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Russian Tourism Plunges Amid Economic Crisis

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Amid a deepening economic crisis that has taken a devastating toll on real incomes across the country, the number of Russians traveling abroad declined by more than 30 percent in the first quarter of 2015, according to data released Monday by the Federal Tourism Agency.

Only 6.5 million Russians left their home country during the first three months of the year, compared to 9.4 million during the same period in 2014, the agency revealed, citing information compiled by the State Statistics Service.

The sharpest plunge was recorded in the subcategory of overseas tourism, which fell by more than 40 percent. Private trips declined by 27 percent during the period, and business trips dropped by 17 percent.

But as Russians increasingly opted for "staycations," internationals flooded into the country, with foreigners visiting 16 percent more frequently than they did during the same period last

year. However, business trips accounted for the bulk of this increase. Foreign tourism to Russia decreased by 1 percent in the first quarter.

The number of foreigners who have decided to stay in Russia on a more permanent basis — obtaining residency permits in the country — increased by 70 percent, reaching 233 people in the first quarter of this year.

Following a sharp decline in the ruble's value against the euro and the U.S. dollar, the number of Russians opting to vacation inside the country has increased by 30 percent, the head of the Federal Tourism Agency Oleg Safonov said at a news conference in February, as reported by RIA Novosti.

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