

DIRECT FLIGHTS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND GEORGIA RESUMED AFTER 3 YEARS



Airlines resumed direct flights between Russia and Georgia. The route was canceled three years ago because of war conflict in South Ossetia.

In the past, direct flights between Moscow and Tbilisi were canceled several times thanks to serious deterioration of Russian-Georgian political relations. First, the air service was interrupted in fall 2006 when Georgian authorities arrested five Russian soldiers. Then in 2008 restrictions on Georgian airlines flying to Russia were introduced due to a spy scandal. Finally, in August 2008 the armed conflict in South Ossetia caused the air connection to be completely stopped.

Recently however two carriers - Russian Siberia and Georgian Airzena - resumed direct flights between Moscow and Tbilisi. Officially, the route is served only by charters not regular flights. However, both carriers provide the option of booking the tickets directly through the airlines, which is usually an option available only for regular flights.

The Siberia Airlines commented that the flight is a charter organized on regular basis. Moreover, the Russian Federal Air Transport Agency pointed out that there are no legal restrictions for direct sale of tickets for charter flights.

The direct flights however are quite expensive. Currently Siberia sells one way ticket for about USD 500, which is almost the same price quoted by Airzena. Flights with layovers in Kiev or Minsk are almost half the above price, reported Rbcdaily.ru.

Air travel between Georgia and Russia is very popular thanks to large Georgian communities in Russia. However, tourist numbers between the two countries are quite insignificant because of political problems. **Experts agree that any development of tourism under such conditions is simply impossible, despite the fact that Georgia is viewed as an attractive holiday destination among Russians.**

Air transport is not the only segment of Russian-Georgian relations signaling positive changes. At the end of 2011, representatives of the two countries discussed the re-launch of Georgian wines and mineral water on Russian market. It is expected that the import could start again in the coming months.

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