

Russia Launches Direct Crimea Train Ticket Sales

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Russia on Friday began selling tickets for direct train journeys to Crimea, bypassing Ukraine and further cementing its 2014 annexation of the peninsula.

Direct trains from Moscow and St. Petersburg will start to run in late December, replacing the route that ran through Ukraine before the annexation.

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Russia already opened a road section of its controversial \$4-billion bridge to the peninsula last year. Now the state property agency has [bought](#) 166 passenger carriages and 10 locomotives for the new train route, although it has not said who supplied them over apparent sanctions concerns.

The first trains are expected to leave St. Petersburg on Dec. 23, with tickets for the 43-hour

journey to Crimea's largest city of Sevastopol starting at 3,650 rubles (\$57).

Trains from Moscow will depart for the Crimean capital of Simferopol on Dec. 24, with tickets starting at 2,966 rubles (\$46) for the 33-hour ride.

Grand Service Express, a private company that services the Moscow-St. Petersburg Grand Express train, is operating the Crimean service. Risk-averse Russian companies, including Russian Railways, try to avoid opening subsidiaries in Crimea dealing with Crimean firms.

Under EU sanctions, European businesses and private citizens are banned from investing in Crimea, its transport and infrastructure. The United States has not introduced similar sanctions.

Russia's Transport Ministry had said it plans to transfer the 176 carriages and locomotives to Crimean Railways, the local state-owned railway company. Apparently wary of sanctions risks, the ministry declined to say who had supplied the rolling stock and at what price and on what terms they would be handed over to Crimean Railways.

President Vladimir Putin opened the road section of the bridge with a televised 19-kilometer truck drive in May 2018. The Crimean bridge's rail section was originally due to open in December 2018.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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