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China Signals Readiness to Extend Visa-Free Regime for Russians

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Russians shopping in Heihe, northeastern China. **Wei Jianshun / Zuma / TASS**

Authorities in China have signaled that they are ready to extend a visa waiver program for Russian citizens by one more year, Russia's Foreign Ministry told the pro-Kremlin newspaper Izvestia on Monday.

"Our partners have already informed us of their willingness to extend the visa-free regime," the ministry was quoted as saying. "We are coordinating with them to work out the details of maintaining the current arrangements for mutual travel."

In September, Beijing lifted visa requirements for Russian passport holders as part of a one-year trial program, allowing them to visit China for 30 days without a visa for business, tourism, family visits and educational exchanges.

President Vladimir Putin later signed an executive order temporarily waiving visa requirements for Chinese nationals as a reciprocal measure.

Both programs are set to run until Sept. 14.

On Sunday, China's Ambassador to Moscow Zhang Hanhui told the state-run TASS news agency that he would like to see the arrangement between the two countries made permanent, noting that it provided both countries with "many benefits" and was "beneficial for the people."

Russia's move to lift visa requirements for Chinese citizens, combined with diplomatic tensions between China and Japan, triggered a surge in searches and bookings for travel from China to Russia, market analysts told The Moscow Times in November.

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