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Visa Woes Stop U.S. Actor at Airport

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Actor Robert De Niro and businessman Emin Agalarov drinking sake before Saturday's premiere of "Stone." **Denis Sinyakov**

A visa mishap almost ruined a weekend trip to Moscow for two-time Oscar-winning actor Robert De Niro, but airport officials managed to solve the issue on the spot — a luxury seldom available to noncelebrity travelers.

De Niro, 67, flew in to Sheremetyevo Airport from Rome on Friday night to promote his new film, "Stone," a thriller co-starring Edward Norton and Milla Jovovich that premiered in Russia on Saturday night.

But his Russian visa proved to have incorrect entry and departure dates, which led customs officers to bar De Niro from entering the country, the tabloid Lifenews.ru reported.

The trip's organizers, however, managed to sort out the matters after lengthy talks with officials, the report said, adding that De Niro spent the time sipping espresso in the arrival hall.

Lifenews.ru said the American actor waited for two hours, although Komsomolskaya Pravda

reported that it took seven hours before officials finally let him through.

It was unclear how the visa issue was resolved. In most cases, incorrect visa dates would have been sufficient for a traveler to be denied entry into Russia and sent back to his point of departure.

Cumbersome visa regulations have long been a sore point with visitors to Russia, discouraging both business travelers and tourists. The government has looked to ease the procedures and this year renewed a campaign to scrap visas with the European Union altogether.

President Dmitry Medvedev will raise the issue of visa-free travel during two-day talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel that start Monday in Deauville, France, Kremlin aide Sergei Prikhodko told reporters Friday.

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