

TOURISM MARKET IN RUSSIA IS AT A STANDSTILL



Russian tourism market is not doing so well. Compared to the last year, the outbound tourist flow seems to be much higher than inbound tourism. Moreover, Russian Railways does not appear more customer-friendly than before, which does not encourage domestic travel much too.

According to the experts from the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR) the domestic tourism market in Russia will be at a standstill during the year 2011. The stagnation of the domestic travel continues for the second year in a row. As the Russian Tourism Authority, Rostourism, reported **domestic tourist flow increased in 2010 by just 1% compared to the crisis year 2009 and stabilized at 32 million tourists**. In the same time outbound tourism flow increased by as much as 40% meaning that about 13 million Russian tourists traveled abroad in the year 2010.

The experts noted the main reason for the stagnation of the domestic travel is **the lack of competitiveness in the field of tourism services with respect to the price and quality ratio**. Also, a significant number of 'uncounted' Russian tourists enjoyed staying in campsites with minimal amenities last year. This unexpected trend is most likely to continue even in 2011.

Moreover, the increase in domestic tourist traffic is also prevented by an inflexible tariff policy of the Russian Railways. More Russian tourists than before traveled to the resorts in their own cars and similar trend is expected this year too. **The prices of rail tickets are predicted to rise by 12% for the summer season**. In addition, the tickets cannot still be bought sooner than 45 days in advance, while the air tickets are available virtually a year before the intended flight. Regarding the issue, ATOR appealed to the Russian Railways to extend the period of ticket availability up to at least 3 months. However, the approach of the Railways has remained unfavorable in most areas. Nevertheless, renting a car is still more expensive than buying rail tickets in the ticket office in the end.

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