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Sochi's Biggest Ski Resort Sees New Year's Boom as Ruble Hits Foreign Travel

By Sarah Crowther

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To cope with the influx of skiers, the Rosa Khutor resort has raised the price of sky passes 43 percent from September levels.

Sochi's largest ski resort, Rosa Khutor, has hiked the price of holiday ski passes by more than 40 percent as the falling ruble brings an unexpected deluge of Russian skiers unwilling to pay European prices.

The ruble's fall of more than 40 percent against the U.S. dollar this year and rising inflation at home have left many Russians with no choice but to forgo trips abroad in favor of vacationing in Russia — in particular, the former Olympic city of Sochi.

From Dec. 31 to Jan. 1, all rooms in the mountain resort are booked, as are most rooms for the period of the New Year's holiday, Ilya Umansky, vice president of the Russian Association of Tour Operators, told business daily Vedomosti on Wednesday.

Demand for international travel has shrunk as ticket prices are forced up by the falling ruble. The cost of tickets for international flights into and out of Russia was hiked 12.5 percent last week due to the ruble's devaluation, the Association of Tour Operators reported.

To cope with the influx of skiers, the Rosa Khutor resort has raised the price of sky passes 43 percent from September levels, Vedomosti reported. It will also reduce the number of passes sold between Jan. 1 and Jan. 10 to 9,500, ostensibly for skiers' safety, according to a press release Monday.

"We were forced to take a series of steps, in this instance not very popular ones," the resort's CEO Sergei Bachin said in a press release.

The decision has proven so unpopular that a petition urging Rosa Khutor to reduce its prices has already been drafted.

"People don't have a way out because tickets have already been purchased, the hotel has already been paid for," aggrieved customer Daria Zakhodyakina wrote on the petition's website. "It is too late to find a new resort, everything's already sold out everywhere," she said.

Single-day passes from Dec. 26 to Jan. 10 at Rosa Khutor will now cost 2,650 rubles ($49), according to the company's website.

There are three other ski resorts in Sochi: Laura and Alpika Service, both owned by state-run natural-gas giant Gazprom, and Gornaya Karusel, which is owned by leading Russian lender Sberbank. All three can accommodate between 6,000 and 8,000 skiers for a price of 1,800 rubles ($33) a day or less during the New Year's period, Vedomosti reported.

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