

RUSSIA TO ATTRACT TOURISTS INNOVATIVELY



A tank tour in the snow, a night at the Czar's Palace? With tours off the beaten track and facilitation of the visa process, Russia aims to become one of the world's top ten tourist destinations.

One year after the World Cup, Russia is looking for new ways to attract tourists. By 2035, revenues from tourism are expected to more than double to the equivalent of 22.4 billion euros.

"Young foreigners can now discover Russia and its attractions forbidden to their parents," advertises Maria Lomidze, managing director of the Association of Russian Tour Operators. After all, the former USSR has a lot to offer with its rich cultural heritage and spectacular landscapes - from the subtropical seaside resorts on the Black Sea to Lake Baikal in Siberia and the volcanoes of Kamchatka.

With around 25 million tourists in 2018 - mainly from the former Soviet republics and more recently from China - Russia currently ranks 16th on the World Tourism Organization's list. But the difficulties in obtaining visas, lack of modern accommodation, and poor transport connections outside the big cities still deter many travelers.

"According to our estimates, five million foreign visitors came to Russia for the 2018 World Cup, and thanks to this advertising we expected an increase in the number of visitors this year," says Lomidze. "But because of the long and difficult visa process, the World Cup effect weakened."

The Kremlin, therefore, announced to facilitate entry formalities from 2021 with electronic short-stay visas for EU citizens, the Chinese and Koreans. As of today, since October 1st, 2019 such visas are to come into force for stays of up to eight days in St. Petersburg and the surrounding region.

Since July there has been a similar offer for the exclave Kaliningrad, the former Königsberg. Since 2017, citizens from 18 countries have also been able to obtain free electronic visas for the Far East of Russia, including the Kamchatka region, for ski and hiking tours in unspoiled countryside.

To attract tourists, tour operators now also rely on Arctic tours with reindeer herders, trips in tanks from the Soviet era or an overnight stay in a palace that belonged to Peter the Great.

But according to estimates by the organizers' association, the whole of Russia spends only around one million euros a year on tourism marketing. Moscow would have to invest billions in tourism infrastructure, but experts believe that a major image campaign is just as important in view of Russia's role in the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria.

In contrast, the Soviet Union had targeted foreign tourists at the time. Posters and magazines advertised trips through the Central Asian steppe and the Caucasus with thrills. "The attraction of the Soviet Union consisted primarily of the aura of the forbidden, a bit like North Korea today," says Andrej Siwitski, deputy head of the state travel agency Intourist, founded 90 years ago.

Date: 2019-10-07

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/russia-plans-to-attract-tourists-without-much-investments-news11209>