The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Chinese Travel Bookings to Russia Surge Amid Visa-Free Talks and Japan Tensions

By Mack Tubridy

November 27, 2025



Chinese tourists on Red Square in Moscow. **Oleg Yelkov / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin's pledge to allow Chinese citizens to travel to Russia without a visa, along with recent tensions between Beijing and Tokyo, has sent searches and bookings from China soaring, with some metrics showing increases of up to 400%, according to market researchers.

"In the 48 hours after President Putin signaled visa-free entry for Chinese, search and product-view volumes for Russia on Chinese platforms were roughly three to five times higher than in the previous week," Subramania Bhatt, CEO of China Trading Desk, told The Moscow Times on Thursday.

Putin announced last week that Chinese citizens would soon be able to visit Russia without a

visa, following China's decision to lift visa requirements for Russian passport holders in September. He has not yet specified when the policy will take effect.

Bhatt said Russian hotel bookings for Chinese travelers in December are already up around 50% compared with the same period last year.

"Visa-free travel, along with earlier group visa-free and e-visa programs, is probably the single most powerful accelerator of Chinese travel to Russia right now," the CEO of the Singapore-based research firm said.

Related article: Chinese Nationals Will Soon Be Able to Visit Russia Visa-Free, Putin Says

The surge in interest is also being amplified by a diplomatic rift between Japan and China that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi touched off earlier this month after she told parliament that a hypothetical Chinese attack on Taiwan could trigger Japanese military action.

Takaichi's comments sparked fury in Beijing, and China's Foreign Ministry has since urged its citizens to avoid traveling to Japan. According to Bloomberg, Chinese airlines have been instructed to cut flights to Japan through March 2026.

Bhatt said many Chinese travelers who had been considering trips to Japan's northern island of Hokkaido, known for its powder snow for skiing and snowboarding, are now switching their sights to Russian destinations.

Moscow, St. Petersburg and Russia's Far East and Arctic regions offer "a relatively easy substitute" for winter travel, Bhatt told The Moscow Times.

"Once you add visa-free entry and the perception that Russia is less politically sensitive than Japan right now, that substitution becomes even easier for agencies to suggest and for travelers to accept," he added.

Russia and China already maintain a mutual visa-free regime for group tours. Last year, China also allowed Russian travelers in transit to stay for up to 10 days without a visa.

Putin's initial pledge in September to ease visa restrictions for Chinese nationals also triggered a spike in hotel and flight searches from travelers in China.

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