

# Fewer Russian Tourists Traveling to U.K., U.S., Tour Operators Say

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Tour operators in Russia are seeing a drop in travel to Britain and the United States as the countries remain locked in diplomatic battles over poisoning and election-meddling accusations.

Russian tourists have experienced significant delays in obtaining U.S. visas over the past year amid staff cuts and the recent closure of the U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg. Last week, the government agency tasked with promoting Russia's image abroad launched a sardonically titled [program](#) to repatriate students from "unfriendly countries."

"A decrease in the flow [of Russian tourists to the United States] is expected precisely because of difficulties with obtaining visas," Russian Tour Operators Association acting director Maya Lomidze said at a news conference Monday.

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In Britain, tourism numbers have declined 10 percent mostly due to the declining popularity of education programs, Lomidze added.

Britain's visa policy, however, "hasn't changed," she said. "We're not seeing any restrictions or additional requirements to obtain British visas."

Britain accuses Russia of using a highly potent nerve agent to poison ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, last month. Russia has denied any involvement and suggested Britain carried out the attack to stoke anti-Russian sentiment.

### **Embed:**

Lomidze said Russians are traveling to neighboring countries including Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus and Georgia to apply for U.S. visas and avoid long waiting times. Russian citizens can also apply for U.S. visas in any European Union country, she added.

"I can't say it's the most popular option to obtain American visas, but nevertheless this option does exist," Lomidze said.

The expulsion of scores of U.S. diplomats and the closure of the St. Petersburg consulate in a diplomatic tit-for-tat over the Skripals' poisoning and U.S. election-meddling accusations have extended visa waiting times from less than one week a year ago to eight months currently.

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