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Russia Considers Waiving Visas for Train Passengers

By The Moscow Times

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Foreign visitors traveling to Russia by train may soon be able to enter the country visa-free for up to three days.

Foreign visitors traveling to Russia by train may soon be able to enter the country visa-free for up to three days in a measure aimed at opening up the notoriously bureaucratic nation to short-term tourists.

State newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported Tuesday that parliament is currently discussing legislation that would make the measure possible.

The proposed bill follows a similar law passed in 2009 that made it possible for visitors arriving by cruise ship or ferry to stay in Russia for up to three days without a visa. Industry analysts say the law resulted in a significant boost in tourism numbers to the northern port city of St. Petersburg, which lies near Finland and Estonia.

"Rostourism always supports any easing in visa regulations, as it directly encourages the development of incoming and internal tourism and brings revenue to our economy," tourism agency spokeswoman Irina Shchegolkova was quoted as saying by Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

Russia has international rail connections with countries including Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus, Mongolia and North Korea.

The bill, which was initiated by Rostourism, the Foreign Ministry, Federal Migration Service and other government agencies, is up for discussion through February 11, Rossiiskaya Gazeta said.

Another bill to allow foreign tourists flying into the country's major international airports to stay for up to three days without a visa has already been passed in a first reading in the lower house of parliament, the newspaper said. That bill does not cover non-Russian air carriers, however, such as the low-cost airline easyJet, which flies between London and Moscow twice daily.

If passed, both laws would include lists of countries whose nationals would be eligible to enter the country under the new rules, as well as of railway stations and airports covered by the laws.

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