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Oil Spill Cripples Tourism in Russia's Black Sea Resort of Anapa

July 29, 2025



Igor Onuchin / TASS

A massive oil spill in the Black Sea has brought the tourism season in the Russian resort town of Anapa to a near standstill, with hotel occupancy plunging to just 30% and visitor numbers down by more than 75% compared to last year.

The drop comes as authorities maintain a swimming ban across the coastline due to persistent contamination from the December 2024 fuel oil spill in the Kerch Strait. According to regional officials, only 24,000 tourists visited Anapa in July compared to 100,000 during the same period last year.

"This is a serious problem," Krasnodar region Governor Veniamin Kondratiev said Monday during an emergency meeting with local hoteliers.

He noted that out of nearly 1,600 registered accommodations, only 950 remain open, with 68 attempting to stay afloat by offering discounted all-inclusive packages.

The oil spill, caused by the sinking of two tankers that released more than 4,000 tons of fuel oil into the Black Sea, has triggered long-term environmental damage and forced ongoing emergency measures across the Krasnodar region, annexed Crimea and Sevastopol. Federal emergency status remains in effect as cleanup efforts continue.

Environmental regulators warn that oil continues to seep from the sunken vessels, making full containment difficult.

The national consumer health agency Rospotrebnador has kept beach closures in place as the coastline remains unsafe for recreational use.

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In response to the crisis, the regional government has announced a 50-million-ruble ($610,000) emergency relief fund to support struggling businesses.

The money, drawn from the regional reserve fund, is intended to cover losses from cancelations and help businesses pay for salaries, rent, advertising and other essential costs.

“The measure has already shown results — dozens of businesses have applied,” Kondratiev said.

But many in the local business community say the assistance is far from enough, with owners of guesthouses, restaurants and shops reporting devastating financial losses and mounting debts.

“Entrepreneurs were left with debts and no income,” one guesthouse owner told the Kavkazsky Uzel news outlet. “Some had taken out loans of 4 to 25 million rubles [$48,800 to $305,000] to expand their businesses. Now they don’t know how to keep operating.”

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Other business owners described a deserted city.

“Everything — rent and utilities — has been paid for a year in advance. No one will refund the money. We were told: it's your risk,” a souvenir vendor said.

So far, no additional aid has been announced for non-hotel businesses impacted by the downturn.

The December spill, one of the worst environmental disasters to hit the region in years, has already caused widespread deaths of marine life and seabirds. Oil slicks have been reported as far away as Ukraine’s Odesa region.

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