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Universal Sightseeing Pass Upgrades Tourism Appeal

By Irina Filatova

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A sightseeing bus, such as this one sitting near the Bolshoi Theater on Monday, will honor the three-day pass. **Vladimir Filonov**

Moscow will become a tad friendlier to foreign tourists this month, as it joins other world capitals like London and Paris that offer a sightseeing pass that provides entry to the most popular museums.

The price for a three-day pass will be 2,400 rubles ($76) and include admission to a choice of city attractions like St. Basil's Cathedral, the State Historical Museum, the Museum of the Patriotic War of 1812 and the State Contemporary Arts Museum. There are a total of seven venues devoted to various subjects.

The pass also covers admission to a walking tour around the city, a sightseeing tour on a double-decker bus and a cruise along the Moscow River.

The Moscow Pass is part of a project by privately owned communications firm KremlinMultimedia to improve the image of the capital and make it more convenient for living and visiting by developing a brand called WowMoscow.

Foreign visitors are familiar with such passes, as it's a "well-known product that exists in the cities like New York, London and Paris," said Ksenia Zemskova, head of the WowMoscow project.

Tourists traveling individually expect to have about the same number of entertainment options in any of the world's capitals, like a sightseeing bus tour, so Moscow Pass will provide a range of services offered at most popular destinations, she said in a telephone interview late last week.

Sightseeing passes of various configurations are offered in most world capitals and provide significant discounts compared to what a visitor would pay buying the tours separately.

Tourists visiting London, for example, can buy a one-day adult pass providing access to more than 60 city attractions for £46 ($74), according to the London Pass website. A card for three days costs £66.6.

A three-day Berlin Pass for adults costs 73.8 euros ($100) and provides entry to over 50 museums and attractions, according to the project's website.

The price for the Moscow Pass is affordable for foreigners and it's lower than the overall cost of admission fees for the museums and tours included, said Daniil Golovachyov, a client manager at Capital Tours, which organizes guided tours around Moscow for foreigners. But the list of attractions offered at the moment doesn't have many of the must-see places which most foreigners want to attend — like the Kremlin and the Armory Chamber or the Tretyakov Gallery, he said by telephone.

Among the curious attractions offered by the Moscow Pass are the Moscow Torture Museum, the Moscow House of Photography and the Russian Icon Museum. "We'd like the pass to give tourists a chance to get acquainted not only with well-known sights, but with modern museums as well ... so that tourists will know that Moscow is more than just the Red Square," Zemskova said.

She added that negotiations are underway with other museums, including The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and the Tretyakov Gallery, on joining the project, as the target is to have about 20 museums accessible via the pass.

The Moscow Pass will allow a tourist to save up to 30 percent on ticket prices and provide other benefits, she said, adding that pass holders will also get discounts at some Moscow restaurants like Uzbekistan and health food cafe chain Prime Star.

The card also offers discounts for a range of city tours, like an excursion on the Moscow Metro and the Kremlin tour, according to the project's website.

As the number of venues and services grow, the size of the discount from one-off prices might reach 50 percent, Zemskova said. An information booklet and a city map in English and

Russian will accompany the pass, with more languages to be added in the future.

Plans to develop the project include adding public transportation to the package in the near future — an option available with passes in other cities, Zemskova said, adding that the initiative is already being discussed with the Moscow Metro and Aeroexpress.

Another idea is to partner with banks so the pass could be used as a debit card, while local mobile operators might also be approached to provide services to card holders.

"Our goal is to provide a package of services allowing tourists to conveniently spend time in the city," Zemskova said.

Moscow has dramatically progressed in developing tourist infrastructure over the last couple of years, said Irina Tyurina, a spokeswoman for the Russian Tourism Union.

Earlier this year Moscow became the most recent European capital to introduce double-decker sightseeing tour buses.

Tyurina praised the initiative to introduce the Moscow Pass, which will make life easier for tourists visiting the capital. The project also develops the image of Moscow as a popular tourist destination, since tourists will share their experience of using the pass with friends and relatives, she said.

The number of foreign tourists who visited Moscow in January to September jumped by more than 17 percent over the first nine months of last year, according to City Hall's Tourism and Hotel Industry Committee. The figure is expected to exceed 5 million people this year, the committee's head, Sergei Shpilko, said last month.

Tourists will be able to buy the Moscow Pass online, paying by credit or debit card and specifying an address in Moscow for the card to be delivered. They will also be able to get the card at the Tourist Information Center on Red Square.

Cards will also be available for sale at the museums participating in the project or through the concierge service at hotels like Lotte Hotel Moscow, InterContinental, Marriott Aurora, Radisson Royal and Baltschug Kempinsky.

For more information on the Moscow Pass, see www.moscowpass.com.

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