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Russian Tour Companies Request Lighter Visa Requirements for Tourists

By The Moscow Times

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Russian tour companies in a letter to the Foreign Ministry have asked for an easing in visa requirements for foreign tourists in order to boost inbound tourism, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday, citing a copy of the document.

The letter was written by eight tour operators including Intourist Thomas Cook, City Sightseeing Moscow and Academservice.

The tour companies offered Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov a number of suggestions on how the regulations may be eased, such as the introduction of electronic visas and visas granted on arrival.

The authors of the letter also seek to introduce 72-hour visa-free travel for transit visitors from Western Europe.

According to the authors of the letter, Russia's rigid visa policy is the main factor constraining

the growth of the inbound tourism.

The complete abolition of visa requirements could gradually increase the flow of visitors from Europe and the U.S. by 30 to 40 percent, general director of Academservice Alexander Kurnosov told Kommersant.

The Foreign Ministry's press service said they will comment on the letter at a later time.

Russian inbound tourism has been showing growth amid the weakening of the ruble. There was a 13.4 percent increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting Russia in the first nine months of last year, the highest rate of growth since 2008, Kommersant reported, citing the Rosstat state statistics service.

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