

Failed Travel Agency 'Stole' From Tourists

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Investigators have opened a large-scale [criminal fraud case](#) against the management of one of Russia's largest tour operators, which left more than 3,500 clients stranded in Russia and abroad when it went bankrupt over the weekend.

The Investigative Committee suspects the management at Lanta-Tur Voyage of deliberately failing to pay for hotels and flights for its clients and pocketing their money, agency spokesman Vladimir Markin said Tuesday, according to RIA-Novosti.

Police in Thailand also have arrested the head of Lanta-Tur Voyage's office there for having an expired work permit, Viktor Kriventsov, Russia's honorary consul in Pattaya said, Interfax reported.

The company's bankruptcy led the Sport and Tourism Ministry to call a meeting with leading tour operators Tuesday to discuss how to reinforce regulation, RIA-Novosti reported.

About 3,000 Russian tourists remained stranded abroad as of Monday — including in Goa, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico and Italy — while some tourists had managed to return home, the Federal Tourism Agency [said](#) on its website.

Aeroflot and Transaero have agreed to fly the stranded tourists home free of charge when vacant seats become available, RIA-Novosti [reported](#) Tuesday, citing the Federal Air Transportation Agency.

The bulk of the tourists waiting to return home are in Thailand, Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, the transportation agency said.

Lanta-Tur Voyage declared on its website that it was "suspending its activities due to an inability to finance the services ordered by tourists" and recommended its clients apply to insurance company Ingosstrakh to get their money back, the agency [said](#) Saturday.

As of Tuesday, Ingosstrakh [said](#) on its website that it had received more than 200 applications from Lanta-Tur Voyage clients.

Ingosstrakh had insured the tour operator for the sum of 100 million rubles (\$3.3 million), which should be enough to pay for all the stranded clients, spokesman Vladimir Kleimyonov said at a meeting with the tourism agency Saturday, Kommersant [reported](#).

Lanta-Tur Voyage president Lyudmila Puchkova said her company collapsed after Master-Bank refused to continue lending it money, Kommersant said.

Yegor Altman, an adviser to the bank's chairman of the board, told The Moscow Times that Master-Bank was not the tour operator's only creditor, but declined to comment further.

Calls to the tour operator's office on Ulitsa Krylatskiye Kholmy, the only one still working, went unanswered Tuesday.

Meanwhile, another of the operator's Moscow offices — on Bolshoi Cherkassky Pereulok — was pelted with stones, Lifenews.ru [reported](#) Tuesday, posting a picture of a broken glass door held together by tape.

City police would examine the attack on the company's office although the office's managers had refused to file an official complaint, a police source told RIA-Novosti.

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