

Russian Holidaymakers Return to Europe as Demand for Trips Abroad Surges

By [Ben Aris for bne IntelliNews](#)

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The Moscow Sheremetyevo international airport. **Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

Russian tourists are increasingly booking trips to Europe, with a sharp rise in hotel reservations for Spain, France and Italy, according to leading online travel aggregators.

Overall, outbound tourism from Russia was up by a fourth in 2024 as more than 29 million trips abroad were made last year, including 11.5 million for tourism — a 25% increase on trips made in 2023, Interfax cited the FSB's Border Guard Service as saying.

Direct flights between Russia and the EU were stopped following the invasion of Ukraine three years ago. It is still possible to make the trip via countries not participating in the sanctions such as Turkey and Serbia, although traffic has plummeted as the cost and journey time ballooned. A trip between Moscow and Paris that used to take a couple of hours and cost a couple of hundred euros now takes around 12 hours and costs around 2,000 euros.

But that has not stopped diehard travelers and the numbers of tourists making the effort have been rising. Hotel bookings in Italy for the upcoming spring season (March–May 2025) through OneTwoTrip have surged by one-third year-on-year, while bookings for Spain are up 65% and France 45%, the company reported, the Vedomosti business daily [reported](#).

Italy now accounts for 9.8% of all outbound trips from Russia, up from 7.3% last spring, with France rising to 6.7% from 4.6% and Spain to 3.8% from 2.3%. Yandex Travel recorded even steeper growth, with bookings in Italy increasing 6.5 times, France nearly 7.5 times and Spain 7.6 times.

Related article: [Japan Sees Surge in Russian Tourist Arrivals](#)

The Russian Europe-bound travel sector is rebounding after a sharp decline in the first two years of the war, when the number of trips by Russian citizens to EU countries fell by 26% y/y to 1.73 million, according to FSB data cited by RBC.

However, as bne IntelliNews reported, the military Keynesianism boost the Russian economy has received thanks to heavy state military spending has created a new [war middle class](#), and the quality of life for regular Russians has improved noticeably over the last three years as their [savings swell](#), despite the economic turbulence.

"The stabilization of Schengen visa issuance has contributed to the growth in demand," Dmitry Gorin, vice president of the Russian Union of Travel Industry, told Vedomosti. He noted that in 2024, about 449,000 Schengen visas were issued to Russians for tourism purposes, with 17 of the 29 Schengen-zone countries granting them.

According to the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR), 1.4 million trips were made to EU countries for tourism in 2024. Of these, 800,000 were overland via Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Norway, while 600,000 were taken by air via connecting flights in "friendly" countries.

While online travel platforms such as Ozon Travel and Ostrovok did not disclose exact booking figures, the latter confirmed that Italy and France remain consistently popular destinations year-round. Summer hotel bookings (June–August 2025) in Italy and France have risen by 35% and 12% respectively, according to Russian travel agents.

The inconvenience and cost of visiting Europe have also driven Russians to become more adventurous and they have been traveling further field during the holiday season. In 2024, the number of trips by Russian tourists abroad rose by 15.4%, with Turkey — which still has direct flight connections to Russia and a visa-free regime — accounting for nearly 40% of the market, or 6.2 million trips were made. It is followed by Abkhazia (5.81 million), Kazakhstan (2.81 million), the United Arab Emirates (1.99 million) and China (1.89 million).

But destinations such as Thailand, Mexico and Japan have also seen notable increases in Russian visitors, as the latter, committed to paying more for plane tickets and resigned to longer flights, look around the world for new destinations. For example, trips to Japan were up 2.3-fold y/y in 2024.

The top 10 destinations in 2024 also included Egypt (1.47 million), Georgia (1.35 million), Thailand (1.32 million), China (1.02 million), Armenia (967,700) and Azerbaijan (709,300). Amongst the popular more exotic favorite destinations were Cuba (130,600), Sri Lanka (114,900) and Maldives (102,890).

And during this year's long New Year's break — where most of the country is off until Jan. 14, the so-called "Old New Year" of the Grigorian Calendar — the tourist flow from Russia to Thailand soared by 35% y/y to almost 4 million foreign tourists, according to the Tourism Ministry.

Nevertheless, despite geopolitical tensions, European destinations appear to be regaining popularity among the travel-loving Russian population, bolstered by improved visa access, a recovering tourism industry and rising disposable incomes.

The Russian national carrier Aeroflot has also benefited after it stepped into the empty slots left by the departure of all Western carriers. The number of passengers carried by Aeroflot Group was up almost 2% y/y in January to 3.9 million people. The planes are full of the passenger load factor up to 86% in the reporting period, reaching 88.6% in the domestic segment and 82.8% in the international segment, the airline said Tuesday.

Sanctions have been a boon for domestic tourism operators, forcing their international competitors to leave the market, despite strong demand and rising incomes. In the first nine months of 2024, private and public investment in the Russian tourism industry grew by 44% y/y, reaching 652 billion rubles (\$6.8 billion) — a 1.5-fold increase on a year earlier, Vedomosti cited Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko as saying.

"Tourism and Hospitality" is one of Putin's [National Projects 2.1](#) reform categories that are designed to improve the quality of life for ordinary Russians and domestic tourism has also received considerable investment and subsidies. Under the subsidy program for the construction of modular hotels for 2023–2024, more than 600 projects with a room stock of about 14,500 rooms have been supported. A new call for applications under the program was announced in December and will last until March 3.

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