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Bubonic Plague Scare Closes Russia-Mongolia Border, Trapping Russian Tourists

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siberiantimes.com

Two deaths linked to bubonic plague in Mongolia have caused authorities to place its border with Russia under "indefinite quarantine," leaving Russian tourists stranded, The Siberian Times reported Friday.

Experts say the direct descendants of the same bubonic plague that killed 50 million people in the 14th century still exist today, killing around 2,000 people a year. A region of western Mongolia on the border with Russia and Kazakhstan was quarantined on Wednesday after a husband and wife reportedly died after eating marmot meat there.

"Despite the fact that eating marmots is banned, Citizen T hunted marmot," the head of Mongolia's animal disease center was quoted as saying, referring to the 38-year-old victim and his 37-year-old pregnant wife.

Russian tourists were affected when Mongolian authorities closed a key border crossing on suspicion that it may have played a role in the outbreak, The Siberian Times reported.

At least nine tourists sought help from the Russian consulate, while a border officer in Russia's frontier republic of Altai said the border closures were due to the extended May holidays in Russia.

Authorities placed nearly 160 people who came into direct or indirect contact with the two victims "under supervision," The Siberian Times reported.

Photos showed emergency staff in protective gear boarding flights arriving in Mongolia's capital to inspect passengers for signs of the disease. The domestic Hunnu Air carrier grounded all flights to the region between Thursday and Saturday due to the quarantine.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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