
Armenian Tourism Industry Unharmed After Public Unrest

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Foreign tourists did not change their minds to visit Armenia because of the March 1 disturbances. Armenian Development Agency Marketing Director Suzanna Azoyan told reporters Monday.

>From February 20 to March 1, Armenia's opposition political forces led by ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosyan were holding rallies in Liberty Square in Yerevan protesting against the results of February 19 presidential elections attributing victory to Prime Minister Serge Sargssyan. As a result of public unrest and clashes between the rally participants and the police, eight people were killed. On March 1, RA President Robert Kocharyan issued a decree on imposing a twenty-day state of emergency in the capital.

"No tourist group, with the exception of a group from Germany, put off their tour to Armenia despite the state of emergency imposed in the country," Azoyan said.

Only a group from Germany consisting of 700-800 members put off the tour to Yerevan scheduled for March 23.

The German tour agency accounted for the decision by the fact that the situation in Armenia requires additional insurance for the tourists which was impossible because they had already paid for the tour.

Azoyan said tourists from other countries, including Japan, arrived in Armenia in the reported period.

RA Trade and Economic Development Ministry's Tourism Department Chief Mekhak Apresyan stated that any political instability, both in the country and in the region, immediately tells upon the volumes of tourism inflow.

However, he said at the moment he can provide no statistical data of influence of March levents on the number of tourists visiting Armenia. The data will be calculated based on the quarterly analysis only.

"Despite the current situation, Armenia continues working with private and international organizations and pursuing its marketing policy of shaping an image of a stable and secure country favourable for investments," Apresyan said.

He said even the bird flue epidemics did not hamper tourism development in the world. Quite the contrary, 6.5% tourism growth instead of usual 4.5% was recorded in the world.

"This shows that neither bird flu nor any other cataclysm is able to make people give up their travel plans," Apresyan said.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, the number of tourists visiting Armenia in 2007 increased 33.5% and totalled 510,300 against 382,200 recorded in 2006. In the reported period the number of Armenians travelling abroad totalled 467,000 which is a 38.7% growth.

Armenian government is planning to increase during the coming 5-7 years the number of tourists travelling to Armenia up to one million yearly. A foreign tourist spends on average \$1,300-\$1,400 during a week's stay in Yerevan.
