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Russian Airlines Fly 1.4 Million Fewer People Abroad as Weak Ruble Hits Demand

By The Moscow Times

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Russian airlines flew 15.6 percent fewer passengers on international flights in the first quarter of this year as demand plummeted due to a sharp devaluation of the ruble, according to data published Wednesday by Russia's Federal Air Transportation Agency.

In the first three months of this year 7.4 million passengers flew with Russian airlines on international routes, down from 8.8 million in the same period last year, the data showed.

Carriers have been hit hard by the decline in the value of the ruble, which makes trips abroad more expensive for Russians. The ruble has fallen around 40 percent to the U.S. dollar since the start of last year as Russia's economy weakens due to falling oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's actions in Ukraine.

International carriers have also cut sharply the number of flights in and out of Russia. U.S. carrier Delta announced earlier in April that it would suspend its New York to Sheremetyevo route this winter, while a host of other airlines, including British budget carrier EasyJet, have reduced or cut services.

Even as international flights slimmed, however, domestic flights grew rapidly. Russian airlines flew 9.6 million people on internal flights in the first quarter, up 11.4 percent from the first three months of 2014, the Federal Air Transportation Agency said.

Domestic destinations are benefiting from the ruble's fall — with trips abroad becoming so expensive, tourism agencies have reported increasing desire among Russians to explore their own country.

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