

# SEF offers tips on how to get home from China for Lunar New Year



Taipei, Jan. 31 (CNA) In the wake of Chinese carriers China Eastern Airlines Corp. and Xiamen Air canceling planned extra cross-Taiwan Strait flights for the Lunar New Year holiday, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) on Wednesday suggested a number of ways for those wanting to return to Taiwan for the festivities.

Both China Eastern Airlines and Xiamen Air announced a day earlier that they have been “forced” to cancel plans for 176 additional flights for the Feb. 15-20 holiday because of Taiwan’s delays in approving them in protest over China’s launch of several new routes without consulting Taiwan.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) denied requests from the two Chinese airlines for additional flights to Taiwan that would have used the north-south M503 flight route, as well as the W121, W122 and W123 extension routes, in protest over China’s unilateral decision to launch the routes without first negotiating with Taiwan.

According to the Commercial Times, the canceled additional flights will affect up to 50,000 passengers.

According to the SEF, the canceled flights will affect eight airports, but seats are currently still available on scheduled flights and approved extra flights.

The eight affected airports were named as Shanghai Pudong, Wuxi, Nanjing, Hefei, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Hangzhou and Changsha.

If no bookings are available for the eight airports, then passengers can consider traveling to nearby airports to seek alternative flights, the SEF added.

Meanwhile, the CAA is seeking to coordinate with Taiwanese carriers to apply for extra services or to increase seating capacity, according to the SEF.

China Airlines, Taiwan's biggest carrier, has applied to the CAA for an additional nine flights and is awaiting approval from the relevant authorities in China, according to the SEF, which added that EVA Air, another major Taiwanese carrier, also plans to use larger planes for some flights during the period.

At the same time, the SEF has also encouraged Chinese carriers to apply for extra services in order to transport more passengers.

There are about 80 regularly scheduled flights daily between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, and the CAA is hoping for increased services for these destinations. The carriers have said they will evaluate demand and make the necessary adjustments.

The CAA is also coordinating to increase ferry services on the mini-three links and plane services between Taiwan and the outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu, according to the SEF.

Apart from Feb. 15-16, ferry services are available daily from Pingtan to Taipei and Taichung, according to the SEF, adding that on Feb. 13, 750 ferry seats will be available.

The SEF, which is controlled by the Mainland Affairs Council, is a semi-official organization set up by Taiwan to handle affairs relating to China.

(By Miao Zong-han and William Yen)

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## Google plans to make Taipei its largest R&D center in Asia Pacific



Taipei, Jan. 30 (CNA) Taipei will become the biggest research and development center of Google Inc., which completed a deal on Tuesday to acquire a large part of Taiwan's HTC Corp.'s smartphone assets, a Google executive said Tuesday.

"With the official close of this deal, we're expanding our footprint in the Asia Pacific region," Rick Osterloh, senior vice president of Google's hardware operations, said in his blog. "Taiwan is a key innovation and engineering hub for Google, and Taipei will now become the largest Google engineering site in APAC."

In a filing with the Taiwan Stock Exchange, HTC said it had completed the deal to sell its smartphone ODM assets to the American company for US\$1.1 billion, following the announcement of the acquisition last September and the regulatory approval three months later.

Under the deal, about 2,000 HTC engineers will go to work for Google, an American technology company that specializes in Internet-related services and products.

“(We) are welcoming an incredibly talented team to work on even better and more innovative products in the years to come.” Osterloh said. “These new colleagues bring decades of experience achieving a series of ‘firsts’ particularly in the smartphone industry – including bringing to market the first 3G smartphone in 2005, the first touch-centric phone in 2007, and the first all-metal unibody phone in 2013.”

He said it was the same HTC team that had been working closely with Google on the development of its Pixel and Pixel 2 smartphones.

Google, which is entering its third year in the hardware business, will get to work immediately with its new teammates, combining the best of its artificial intelligence, software and hardware resources, Osterloh said.

HTC, meanwhile, said it has retained a team of about 2,000 smartphone engineers that will continue to develop new models under the HTC brand.

The Taiwanese company is expected to use the proceeds from the deal with Google to strengthen its virtual reality business and cushion the losses in its smartphone operations, according to market analysts.

However, because HTC’s hardware business has been one of its major revenue sources, the disposal of a chunk of those assets is likely to shrink its bottom line in the long run, analysts

said.

