

RUSSIA MOVING TO AN E-VISA REGIME STEP BY STEP



Russia is planning to move to an e-visa regime. At the moment, the situation is rather tangled with bureaucracy and the country is losing visitors due to the complicated and lengthy visa application process.

Tourists who wish to visit Russia apply for a tourist or business invitation to various company offering this service, for example, ivisaonline.com. According to ivisaonline.com more than 100,000 tourists are applying for a Russian visa invitation through their website each year. **Based on this invitation they are then granted a visa for a certain period and for the requested number of entries, with everything being dealt with merely in a written manner, not electronically.**

However, throughout the years, Russia has been testing an electronic visa in various regions across the country. The primary example is the Far Eastern Federal District of the country, where this policy is being tested since 2017.

The e-visa regime applies to citizens of 18 countries, including China or Japan. The maximum possible stay is eight days and the visitor can only move within the region - Vladivostok, Sakhalin, Kamchatka, Chukotka, etc. Another limitation is that visitors must leave from the same point.

However, the introduction of this policy has had positive effects and Russia is planning to increase the number of days of stay from 8 to 14 days and perhaps even up to 16. Moreover, from July 1 this year, this initiative will also be launched in the Kaliningrad region.

The increase in the validity period of electronic visas, as well as the expansion of its geography, will increase the influx of foreign tourists to Russia, as reported by officials in the sector.

“Our country has a huge potential. We definitely have room to grow. The strategic goals and objectives that we set for ourselves are primarily the growth of income from tourism for the country’s GDP by 2025 to 4.8% (now 3.8%). In addition, we aim to increase export of tourist services to \$15.5 billion from the current \$8.9 billion and fit between the top 12 countries according to the UNWTO rating (currently 16th),” said the head of Rostourism Zarina Doguzova.

Thus, Russia is working in the direction to implement this policy across its entire territory. The experience of the Far Eastern Federal District and from the Kaliningrad region will be used to spread the practice of electronic visas in other regions.

Ms. Doguzova said that from 2021 it will be possible to enter any Russian region with an e-visa. “The e-visa regime will immediately begin to operate throughout Russia. We expect that it will happen in 2021, in about a year and a half,” she said.

The all-Russian e-visa, in contrast to those issued in the pilot regions, will be paid. The cost will be up to \$50. At the first stage, a universal single-entry electronic visa will be used for a short-term stay in Russia for up to 16 days. In the long run, multiple entries will also be possible.

Firstly, it is planned that visitors with e-visas will enter the country through the main cities, which account for the main flow of visitors entering the country. These are Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Sochi, Kazan, and others. **As the other border crossing points are equipped with the necessary technology, the number of entry points will increase.**

The list of countries whose citizens will be able to use the online visa service from 2021 will be approved separately. It will be prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. It will include China, South Korea, Japan, the EU countries and non-EU Schengen states, as well as, possibly, New Zealand. The UK, Canada and the USA are not yet scheduled for inclusion in the list.

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