

POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATIONS TO SUFFER FROM THE ARMED CONFLICT IN UKRAINE



The past two years have been very tough for the tourism industry worldwide, as restrictions paralyzed the sector in an unprecedented manner. And it seems that tourism just can't catch a break, with the armed conflict in Ukraine very likely to affect tourism flows in numerous tourist destinations.

This is especially the case for countries that rely heavily on Ukrainian and Russian tourists and those which have chosen to sanction the Russian federation in the aftermath of Vladimir Putin's invasion.

Turkey's Bookings from Ukraine and Russia 'Turned off'

The first, and probably most obvious destination set to feel the effects of the conflict, is Turkey. **Just several days ago Turkish stakeholders were optimistic, expecting the return of pre-Covid figures in the tourism industry.**

But now, it seems that these predictions were premature. While the authorities are not worried, according to the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, bookings from Russia and Ukraine have virtually "turned off" due to the war in Ukraine.

"Russia and Ukraine are among the main source markets for Turkey's tourist destinations. Negative consequences for the sector are inevitable," the president of the Association, Firuz Baglıkaya, noted. According to him, the current situation "makes tourism professionals extremely nervous".

The longer the military situation lasts, the longer air traffic is closed, the more the tourism sector will suffer. And thus, the optimistic plans for 2022 are not destined to come true.

Already now experts expect a loss of 1 million tourists from Ukraine and at the same time the inevitable economic losses of the country. The worst-case scenario, however, estimates a loss of 4-5 million tourists from both Russia and Ukraine, resulting in a loss of \$5 billion in revenues.

Egypt Worried about the War Impact

Another country destined to feel the impact of the war in Ukraine is Egypt. According to experts, the conflict is a major red flag for Egypt's tourism sector.

"If the war starts, then there will be no tourism at all," Ali Okda, CEO of Meeting Point Egypt, a travel company focused on the Russian market, noted just before the invasion.

He added that other issues include tourist planes not being able to take off from Ukraine, its airspace being closed to civil aviation, and insurance companies not being willing to insure planes arriving from Ukraine or Russia.

The decline was also confirmed by hoteliers. According to Savoy Hotels, more than 20,000 Russian tourists a week used to visit Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada. However, that figure has now dropped

to 10,000.

The same tourist destinations have recently received between 6,000 and 8,000 tourists a week from Ukraine, while before the clashes there were 40,000 of them.

As in the case of Turkey, Ukraine and Russia are important source markets for Egypt. The former consider the destination their second favorite travel target, while Russian inflow has been rising steadily since the crash of the Russian passenger plane over Sinai in 2015.

Cyprus Expecting a Tourism Collapse

Another important tourist destination to suffer from the ongoing conflict is Cyprus. According to local media, Cypriot authorities fear that if more EU sanctions are adopted, officials will have to act against rich Russians who keep their money in Cyprus, and deal with a decline in Russian tourist flow, which is fundamental for the country.

“The tourism sector will certainly suffer, but the economy as a whole will also suffer. Everything will depend on what sanctions will be imposed on Russia and how long they will last,” Deputy Minister of Tourism, Savvas Perdios, said.

Russia is the second-largest tourist market in Cyprus after the United Kingdom. In 2021, Russians accounted for 40 % of the total tourist flow. In addition, a significant number of temporarily residing Russians live here and many also own real estate on the island.

Many Other Countries to Be Affected

But the list of tourist destinations goes on. Experts in Italy are worried about the consequences of the Russian invasion because Russians are among the “big spenders” in Italy.

Russian citizens have spent almost 1 billion euros in the country in 2019, with the Milan Fashion Week being one of the most popular investment events.

In Spain, the effects of the Russian invasion in Ukraine are already being felt. In one week, hotel reservations fell by 18% in the country, according to the Mirai reservations platform. While Russian visitors represent only 1.5% of all foreign tourists in the Iberian Peninsula (1.3 million visitors a year), they spend a lot. Annually, the revenue from Russian tourists’ spending in Spain reaches around 1.4 billion euros.

The French Côte d'Azur is also likely to feel the effects of the war conflict. The region used to welcome Russian visitors especially during the summer season when they represented 13% of overnight stays in hotels. “Very likely, we will have fewer Russians, partly because of the significant drop in the ruble which will probably increase following the sanctions taken by the European Union, the United States and other nations,” explained Michel Tschann, president of the Nice hoteliers union and director of the Splendid hotel.

Some other countries of the European Union, albeit small ones, like the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Latvia, have suspended the issuance of visas to Russian citizens that will de facto stop the influx of tourists from Russia.

All in all, it is a very complicated situation. And while the most terrible scenes are currently seen on the territory of Ukraine, far-reaching consequences in other places are inevitable.

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