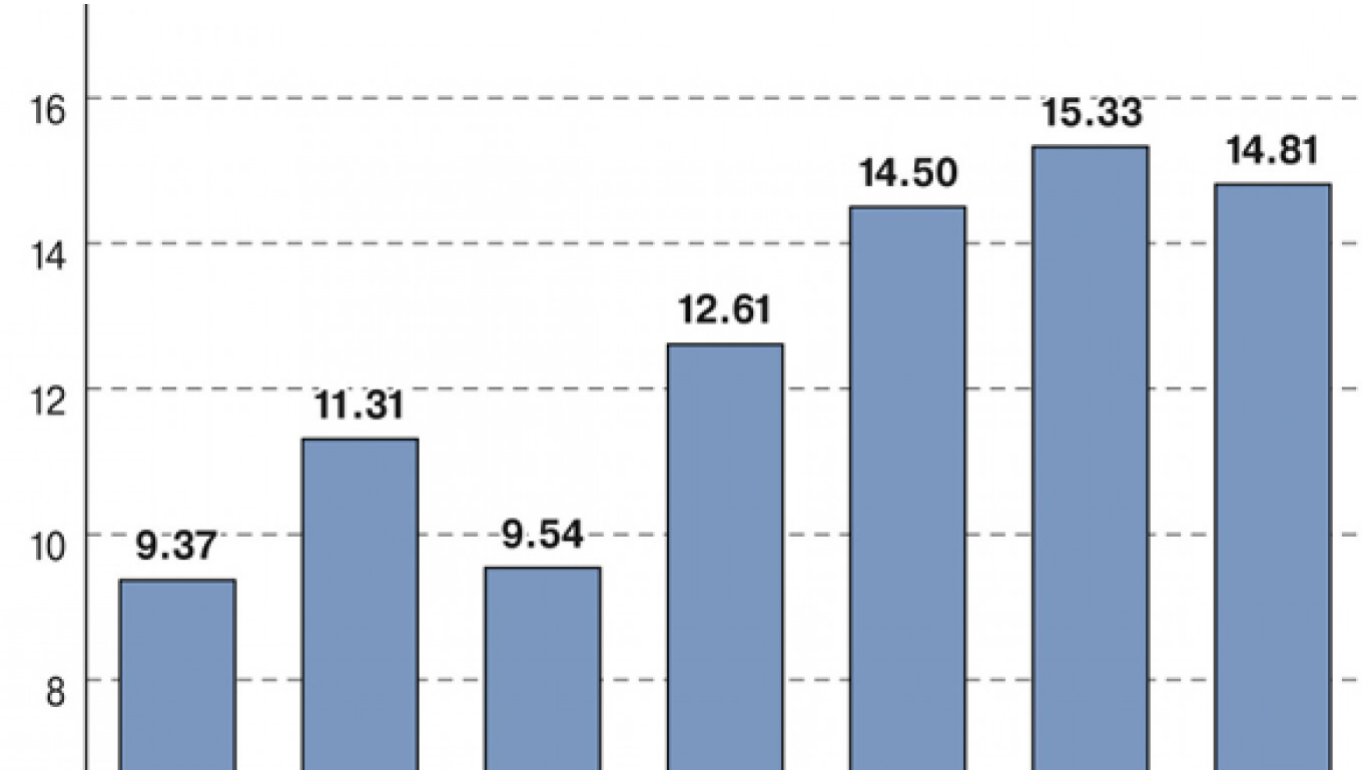
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30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ruble Decline Stimulates Advance Vacation Bookings

By Christopher Brennan

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Russian tourists are looking to stretch the value of their depreciating rubles by taking advantage of advance booking discounts on vacation packages, a news report said Wednesday.

Travelers are increasingly looking to save money by booking ahead for dates as far off as October and the New Year, Volga Tour director Yulia Skorokhodova said, Vedomosti reported.

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Popular Retreats	
Country	Russian Tourists Jan.-Sept. 2013
Turkey	2,767,649
Egypt	1,429,629
Greece	1,097,884
Spain	887,191
China	787,226
Finland	787,159

Thailand	683,082
Germany	638,193
Italy	605,482
Cyprus	494,702
— Vedomosti / Rosturism	

The result has been an increase in sales for destinations that conduct transactions in dollars, such as Turkey, a spokesman from tour operator TUI's Russian office said. The spokesman said that this year's figures have surpassed the record sales of "early booking" deals to Turkey seen last year.

"With early booking clients receive discounts of up to 30 percent and guarantee that they can pay the price of a tour set on the day of placing the order," he said, adding that discounts for early reservations often come from the foreign hotels and the deals can help avoid price cutting while competing for last-minute sales.

But the ruble's slide, down to 35.78 rubles to the dollar based on the Central Bank's Thursday exchange rate, has not led to an increased desire to lock in bookings at all destinations. TUI's representative said that trips to Europe and CIS countries have seen no growth and Maya Lomidze, director of the Association of Tour Operators of Russia, told RIA Novosti that sales for spring break holidays have dropped.

Turkey and Egypt are the two most popular vacation spots for Russian tourists, with 2.8 million and 1.4 million travelers, respectively, visiting those countries in the first nine months of 2013, according to statistics from the Federal Tourism Agency.

But tour operators to Egypt have begun to see losses on trips amid continuing political unrest in the country, Kommersant reported last week. Tourist agent network 1001 Tour said that new reservations dropped from 54 to 15 the week after the bombing of a tourist bus en route to Israel on the Sinai Peninsula killed three South Korean nationals and an Egyptian driver.

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