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Russia Moves to Require Visitors to Submit Fingerprints

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Russian authorities are drawing up plans to require all visiting foreigners to submit fingerprints upon arrival, the country's deputy police chief has said, as experts warned that the move would hurt tourism.

Russia has prosecuted more than 30,000 foreigners so far in 2019 for violating migration law, Russia's Deputy Interior Minister Alexander Gorovoy said at an interagency forum Wednesday. His comments come amid government plans to offer simplified e-visas to foreign tourists by 2021 in a bid to collect up to $15.5 billion in annual tourism revenue.

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"[Requiring fingerprints] will allow us to systemize Russia's existing database and prevent unwanted people or those who committed crimes in other countries from setting foot in our territory," the state-run TASS news agency quoted Gorovoy as saying.

Lawmakers are prepared to back the fingerprint bill if it doesn't contradict Russia's drive to offer simplified electronic visas, the Kommersant newspaper reported.

"We could respond more promptly if there's a [data]base for each foreigner when they are detained or screened for any offense," lower-house lawmaker Anatoly Vyborny told Kommersant.

Vyborny, a member of the State Duma's anti-corruption committee, noted that previously convicted or deported foreigners "can change their name and try other ways of hiding their identity."

"We're gradually moving toward e-visas and are generally seeking to simplify entry," upper-house Federation Council senator Igor Fomin told Kommersant. "All this shouldn't contradict each other."

Industry experts expect the move to slash the number of visiting tourists by up to 20% and cause issues with electronic visas that had already been issued. Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg has launched a pilot program offering e-visas to tourists starting from Oct 1.

Around 17 million people visit Russia every year, according to Gorovoy's estimates.

Tourists around the world have frequently cited difficulties with obtaining visas as a barrier to visiting Russia.

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