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Putin Proposes Visa-Free Travel to Russia for BRICS Countries

By The Moscow Times

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Tourism should bring significant revenues to the Russian budget and become a catalyst for the development of Russian regions, Putin said.

President Vladimir Putin called on Monday for visa-free travel for tourists from India and South Africa, in a move to boost Russia's ailing tourist industry which has been hit by the falling ruble and foreign travel restrictions for Russian officials.

“In order to attract foreign tourists we may provide further simplification of visa formalities, for example, to expand the practice of visa-free exchanges for tourist groups. It may be applied to all BRICS countries," Putin said at a session of the State Council Presidium in Crimea, dedicated to the development of the tourism sector in Russia, according to news agency TASS.

The BRICS are a group of major developing nations comprising China, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa.

Chinese tourist groups can already come to Russia without visas. Almost 410,000 Chinese tourists visited Russia last year, according to data from Russia's Federal Tourist Agency Rostourism.

Visa requirements between Russia and Brazil were abolished in 2010.

Putin noted that the introduction of visa-free travel with Israel in 2010 more than doubled the number of tourists from the country, TASS reported.

As a result of the abolition of visa requirements with Turkey and South Korea, the tourist inflow from these countries increased by 41 and 40 percent respectively, Putin said.

Tourism should bring significant revenues to the Russian budget and become a catalyst for the development of Russian regions, Putin said, according to news agency RIA Novosti.

In the first three months of this year the number of international tourists visiting Russia increased by 16 percent compared to the same period last year and reached 7.3 million, according to Rostourism, citing data from state statistics service Rosstat.

Meanwhile, outbound tourism in Russia is in decline due to the sharp ruble devaluation and falling real incomes.

In the first three months of this year the number of Russian tourists going abroad fell by 40 percent compared to the same period last year, Rostourism reported, citing Rosstat.

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