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Chinese Tourism to Russia Hits Record Numbers in 2017

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Sergei Karpukhin / Reuters

The global boom in tourism from China has not escaped Russia, with Chinese visitors accounting for the highest number of foreign tourists to the country last year.

China has led global outbound travel since 2012, with around 135 million Chinese tourists traveling abroad and spending $261 billion in 2016, according to the UN World Tourism Organization. To accommodate growing tourist numbers from China, Russia has introduced visa-free travel for Chinese tour groups and hired Chinese-speaking staff at airports and train stations.

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"The number of Chinese tourists to Russia reached 1.5 million in 2017. This is the largest number among all countries for Russia," the state-run TASS news agency cited Chinese

Ambassador to Russia Li Hui as saying Tuesday.

In the opposite direction, China became the second-most popular destination for Russian tourists in 2017, Li added.

More and more Chinese tourists have flocked to Russia as Moscow's diplomatic relations with western countries deteriorated over the Ukraine crisis and anti-Russian sanctions.

China became the top source country for foreign tourists to Russia in 2014, when more than 1.1 million Chinese citizens visited Russia.

Russia's Federal Tourism Agency's latest figures indicate a 16-percent increase of Chinese tourists coming to Russia in 2017. Finland and Poland, as the second and third sources of tourism into Russia, saw double-digit declines of 26 percent and 33 percent each.

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