

Bilateral relations between the former Cold War foes have been strained in recent years over issues including Russia's granting of asylum to U.S. fugitive Edward Snowden and the passage of the U.S. Magnitsky Act, which allows for sanctions against Russian human rights abusers. But the countries have made progress on visa rules for their citizens.

"Currently, the waiting time for an interview is the shortest of all time," McFaul tweeted, urging Russians to apply for visas before the "spring hot time" and stressing that a three-year-visa would cost "only \$160."

An inquiry submitted to the U.S. Embassy for more statistics was not answered in time for publication.

The 2012 bilateral visa agreement extended the validity period of visas for citizens of both countries to three years, up from the former average of one year, for people traveling for tourism, business, a home stay or humanitarian activities.

The deal also abolished the requirement for Americans traveling for business or on a home stay to obtain an invitation from a Russian entity that had to be approved at the Federal Migration Service, a process that took up to a month. Now, U.S. citizens coming to Russia for those purposes need only a notarized invitation that takes just a day to prepare. Moreover, Russian consulates no longer require the invitation to be sent by mail but accept a copy sent by e-mail or fax.

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