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Drop in Russian Tourists Costs Turkey $840M

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Turkey has lost $840 million in the first half of the year due to a sharp decline in the number of Russian visitors, the Russian Association of Tour Operators (ATOR) said in a statement Tuesday.

Some 184,000 Russian tourists went to Turkey in the first six months of 2016, 87 percent less than in the same period last year.

Turkey's total revenue from tourism totaled $5 billion in the second quarter of 2016, down 35.6 percent from 2015 and its lowest level since 1999, ATOR said.

Numbers of Russians visiting to the country first began to drop when the Kremlin imposed a ban on package holidays to the once popular travel destination.

The ban was one of a number of measures triggered by the downing of the Russian fighter jet

near the Syrian border by the Turkish army. Other sanctions included bans on food imports and restrictions on work visas for Turkish nationals,

Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted the ban last month after an apology from Turkish President Recep Erdogan, but the suspension of charter flights to the country still remains in place.

Safety concerns are also affecting the flow of tourists to the country. Turkey has been hit by a wave of terrorist attacks over recent months, while the government is reeling from a bloody coup attempt that took place last month.

Experts predict Turkey's tourism industry will shrink by at least $5 billion, accounting for 0.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product, ATOR's statement said.

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