

# MOSCOW TOURISM ENTERS THE AFTER-LUZHKOVA ERA



Eighteen years after he entered the mayor's office in Moscow for the first time Yuri Luzhkov is leaving and for the Russian capital, the new era is about to start. It also means that hopes of tour operators will remain unfulfilled; Moscow will not become the center of world tourism comparable to Paris, London, Prague or Barcelona.

Despite the numerous promises made by Moscow officials to attract more tourists, the capital city has remained only a financial center. **Tour operators complain mainly about the substantial lack of accommodation for tourists** such as two or three-star hotels that Luzhkov's government promised to build.

Back in 2007 Moscow had only 203 hotels. Under the 'Tourism Development Program 2010' over 350 new hotels should have been built by 2010 and 130 of them should have been located in the heart of the city. However, currently there are only 273 hotels with overall capacity of about 85,000 beds. Thus, **in three years time the number of hotels has been increased only by 70** and moreover, an average tourist cannot afford to stay in most of them.

According to Hogg Robinson Group, an international corporate travel services organisation, **Moscow has had the highest room prices in the world six years in a row**. Despite the economic crisis and the drop of ruble's value by 12%, hotels in Moscow still charge £ 256 or \$ 402 per room for a night. As a result, when planning holidays, many foreign tourists prefer to stay in other cities or even countries.

However, expensive hotels are not the only obstacle of slow development of tourism in Moscow. There is another problem - the transformation of the city with a rich history into the city of architectural imitations. In recent years, **many Russian TV channels have pointed out that Luzhkov's city is rapidly losing its unique architectural appearance**. Indeed, it is not only an aesthetic and cultural issue, but also a serious trouble for tourism industry. After all, tourists visit Moscow mainly because they want to look at genuine historical monuments.

Luzhkov tried to make Moscow more attractive for tourists, not only by building a set of hotels, but also by other projects. However, some of them happened to be only hoaxes. For example, the plan to build Disneyland, similar to an amusement park near Paris, was an ambitious project. In 1992, Zurab Tsereteli, an architect close to Luzhkov, won the tender for the construction of such a park in the north-west Moscow and was granted the right to use the land of 300 hectares for indefinite period of time. However, instead of building Russian Disneyland, he used the given area for a food market, a construction market, garages, petrol stations and even a dump. As a result, Moscow representatives took the right for the land back from Zurab Tsereteli in 2007.

Moscow tour operators hope that the new Moscow officials will identify the problems and approach the development of tourism industry not only with statements and declarations.

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