

# Russians Find New Holiday Spots After Egypt, Turkey Bans

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Russian officials' expectations that the restrictions would lead to a revival of the domestic travel sector are not borne out by the market.

Russian tour operators have seen increasing demand for tours to India, Thailand, and the UAE following restrictions on travel to Egypt and Turkey — Russians' two preferred destinations in the first half of 2015, Russian media reported on Friday.

At the same time, officials' attempts to revive interest in domestic travel seemed to be falling flat, while the whole outbound tourism sector was expected to shrink 40 percent — with demand for foreign tours set to plunge even further, according to the RBC news portal.

With flights to Egypt banned on Nov. 14 and a de-facto ban on selling package tours to Turkey in place from Nov. 24, Russians have started looking eastwards: the Russian Association of Tour Operators reported a 10-15 percent rise in demand for Thailand packages, with India and Vietnam attracting 5 percent more bookings each, according to its CEO Maya Lomidze, the

Kommersant newspaper and RBC news portal reported Friday.

Alternative destinations in the Middle East have also been sought after, with demand for tours to the UAE climbing 20 percent.

In addition, many tourists seemed unwilling to give up on Turkey: according to Irina Ryabovol from the travel agency Momondo, interest in individual flight bookings to the southern coastal resort of Antalya — traditionally a package destination — has risen 20.4 percent since the embargo came into force, Kommersant reported.

Ryabovol added that Istanbul remained in the top 10 of Russians' favorite destinations in terms of airline ticket searches, Kommersant wrote.

At the same time, Russian officials' expectations that the restrictions would lead to a revival of the domestic travel sector are not borne out by the market.

Despite earlier claims by the head Russia's federal tourism agency Rostourism, Oleg Safonov, that the domestic tourism market could grow by 30 percent by the end of the year, Russian holidaymakers seem only marginally more interested in traveling within the country, the Kommersant report went on to say.

According to Lomidze and Sergei Romashkin, head of the Delfin travel company, the sector could see growth in the region of 10 percent — a “standard” result, the newspaper wrote.

Romashkin went on to name Kaliningrad and Sochi as potential “rising” destinations, while demand for Crimea tours fell due to the recent power blackout, the article went on to say.

“Officials are hoping for a surge in domestic demand, but this is out of the question ... those who planned to sunbathe on an Egyptian beach are hardly likely to go skiing in Krasnaya Polyana instead,” he said, Kommersant reported.

Tours to Egypt and Turkey accounted for 38 percent of all foreign package sales this year, according to Rostourism data, Kommersant reported.

The state-backed RT news portal reported Friday that direct flights between Russia and Egypt could resume soon after Egypt's national carrier addressed security concerns, with EgyptAir waiting for a green light from Russia's federal air transport agency Rosaviatsia.

Russia wants to restore flights to Egypt, but that could only happen when it is confident that Egyptian airports comply with security requirements, the Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said Thursday, RT wrote.

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