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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Welcomes 20% More Tourists in 2019

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The numbers come as Russia moves to simplify visa requirements for citizens of 53 countries and boost its tourism revenue. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Tourist arrivals to Russia have surged by 20.5% in 2019, according to official figures cited by the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR) on Monday.

More than 5 million tourists visited Russia in January-December 2019, according to ATOR's breakdown of Federal Security Service (FSB) border service data, up from 4.2 million tourists the previous year. The numbers come as Russia moves to simplify visa requirements for citizens of 53 countries next year and boost its tourism revenue.

Related article: Russia to Offer Simplified E-Visas to 53 Countries, Snubs U.S. and Britain

Country-specific figures showed increasing tourist arrivals in Russia from all continents except Latin America. The top five countries where tourists came from remained unchanged since 2018.

China supplied the highest share of inbound visitors at 1.5 million tourists, an increase of 19% from 2018. Russia has introduced visa-free travel for Chinese tour groups and hired Chinese-speaking staff at airports and train stations to accommodate the surge.

Germany accounted for the second-most visitors with more than 520,000 tourists, an increase of 15.7% from 2018. South Korea contributed the third-most visitors at more than 413,000 tourists, an increase of 20.8% from 2018.

The United States came in fourth with 241,000 American tourists last year, up by 6% from 2018.

Israel rounded out the top five with 199,000 inbound tourists, an increase of 21.7% in a year.

Almost 33 million foreigners visited Russia overall, not only for tourism.

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