

INBOUND TOURISM IN RUSSIA HAS BEEN GROWING



According to statistics from the Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, 1.57 million foreign citizens visited Russia for tourism in 2024. In comparison, only 670,700 people traveled to Russia for tourism in 2023. In the pre-COVID year of 2019, the Russian inbound tourism welcomed 5,061,696 foreign tourists, more than three times the number in 2023.

After a sharp decline in 2022, the number of foreign visits to Russia began to recover in 2023. However, this recovery was primarily driven by business travel rather than tourism.

In 2023, 605,400 foreign citizens visited Russia for business, nearly matching the number of leisure tourists. It's worth noting that many visits labeled as "tourist" were, in fact, business trips. Experts have observed that almost all foreign visits to Russia in 2023 were for business tourism rather than leisure.

In 2024, the classic leisure tourism segment experienced a noticeable recovery. Official statistics indicate that 1.57 million foreigners visited for leisure, compared to 611.5 thousand who came for business—nearly 2.5 times fewer.

It's worth mentioning that the recovery of business tourism, which began actively in 2023, has slowed down. In 2024, only 1% more business tourists arrived in Russia compared to 2023, and the numbers still fall short of those in 2019, when there were 3.5 million business visitors. Consequently, the inbound business flow to Russia remains 5.7 times lower than before the pandemic.

Top Source Markets for Russian Inbound Tourism

In 2024, most foreign tourists visiting Russia came from China, with 848,000 visits for leisure purposes, accounting for half of all leisure visits. This marks a substantial increase of 4.2 times compared to 2023 when there were only 200,000 visits. However, this figure has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels; in 2019, Chinese tourists made 1,493,237 trips to Russia for tourism, which is 1.76 times more than in 2024.

Germany ranked second in inbound tourism flow in 2024, with 65,800 visits, reflecting a 21.2% increase compared to the previous year. Experts believe that most of these visits are for personal reasons, such as visiting relatives or for business, rather than tourism. Tour operators note that there are currently only a few isolated instances of German tourists visiting Russia for leisure. Before the pandemic, Germany was a primary source of tourists to Russia, with 522,000 visits for tourism in 2019, but the tourist flow from Germany has since decreased by nearly eight times.

Third among the top inbound tourist sources is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has recently emerged as a significant source market for Russia's tourism. Before the pandemic, the number of visitors from the UAE was minimal, with only 23,000 visits recorded in 2019. However, since last year, the number of tourists from the UAE has been steadily increasing, totaling 65,300 visits for tourism purposes by the end of 2024. This represents a growth of 2.8 times compared to 2019 and a

53.6% increase compared to 2023.

Turkey ranked fourth at the end of 2024, with 58.5 thousand visitors, representing a 23.2% increase compared to 2023. While tourists from Turkey visit Russia, most of these visits are primarily for business. However, many Turkish travelers enjoy sightseeing, dining, and other activities. Notably, the number of visitors from Turkey in 2024 has already surpassed the pre-pandemic figures from 2019 by 7 thousand trips.

Turkmenistan took the fifth place, with 57.4 thousand visitors and a remarkable 65.3% increase compared to 2023. Although the official aim is "tourism," most Turkmen citizens traveling to Russia do so for business, transit, or personal reasons rather than traditional tourism.

Saudi Arabia comes in sixth place. Indeed, there is a growing interest among Saudi tourists in visiting Russia. However, more direct flights and the ability to make payments using foreign bank cards are needed to achieve a more substantial tourist flow. Despite these challenges, 55.2 thousand Saudi Arabian citizens visited Russia in 2024, a figure more than 13 times higher than the pre-COVID total of 4.2 thousand visits in 2019 and seven times greater than the numbers from 2023.

Seventh place goes to Iran. Russia and Iran have an agreement allowing a mutual visa-free regime for organized groups of tourists. This agreement is proving effective: in 2024, the number of Iranian tourists visiting Russia increased by 20,000 compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019, reaching 49,600 visits. This represents a 69.7% increase compared to 2019. Additionally, the flow of Iranian tourists has grown by 68.1% compared to 2023.

Foreigners' Favorite Destinations in Russia

Foreign tourists in Russia typically choose classic tours that last an average of 5 to 7 days. The most popular destinations include Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Murmansk. In 2024, Kazan will also be added to these cities, showing significant growth in popularity.

According to Intourist, one of the leading Russian tour operators, the top five winter destinations for foreign tourists visiting the European part of Russia in 2024-2025 are Moscow (50%), St. Petersburg (25%), Krasnodar Krai (3%), Murmansk (10%), and the Moscow Region (which includes Sergiev Posad) at 5%. Other cities in Russia account for 7%.

Most foreign tourists visit Russia during the summer months, but in 2024, there was a noticeable increase in winter tourism, particularly from Arab markets. During the winter, the number of tourists arriving from some Arab countries was nearly as high as in the summer. Statistics support this observation: in the fourth quarter of 2024, the tourist flow from the UAE reached 22,028 visits, while in the third quarter (from July to September), it totaled 23,953 visits. There were 16,046 visits from Saudi Arabia in the fourth quarter, contributing to 55,167 visits from that country throughout 2024, with 22,923 trips occurring in the third quarter.

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