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St. Petersburg Tourism Hit by Crimea Crisis

By Mark Lammey

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Western tourists are shying away from going to St. Petersburg because of the situation in Ukraine and Crimea, presenting tourist agencies and the city's hoteliers with the task of plugging a gap in revenue, Vedomosti reported Friday.

Baltic Travel Company has had to cancel all three of its April tours to St. Petersburg, company director Lyudmila Kudryavtseva said.

More than 100 people were set to embark on those tours, while a group of 80 planning to go in June has already been scythed down to 40.

The tourists, mostly from Germany, Holland and England, told the company that they canceled because they are frightened that the conflict might spread and are not convinced that there is enough distance between St. Petersburg and Crimea to ensure their safety.

The Crimean city of Sevastopol is about 1,700 kilometers south of St. Petersburg.

Trips to Moscow and the Ukrainian cities of Kiev, Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk have also been hit by cancellations, Mir travel agency director Valery Fridman said.

The Four Seasons Lyon Palace hotel, which opened in St. Petersburg last summer and can normally count on Americans to make up 20 percent of its patrons, has decided to switch to attracting tourists from China, Brazil and India, instead of Europe and North America, said Natalya Yermashova, the hotel's director.

The Korinthiya and Oktyabrskaya hotels have also confirmed that cancellations by Westerners has become a growing trend.

While the Courtyard Marriott hasn't been afflicted by mass cancellations, the hotel's management is looking into an alternative development strategy in the event that they occur, said Viktoria Korenova, the Marriott's commercial director.

The city's tourism committee said that 6.2 million tourists visited St. Petersburg last year, a 3 percent increase over 2012. Three million of those tourists were foreign, with Germans, Finns and Chinese making up the majority.

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