The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

European Budget Airlines Push For St. Petersburg Flights

Ryanair, EasyJet and Wizz Air have applied to operate "seventh freedom flights."

September 24, 2019



hopeless128 / Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Europe's three largest low-cost airlines have applied to fly in and out of St. Petersburg in a move that would increase tourism to Russia's northern capital but has drawn criticism from Russian airlines.

St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport could become the first Russian airport to permit "seventh freedom flights," which allow international carriers to operate flights outside their country of registration, reports citing Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Maxim Akimov said last week. Starting Oct. 1, tourists from 53 countries — including all EU member states except Britain — will be able to visit St. Petersburg under a simplified e-visa program.

Related article: Russia Offers Simplified E-Visas to Visitors of St. Petersburg

Ireland's Ryanair, Britain's EasyJet and Hungary's Wizz Air have applied to operate direct flights between Pulkovo and 33 countries, the RBC news website reported Tuesday, citing Leonid Sergeyev, the head of Pulkovo's managing company Northern Capital Gateway.

"These are the [airlines] that reacted first before the official announcement of the initiatives [to grant 'seventh freedom' status to Pulkovo]. In practice, the real demand will be greater," Sergeyev told RBC.

Another airline from a CIS country has also applied to operate flights between Pulkovo and the United States, RBC cited Sergeyev as saying. Sergeyev didn't name the airline.

According to preliminary route plans, foreign low-cost airlines plan to operate year-round, with 60% of flights in summer and 40% in winter.

Related article: St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport Eyes Opening Up to Foreign Budget Airlines

Last week, a spokesperson for Akimov said Pulkovo should be allowed to operate "seventh freedom" flights for a five-year trial period.

At the end of the five-year pilot project, Akimov reportedly said the routes "could be either handed to Russian airlines or stay with the foreigners."

Russian airlines have expressed concerns that granting Pulkovo so-called Open Skies status would increase competition and lead to lost profits.

"We are categorically against granting foreign companies an Open Skies regime in St. Petersburg without Russian companies obtaining similar rights in states whose carriers will fly from Pulkovo to third countries," RBC quoted the manager of a large Russian airline as saying.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/09/24/european-budget-airlines-push-for-st-petersburg-flights-a67405