

St. Petersburg Wants 60 Percent More Tourists by 2016

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Tourist visits to St. Petersburg should increase to 8.1 million, and spending on tourism should reach 16 percent of the city's gross domestic product by 2016, according to St. Petersburg City Hall's 2011-16 tourism development plan.

The city attracted 5 million tourists and spending reached 115 billion rubles (\$4.12 billion), 10 percent of the local government's GDP, in 2010.

The city government will focus on increasing the number of nights tourists stay to five and boosting the number of repeat visitors. City Hall is also planning to develop the tourism sector for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions — known in the business as MICE tourism — as well as art, culture, family and pilgrim-driven trips, as well as typical excursion trips. It also wants to change the tourist flow from seasonal to year-round.

According to the development program, City Hall plans to invest in advertising and promotion, develop infrastructure and build new accommodation. The plan also includes talk of developing yacht tourism and camping.

To achieve their ambitious goals, the city must direct its promotional campaign at Russian tourists as well as foreigners; Russians' reputation as big spenders makes them among the most sought-after European tourist groups. If they succeed in sparking Russians' interest, the city might even surpass its 2016 targets.

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