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Russian Travel Agencies Bankrupted as Demand Falls Up to 50%

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Clients of the "Solvex-Tourne" travel company gather outside its office after the announcement of the suspension of activities of the company in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Some 130,000 Russians have lost money or needed emergency help with air tickets to return home from interrupted overseas vacations after more than a dozen travel agencies went bankrupt over the past two months, Interfax reported Wednesday.

At least 14 travel agencies in Russia folded between mid-July and mid-September as part of a "deep systemic crisis exacerbated by political and economic factors," with demand for tour packages falling 30-50 percent this year alone, Irina Tyurina, spokeswoman for the Russian Tourism Industry Union, said in comments carried by Interfax.

About 56,000 Russians needed emergency help overseas after their travel operators went bust, leaving clients facing eviction from hotels over unpaid bills and without air tickets home, Tyurina said.

Meanwhile, federal lawmaker Mikhail Starshinov from the ruling United Russia party has

called for investigators to conduct an inquiry into the country's tourism industry watchdog, Rostourism, because of the rash of bankruptcies, Interfax reported.

"I am more than certain that our bureaucrats from Rostourism aren't thinking about ... our citizens getting into unpleasant situations abroad," Starshinov said.

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