

HOW VLADIMIR PUTIN AFFECTS DOMESTIC TOURISM IN RUSSIA



Domestic tourism in Russia has been booming in the past couple of months amid an unprecedented crisis in international travel. The rise in interest is pretty clear, as recent data show a deficit of only 5 % compared to 2019, while the hotel occupancy rate across the country is 20 % higher than last year.

The Putin Effect

In this context, it must be noted that in Russia there is a particular factor that plays an important role in the domestic tourism market - president Vladimir Putin. It might sound crazy, but it is true. For example, tourism authorities are planning to develop tour routes in regions where Putin likes to relax, as there is a high demand for visiting places previously visited by the head of the state.

Since 2000, Putin has been vacationing in several regions of Russia. Some of them, like Krasnaya Polyana or the Black Sea coast, have indeed become the most popular destinations among Russians.

Others, such as the Abzakovo ski resort, became points of attraction immediately after the president's visit, but then returned to their previous level of popularity.

Finally, there is Siberia, where there has not yet been a particular increase in tourist traffic, mainly due to the remoteness, complex logistics and, as a result, the high cost of the trip.

Nevertheless, the attention of Putin contributes to **the growth of the popularity of domestic tourism in Russia. Or at least that is what local tourism authorities believe.**

The Boom of Abzakovo Ski Resort

As mentioned above, an example of the positive “presidential” effect on Russian domestic tourism is the Abzakovo ski resort.

Abzakovo boomed in 2000 when Vladimir Putin flew there after the inauguration. The resort immediately faced an increase in popularity and began to expand - they built new lifts and tracks, and new hotels.

And while it is true that after the 2007 crisis (and Putin’s last visit in 2003) there was a drop in demand at the resort, but in the 2010s the resort recreated itself and, also thanks to the launch of a high-speed electric train from Ufa, is yet again among the most popular Russian winter destinations.

Olympic Fever

Sochi and Krasnaya Polyana have received the most attention from Putin. The reconstruction of Sochi and Adler for the 2014 Winter Olympics and the construction of a mountain cluster from scratch was one of the president’s main construction projects during his time as head of state.

Putin has been skiing at the local resorts for seven years in a row now, while during his summer he spends time at his Sochi residence - Bocharov Ruchey - which obviously attracts a lot of attention.

Despite the many controversies surrounding the Olympics, the resort began to gain momentum rather quickly and almost immediately became one of the most popular ski resorts in Russia.

The region has benefited greatly from this popularity ever since, having registered a rise from 5 million visitors to 6.2 million in the span of 5 years between 2014 and 2019. Consequently, there has also been a significant increase in income.

Putin's Taiga Trips

Before the completion of numerous construction projects in Sochi, Putin began to explore the taiga. One of the first in a series of photo reports about the president's vacation was a report on a trip to Tuva and Khakassia in the summer of 2013. Then Putin was vacationing on Lake Tokpak-Khol and returned to the taiga on numerous occasions, even in 2021.

The "Putin effect" on the two-above mentioned destinations was pretty clear, but Siberia is most definitely a tougher nut to crack, also given the fact that, for example, Tuva, is the worst place for vacationing in Russia according to many experts.

The reason for this is primarily poor infrastructure and a lack of offer. From the same year, the head of the republic saw potential in tourism: he began to modernize the airport and turned to Putin with a request to give a separate instruction on the development of tourism in Tuva.

As a result, Tuva decided to develop the sector in a proven way - by combining tourist facilities into a cluster.

In 2020, the VisitTuva.ru cluster project appeared, which included the Chagytai tourist multifunctional center, the Taiga ski complex, the Dus-Khol complex, and centers for licensed fishing in the Kaa-Khem and Chaa-Khol districts.

Local authorities expect that by the end of 2021, 78 thousand tourists will visit Tuva, which is almost 90% more than in 2020. Thus, once again emphasizing the "Putin effect" on domestic tourism in Russia.

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