

Aeroflot's Domestic Passengers Back to Pre-Coronavirus Levels

With Russia's borders shut, domestic flights carried almost as many passengers as last year in August.

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Russia has started reopening its borders with a handful of countries. **Mikhail Metzel / TASS**

Aeroflot — Russia's largest airline — carried almost as many passengers on domestic flights this August as it did in 2019, as Russia's borders remained closed and millions took their summer vacations at home.

Aeroflot Group said it carried 3.6 million passengers on domestic flights in August on both its flag-carrier Aeroflot brand and lowcoster Pobeda — just 0.4% down on the same period last year.

That marks a sharp uptick from July, when the number of domestic passengers was running almost a fifth lower on 2019 numbers, and is the latest sign of a [boom in domestic tourism](#) over the summer after Russia started lifting quarantine measures in June and July.

Sochi airport handled 962,000 passengers in July — almost five times as many as in June and 13% more than the same month last year, Russia's federal air transport agency [said](#). Traffic at Anapa — another Black Sea resort — was up more than a third to 444,000.

The surge in domestic tourism has helped Russia's economy as it recovers from the coronavirus, although it has also [triggered](#) fears of a possible resurgence of the virus.

Sofya Donets, an economist at Renaissance Capital, estimates that the block on international travel has resulted in an extra \$33 billion, equivalent to 2% of GDP, being kept inside Russia this year — money that would otherwise have been spent outside the country on foreign trips. Payments data from the Krasnodar region, where Sochi is located, showed tourists were staying longer, and spending twice as much on average compared to last year.

Russia has [started to reopen](#) its borders and resume flights with a handful of countries, although most still remain shut. International travel is running at a fraction of pre-coronavirus levels, with Aeroflot reporting the number of international fliers was down by more than 90% in August compared to last year.

The state-controlled airline has lost a third of its value since the outbreak of the pandemic, and posted a loss of almost \$500 million in the second quarter. It is planning to tap the government's sovereign wealth fund and private investors next month in a so-called secondary share offering that could bring in an [extra \\$1 billion](#) in much-needed cash.

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