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Russian Jailed for 11.5 Years Over Ayahuasca Bottle From Peru

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A Russian graphic artist has been sentenced to 11.5 years behind bars for bringing a beverage containing the ayahuasca hallucinogen from Peru.

Ayahuasca is a powerful hallucinogenic vine long revered by Amazon Indians that attracts thousands of foreign tourists every year to Peru. It contains a chemical, banned in Russia, resembling the structure of a compound found in psychedelic mushrooms.

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Moscow-based graphic artist Maxim Gert reportedly bought a one-liter bottle of ayahuasca after undergoing traditional treatment in Peru for lower back pain that involved drinking the beverage. He crossed the Peruvian and Spanish borders without raising suspicion, and was only apprehended on his return to Russia at Domodedovo Airport in Moscow.

“He was told he needed to take this drink for another month and a half to finish the treatment,” the man’s friend was quoted as saying by the Tagilcity.ru news website this week.

Gert’s lawyer, Vladimir Brigadin, told the outlet that his client had been tried by the same Domodedovo court judge that had sent a Brazilian shaman to prison for carrying 6 liters of ayahuasca. According to BBC Russia, the 66-year-old shaman’s sentence was reduced from 6.5 to 3 years after Brazilian President Michel Temer asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to intervene.

Brigadin said they had appealed Gert’s June 26 drug smuggling sentence.

“There are more people like Maxim. There have been and will continue to be gullible tourists who buy something in the markets and then face prosecution in Russia,” he was quoted as saying by Tagilcity.ru.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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