

War Fears, Higher Costs Hit Russians' Appetite for Foreign Travel

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People at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. **Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency**

Russians have scaled back plans to travel abroad following the outbreak of the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran in late February, with demand for overseas trips and tourism services falling sharply in the first quarter, industry data [showed](#).

Conflict in the Middle East, a key hub for Russian tourists, alongside rising travel costs are dampening demand, even as the industry had shown signs of recovery earlier this year.

Demand for travel agency services fell 6% year-on-year in January-March, while bookings for foreign hotels dropped 18%, according to data from MTS Bank cited by the Kommersant business daily.

Analysts at fiscal data operator Platform OFD's Chek Index reported a similar trend.

The decline marks a sharp reversal from February, when transactions at travel agencies were still running 11% higher than a year earlier.

The closure in March of the United Arab Emirates and other popular Middle Eastern destinations caused the tourism market to contract by at least 30%, Maya Lomidze, executive director of the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR), told Kommersant.

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Russian tour operator Russky Express reported a 35% year-on-year drop in total sales in March.

Domestic tourism has failed to offset weaker outbound demand. Bookings for trips within Russia fell by 4-5% in the first quarter, according to Sergei Romashkin, general director of tour operator Delfin. Some destinations saw steeper declines, with visitor numbers to Sochi down 8% and to Dagestan down 20%.

Romashkin linked the drop in domestic travel to weakening purchasing power among Russian consumers.

Egypt emerged as the most popular foreign destination in the first quarter, accounting for 31% of total sales, according to travel service Sletat.ru. Its share rose by 10.5 percentage points from a year earlier, likely reflecting a shift by tourists who had previously favored the UAE.

Turkey's share was largely unchanged at 18.4%, while Thailand accounted for about 12%, also broadly stable year-on-year. China's share nearly doubled to 4.8% from 2.6%.

Demand is now gradually recovering but remains constrained by a stronger ruble and rising airfares driven by higher [fuel costs](#), Lomidze said.

In early April, tour operators began receiving additional fuel surcharge bills from airlines for previously booked trips. The average surcharge amounted to \$57 for a two-person tour to Egypt, \$119 for Thailand and \$161 for Vietnam, ATOR said.

Those costs are adding to broader price increases. The average transaction for travel agency services rose 9% year-on-year to 74,000 rubles (\$930) in the first quarter, according to Chek Index.

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