

Travel Operators Face New Fee After More Tourists Are Stranded

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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An advertisement for trips to Israel from tour agency Idealny Mir.

Senators may approve legislation this week requiring tour operators to contribute to an emergency fund for people like the more than 130 tourists left stranded in three countries last weekend when their agency apparently went bankrupt.

Senator Valery Ryzansky, a senior United Russia member, said the Federation Council could pass the bill obliging tour operators to contribute 0.1 percent of their revenues to the fund on Friday, Interfax reported.

Idealny Mir, or Ideal World, left some 70 Israel-bound tourists stranded at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport on Sunday, said Irina Tyurina, spokeswoman for the Russian Tourism Union.

The tour operator failed to pay for the air tickets and hotel accommodation of the Israel-

bound travelers, Tyurina told Interfax.

Another 54 Moscow-bound travelers were stranded in Israel, while eight were struck in Amman, Jordan, Interfax said, citing the Federal Tourism Agency.

The Federal Consumer Protection Service [said](#) it was investigating Idealny Mir and would slap a maximum fine of 30,000 rubles (\$1,015) on the operator and fines of 10,000 rubles (\$340) on individual employees, if it determines that the operator sold services that failed to meet legal standards.

But the consumer watchdog faces a struggle locating the tour operator's staff.

"The company has refrained from making comments. Its senior management are unavailable, and they have even unscrewed their sign plates at the office and gone into hiding," Tyurina said.

"It is probably yet another bankruptcy," she said.

The consumer watchdog also asked city police to examine Idealny Mir's activities.

Repeated calls to the company's Moscow and Israel offices went unanswered Monday.

Meanwhile, more than 40 tourists stuck in Israel have returned to Russia at their own expense, Moseyev said. Eight tourists were put up at a monastery in Tel-Aviv, he said, without indicating whether they were among those who had returned to Russia by Monday.

The Transaero airline, which said it had never done business with Idealny Mir, offered to cut ticket prices for tourists who wanted to return to Russia.

The Federal Tourism Agency [said](#) the tour operator had 30 million rubles (\$1 million) in insurance with Rosgosstrakh to cover the needs of its clients. But Rosgosstrakh denied this, and the tourism agency later clarified that Idealny Mir had terminated its insurance last May but failed to inform the agency.

Idealny Mir opened in 2005 as a marriage agency for Russian women looking for Israeli husbands, the Metro newspaper [reported](#).

Until Sunday, the company had offices in Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Kiev, St. Petersburg and Tel Aviv, its website [said](#).

Besides Jordan and Israel, Idealny Mir sold tours to the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Croatia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Earlier this month, tour operator ITC suspended its activities over financial troubles. A total of 117 clients were abroad at the time, while some 300 tour vouchers remained unused, RIA-Novosti [reported](#). It was not immediately clear how many clients suffered losses.

In January, about 3,000 tourists were stranded around the world after Lanta-Tur Voyage announced it was bankrupt. Acting on orders by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, state-run VTB bank agreed to lend Lanta-Tur Voyage \$7 million.

According to data from the Russian Travel Industry Union, about 14.5 million people traveled abroad last year.

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