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Russia Climbs 18 Places in Tourism Ranking

By The Moscow Times

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There are still plenty of things to improve though. Road infrastructure, an often-cited black spot in Russian life, ranked 92nd in the World Rating.

The World Economic Forum has ranked Russia as the world's 45th most-attractive country for tourists, adding, however, that Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine may have damaged Russia's standing, according to a recent report.

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 said that while Russia has not developed tourism as a "national priority," the country benefited from impressive natural and cultural attractions.

In a press release accompanying the Forum's report Wednesday, Alexey Prazdnichnykh, coordinator of the World Economic Forum rating's program in Russia, named tourist-favorite St. Petersburg, history-filled Tatarstan and the southern region of Krasnodar as Russia's top 3 tourist destinations for 2015.

The country ranked 4th in the world in natural landmarks designated by UNESCO as World Heritage sites, and 10th in cultural heritage ones, and also showed a strong standing in "health and hygiene," ranking 6th in the world on that score, primarily because of its large number of doctors and the availability of hospital beds, according to the report.

But the lack of tourism infrastructure along with troubles with "safety and security," environmental sustainability and business regulations contributed to Russia's rank as 45th among 141 countries in tourism "competitiveness," the report said.

The report notes, however, that much of the research was done before the annexation of Crimea, a lush Black Sea peninsula, and Western sanctions against Moscow that followed in response to Russia's meddling in Ukraine.

"This strong position reflects to a certain extent the fact that much of the data was collected prior to events in Crimea, so the economic impact of the security situation was still negligible," the report added.

The report also called out Russia for its complicated visa requirements for foreigners, saying that the issue damaged the country's standing in the rankings.

"Restrictive policies such as cumbersome visa requirements diminish tourists' willingness to visit a country, and indirectly reduce the availability of key services," the report said.

The world's leader in "tourism competitiveness" was Spain, followed by France, Germany and the U.S., according to the report. Chad closed off the list in the 141st position.

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