

Russian Flight Ban Could Cost Georgia \$300M, Experts Say

June 24, 2019



Shakh Aivazov / AP / TASS

Georgia's economy could lose up to \$300 million annually from the absence of Russian tourists amid tensions between the ex-Soviet neighbors, Georgian analysts estimate.

Angry protests erupted in Tbilisi after a Russian lawmaker's visit last week, prompting Russian President Vladimir Putin to [suspend](#) flights to Georgia, a popular vacation destination for Russians, as of July 8. Russia's Transport Ministry later [said](#) that Georgian flights to Russia will also be suspended starting that day.

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Russia's flight ban could cost the Georgian economy between \$250 million and \$300 million per year, the state-run TASS news agency [cited](#) the head of Georgia's Society and Banks NGO as saying on Saturday.

That amounts to almost 10 percent of Georgia's \$3.2 billion tourism [revenue](#) in 2018.

The number of Russian tourists could plummet from 1.4 million in 2018 to 300,000 per year going forward, the Russian Tour Operators Association [cites](#) an unnamed Russian expert as saying.

Georgia will need to more than double tourism from the European Union to compensate the losses, the *Kommersant* business daily reported, citing official data that said Russian tourists spent 632 million euros in Georgia last year compared to EU citizens' 279 million euros.

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The Georgian economy will suffer from Russia's move in the near-term but will push the country to "diversify" its tourism sector in the long-term, TASS cited Sergi Kapanadze, deputy speaker of the Georgian parliament, as saying.

Six Russian airlines could lose \$47.7 million on refunds for flights booked by 155,000 Russian travelers after July 8, *Kommersant* [reported](#) on Monday, citing an unnamed source in Russia's tourism sector.

Russian tour operators could refund \$1.9 million worth of canceled Georgian tours, the newspaper cited the head of Russia's Delfin tour agency as saying.

The Kremlin [said](#) on Monday that Russia will lift the flight ban as soon as Georgia "resumes a non-Russophobic course."

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