

Aeroflot's Compensation Falls Short

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Aeroflot's efforts to appease customers stranded during the holidays are meeting with frustration and taxation. **Sergei Nikolayev**

Vouchers being given away by Aeroflot to compensate passengers stranded in Sheremetyevo Airport at the end of last year do not equal the full value of tickets and create a tax liability.

Almost 200 Aeroflot flights were delayed by more than eight hours between Dec. 26 and Dec. 28 because of a shortage of de-icing fluid at the airport. Many passengers spent more than a day waiting for flights. Aeroflot decided to present passengers who were stranded with vouchers worth the one-way value of their tickets, but not including taxes and airport fees.

Aeroflot began issuing the vouchers Jan. 13. As of Monday, more than 600 had been issued, the company said. A company spokesman said the line at the company's main office on Arbat was five times longer than usual.

Aeroflot expects to issue 24,000 vouchers worth about \$10 million. The vouchers can be used on future ticket purchase and for paying for overweight baggage.

"Our round-trip tickets from Moscow to Berlin cost 11,000 rubles [about \$360]; the cost in one direction was 5,500 rubles, but Aeroflot is compensating for the cost of the fare, without taxes and fees. For me, that was about 2,500 rubles [\$83]," Roman Chelyuskin wrote in his blog.

If the voucher is calculated from a round trip, its "price" is not determined by simply dividing the ticket cost in two, an Aeroflot spokesman said. Instead, it is based on the one-way fare, which falls into one of a number of price categories. Then the costs of taxes and fees are deducted. The airport fee in Europe ranges from \$104 to \$133 per person.

Since the voucher is a gift from the airline, the passenger has to pay 13 percent income tax on it after redeeming it.

Aeroflot lawyers struggled to find a solution to the tax issue, a company spokesman said with a sigh, but couldn't.

If a passenger does not want a voucher, he can file a form for monetary compensation for hotels and meals, provided receipts are enclosed. In addition, the airline is required by law to pay 25 rubles (about 82 cents) per hour of delay.

Aeroflot informed its frequent fliers that miles deducted from their accounts for free or upgraded tickets for delayed flights would be reinstated.

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