

CRUISE TOURISM SEASON BEGINS IN RUSSIA'S FAR EAST



At the beginning of May, the first ocean cruise liner with foreign tourists arrived in Vladivostok. Thus, the season of international cruise tourism at the ports of the Far East has officially begun. The Costa Victoria liner brought about 2 thousand tourists from the Republic of Korea to the capital of Primorye.

The cruise passengers were greeted in the port by a group of drummers and dance ensembles in costumes of the peoples of Russia. The Costa Victoria goes also to Sakhalin. **Tourists from South Korea have the chance to become part of the Victory Day celebrations in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.** The first cruise ship in Kamchatka is scheduled for May 11th. This will be the Silver Shadow ship on which around 400 passengers from the United States, Europe and Asian-Pacific countries are expected.

Unrealized Potential

The potential for development of maritime cruise tourism in Russia's Far East is incredibly high and not yet fully disclosed, according to experts from the country's Far Eastern Federal University.

"Access to the sea, extraordinary beauty of coastal landscapes, tourist highlights of the Far East, as well as the opportunity to visit 1-2 countries. All of this allows to make these cruises popular and competitive in terms of domestic and international tourism," one of the experts noted.

According to an annual study conducted during the International Tourism Exhibition PITE in Vladivostok, tourists do not want just to explore sights, culture and exoticism. They wish to do so in the comfort of modern ocean liners.

"It is the lack of development of port infrastructure and lack of regional cruise liners that is currently hindering the cruise tourism season. Port charges, anti-Russian sanctions, as well as the tension on the Korean peninsula have also played its role. Unfortunately, there is quite a lot of factors limiting the cruise tourism development in Russia's Far East regions," the expert continued.

Record Numbers

Despite these words, cruise tourism in the region continues to grow rapidly. The three main regions of the Far East - Kamchatka, Primorye and Sakhalin - expect a significant growth in ship arrivals this year and in the short term. In Primorye the growth is already confirmed, with 14 ships scheduled compared to 6 in 2016.

"These are record figures, and they can grow. We are still only talking about ships which have already been confirmed. Before, the maximum number of cruise ships was recorded in 2012. That year, the Vladivostok region welcomed 12 excursion cruise ships," said the director of the Department of Tourism of the Primorsky Krai Konstantin Shestakov.

An administration official stressed that **South Korean tour operators, Lotte Tour Development Co and Costa Group Asia, will be the leaders of cruise excursions in the region.** In the period

from May to December, Costa Victoria and Costa NeoRomantica will visit Primorye nine times. In the same period, five ships from Japan are also expected in the region.

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