

GEORGIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY BENEFITS FROM RUSSIAN FRIENDSHIP



In 2016, Georgian tourism broke two records. The total number of foreign visitors exceeded 6 million people. Moreover, the number of Russian tourists exceeded 1 million people. Last year's tourism brought in 2 billion dollars, while the country's entire budget is 3.34 billion dollars.

"Last year 1,037,564 Russian citizens visited Georgia. This is 12% more than in 2015," said Giorgi Chogovadze, the head of Georgian National Tourism Administration at a briefing for journalists. **It is worth mentioning that in Georgia's 26-year independence this is the highest figure of Russian inflow ever.**

A record was also reached in terms of foreign tourism inflow. Last year 6,350,825 foreigners visited the Caucasian country. This is 449,731 (7.6%) more than in 2015. It is interesting that, according to last year's national census, the population of Georgia is only 3.7 million people. In 1989, 5.4 million citizens lived in the Georgian Soviet Republic.

"We have broken a record both in the number of tourists and income," Chogovadze added. He also said that last year was the first one since gaining the independence when the total income of Georgian tourism industry exceeded 2 billion dollars. This is a 10.1% increase compared to 2015. To compare, the whole budget of Georgia is 8.355 billion lari (3.342 billion dollar).

The National Department of Tourism reported that the continuing increase in the number of tourists, especially from Russia, is a result of "steady development of Georgian tourism infrastructure, but also successful promotion of Georgian potential on the most prestigious tourist platforms.

Indeed, the Vogue magazine recently included Georgia in the top list of the most popular destinations. According to Chogovadze, Georgia spent 8.8 million dollars last year on advertising the country's destinations abroad.

According to the experts, Russians prefer to stay in Tbilisi, Borjomi, Kakheti and Adjara. Guests from the Russian Federation are particularly fond of family tours, as well as specialized tour packages, such as wine tours to Kakheti or mountaineering.

The increase of the number of Russian tourists is a result of the normalization of Russian-Georgian relations after the change of power in Georgia in 2012.

"Cooperation in the field of tourism is one of the priority topics of our talks with the Russian deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin," special representative of Georgia's prime minister of rebuilding relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, recalled.

Since 2013, Moscow has been gradually abolishing the ban on direct flights from Russian cities. This has been the main prerequisite for the growth of the Georgian tourism industry and the flow of visitors from the neighboring country.

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