

Chinese Tourists Flock to Russia

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The first quarter of 2011 saw a 5.3 percent bump in the number of tourists to Russia compared to the same period a year ago. The bulk of them came from China, which saw a 56 percent increase, followed by Germany (down 19 percent) and Turkey (up 30 percent).

Russia has a long way to go before it reaches its full potential as a destination for foreign tourists. Apart from all the talk about developing infrastructure, building hotels, upgrading service, and optimizing prices in the run-up to the 2014 Olympics and 2018 World Cup, the government urgently has to address the visa issue. Complex and time-consuming visa procedures are scaring tourists away.

The government has to seriously consider relaxing visa procedures — possibly including visa-free travel agreements with important markets — toning down or completely abolishing registration procedures, and issuing multi-entry visa for longer periods. These steps would surely convince foreign tourists, including repeat travelers, to choose Russia.

Other problems Russia needs to address: tourism infrastructure, the ratio of price versus quality, a lack of information about destinations in foreign languages, and a lack of proper marketing in important world markets.

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