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Stop Visiting Crimea During Coronavirus Outbreak, Leader Tells Russians

April 20, 2020



All Crimean sanatoriums and vacation spots are closed. **Alexei Pavlishak / TASS**

Russians should stop coming to Crimea during the coronavirus pandemic, its Moscow-backed leader said Monday after a surge in traffic to the annexed peninsula this weekend.

Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014, banned all hotels and guest houses from hosting tourists without negative Covid-19 test results until June 1. Still, regional authorities noted a nearly 40% uptick in Friday's vehicle traffic into Crimea from Russia.

"I never thought that I'd make this plea to fellow citizens, but there's no other way: I strongly ask all our citizens to refrain from coming to Crimea, both for business and leisure," Crimean leader Sergei Aksyonov said.

"All Crimean sanatoriums and vacation spots are closed," Aksyonov said in a video address posted on his social media accounts.

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> Прошу воздержаться от поездок в Республику Крым #Крым #Россия #оставайсядома pic.twitter.com/yz3bCuJ7bd
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> — Сергей Аксёнов (@aksenov_sv) April 20, 2020

On Saturday, Aksyonov threatened to fine visitors who violate two-week self-isolation orders by up to 30,000 rubles ($380).

"Starting next week, we're checking everyone who filled out questionnaires," he said, referring to a form the health watchdog hands out to every visitor asking them to provide information about where they're staying in Crimea.

Authorities said most of the new arrivals came via the Crimean bridge, which President Vladimir Putin opened last year to cement Moscow's hold on the disputed territory. Crimea's air traffic has fallen by an estimated three-quarters and rail traffic five-fold during the pandemic.

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Crimea, like many other regions in Russia, has imposed strict lockdown rules until April 30 to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Crimea had reported 62 coronavirus cases as of Monday. Russia had reported a total of 47,121 coronavirus cases — 10th in the world — and 405 deaths as of Monday.

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