The Moscow Times
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Russians Turn to U.S. Visas as Interest in Europe and China Wanes

July 17, 2025



Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

Russian demand for U.S. visas jumped in the first half of 2025 even as interest in European and Chinese visas slowed, the Kommersant business daily reported Thursday, citing travel agency data.

The shift in visa demand highlights a growing interest in the United States among Russian travelers, even as tensions between Moscow and Washington persist.

Russian applications for U.S. visas rose 20% from January through June compared to the same period of 2024, Darya Lukyanova-Zubritskaya, a representative of the Raketa travel agency, told Kommersant.

The U.S. has also been approving Russian visa applications more often in recent months, said Yulia Othagina, the deputy director of the visa and migration department at the Continent Express travel agency.

Countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Uzbekistan remain the most common travel destinations for Russians overall, Othagina said.

Yulia Lipatova, managing director at the business travel agency Aeroclub, reported a 46% increase in U.S. business visa approvals over the past year. Still, overall business visa applications remain far below pre-pandemic levels, at just 9% of what was recorded in 2019, she noted.

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Travel industry sources attributed the rise to a renewed need for in-person meetings as Russian companies expand ties with American counterparts.

“There may be a greater need for personal contact due to more active communications with U.S. partners,” said Lukyanova-Zubritskaya of the Raketa travel agency.

In contrast, applications for EU business and tourist visas rose just 3% in the first half of the year, the slowest growth in three years. For comparison, demand rose 20% during the same period in 2023 and 16% in 2024.

Aeroclub reported a 5% decline in Schengen visa applications in the first half of 2025, while overall demand for EU visas now sits at just 19% of 2019 levels.

Industry figures interviewed by Kommersant blamed limited appointment slots and stricter documentation requirements for the decrease.

Italy, France and Spain remain the most popular Schengen destinations, accounting for nearly 60% of applications.

Demand for Chinese visas is also cooling. After soaring 37% in 2024, growth slowed to 16% in early 2025, according to Continent Express. Aeroclub reported an even sharper 27% decline in demand for Chinese visas year-on-year.

"this may be due to a saturated market: while many companies actively established business ties with Chinese partners in 2024, travel needs have since declined as processes have become more efficient," Lipatova said.

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