

French Consulate Drops Disruptive Visa Application Rule

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The  **Moscow Times**

The French consulate in Moscow has eliminated a rule that had caused headaches for tour operators, apparently in response to outcry by the industry, Interfax reported Monday.

Beginning on March 12, France's Consulate General tightened a regulation limiting the period in which a visa application could be submitted to no more than 10 working days before the planned travel date. As a result, agencies have only had passports with visas returned to them the night before travel days or even on the day itself.

The French visa center sent out an email to Russian tour companies notifying them that the restrictions had been lifted, Russian Tourism Union spokeswoman Irina Tyurina told Interfax. Beginning Monday, agencies can once again submit between 100 and 150 applications per day, regardless of the travel date.

The Russian Tourism Union sent letters to the French ambassador in Moscow and France's consul general in Russia on Wednesday, asking them to resolve the issue. Tyurina said she assumes the elimination of the new rules came as a response to those letters.

"We have not yet received an official response to our appeal, but we believe that the French Embassy's actions are also an answer. The measures taken speak to the fact that the ambassador plans to solve the problem that has arisen, for which we are grateful," Tyurina said.

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