia’s and China’s state tourism departments. Lenin, born as Vladimir Ulyanov, later on adopted Lenin as his political name.

China has been promoting “red tourism” since 2004 through the country’s official tourism body. Russia’s adoption of this concept in Ulyanovsk could help the struggling town to reap some amount of financial benefits.

However, the town is at crossroads currently because of the differences between its pre-Soviet roots and current Soviet-era heritage as well as the debate raging between the people and government of the region as regards renaming the city. **A large part of Simbirsk, the city's old name, with many churches was razed to the ground in order to build the Lenin memorial museum complex that documents the life history of the revolutionary leader.** The clergy belonging to Russian Orthodox Church and the conservative residents want to restore the old charm of the city.

Russia and “Red Tourism”

Muscovites may not be very enthusiastic about the mausoleum of Lenin, first leader of the Soviet Union, but many from the provincial towns of Russia throng the Red Square every day to visit his resting place. Of late, more and more Chinese have started visiting the Red Square too.

Zhu Shanzhong who was the deputy head of State Tourism Administration in China in 2009 said that millions of people in China, middle-aged as well as elderly, who grew up reading Soviet literature and watching Soviet movies, want to visit Russia to soak in the Soviet legacy and that the expansion of “red tourism” into Russia serves to excite them.

The popularity of “red tourism” among China’s youth is also on the rise. They often visit historical sites, donning Chinese Communist Party symbols and People’s Liberation Army uniforms. China is planning to expand “red tourism” activities within the country and into Russia in the wake of the approaching 100th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution.

New Economic Opportunities

Ulyanovsk, known for its automobile industry and the legendary UAZ military jeeps, is also considered to be the capital of the aerospace industry. The Soviet Union’s collapse and cutting back

on military procurement greatly impacted the industrial climate in the city. The city's population fell by as much as 10 percent during the period between 1996 and 2011.

Actually, Ulyanovsk is already a tourist destination. The sprawling Lenin Memorial Museum complex in the city includes the Pribylovskaya House where Lenin was born. The construction of the complex was completed in the year 1970, in time for Lenin's 100th birth anniversary.

Ideological Struggle

The move of China's Xiangtan, Mao Zedong's birthplace, to establish ties with the Ulyanovsk region of Russia could counter the plans of the governor of Ulyanovsk to rename the town to its pre-1924 name of Simbirsk. According to Governor Sergei Morozov, the city could be renamed as Simbirsk, but the region could keep its name Ulyanovsk, as in the case of Leningrad region and St. Petersburg.

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