The company's relatively new virtual reality operations, an attempt at product diversification, account for only a fraction of its overall sales, according to analysts.

In the third quarter of 2017, HTC posted a loss per share of NT\$3.8 (US\$0.13), registering a net loss for the 10th straight quarter

After the announcement of the completion of the deal with Google on Tuesday, HTC shares rose 1.71 percent to close at NT\$71.40 on the Taiwan stock market, which ended 1.29 percent lower at 11,076.78.

(By Jeffrey Wu and Frances Huang)

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## President calls for unity on diplomatic front



Taipei, Jan. 31 (CNA) President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Wednesday called on Taiwan's political parties to work together for diplomatic purposes despite vigorous

disagreements on domestic policy issues.

Tsai made the remarks while meeting with a delegation from the Solomon Islands led by Ajilon Nasiu, speaker of the country's National Parliament.

Tsai said that when she delivered a speech to the National Parliament during her visit to the Pacific ally in November 2017, she was impressed by the way leaders of both the ruling and opposition political parties attended even though then Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare was facing a vote of no confidence.

At that time, despite fierce competition over domestic issues, they still worked together on the diplomatic front, the president said, adding that more than 80 percent of parliamentarians attended the speech.

Tsai said that although it is common to see fierce arguments on domestic issues or conflicts between political parties in democratic Taiwan, people expect the parties to work together in the promotion of diplomatic work.

The unity demonstrated by the Solomon Islands Parliament and Nasiu's outstanding leadership made a deep impression on her, Tsai added.

Turning to bilateral cooperation, Tsai said the two countries have achieved much cooperating in the areas of medicine and healthcare, agricultural technology, talent cultivation and clean energy development.

Meanwhile, the two countries have signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) on aviation, police cooperation, weather forecasting and harbor-to-harbor cooperation.

Noting that Taiwan's Legislative Yuan established a Taiwan-Solomon Islands legislative friendship group in June last year, Tsai said she looks forward to seeing closer engagement

between parliamentarians from the two countries.

She also expressed hope that the Solomon Islands will continue to support Taiwan and help expand its international space.

(By Yeh Su-ping and Evelyn Kao)

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## Chinese airlines 'forced to cancel' extra Lunar New Year flights



Taipei, Jan. 30 (CNA) Two Chinese airlines have been “forced to cancel” plans to operate extra cross-Taiwan Strait flights during the Lunar New Year holiday that were still pending approval from Taiwan to avoid inconveniencing travelers, the airlines said Tuesday.

Both China Eastern Airlines and Xiamen Air released statements saying they had to cancel their extra flights because they could not afford to keep waiting for Taiwan’s response on those flights out of consideration for their customers.

Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) announced on Jan. 19 that it was withholding approval for the two airlines' applications to operate extra flights across the Taiwan Strait over the Lunar New Year period because of safety concerns.

The CAA's move was made in response to China's unilateral decision to launch four new commercial air routes in the Taiwan Strait, including a northbound M503 route, on Jan. 4, and the two Chinese airlines' use of those new routes in the following weeks.

According to their statements, China Eastern's cancellation of its 106 additional flights has affected nearly 40,000 travelers, while Xiamen Air's cancellation of 70 flights has affected over 10,000 people.

Both airlines are in the process of reimbursing or rescheduling flights for those who booked tickets with them.

In its statement, China Eastern expressed disapproval of the Taiwan government's decision to withhold approval, and said many experts had been consulted and found no existing safety issues with the new routes.

Xiamen Air said, meanwhile, that Taiwan's actions ignored the needs of the people of both sides of the strait and had severely damaged relations between people across the Taiwan Strait.

On Monday, Taiwan's Ministry of Transportation and Communications said military aircraft will be used to transport Taiwanese in China home from Kinmen for the Lunar New Year holiday if no consensus is reached on the controversy over the M503 route.

To board the flights, Taiwanese passengers will have to use the "mini-three links" mechanism established between the two sides in 2001, meaning they will have to travel to Xiamen in Fujian province first in order to take ferries to Kinmen.

(By Yang Sheng-ju, Chen Chia-lun and Kuan-lin Liu)

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# How fearless Russian explorers beat the Brits to discover Antarctica



Адмирал Фёдор Фаддеевич Фаддеев  
(по гравировке Э. Штейнле, опубликованной в 1855 г.)

While Amerigo Vespucci and James Cook only presumed that the Antarctic continent exists, Russian sailors were the ones who discovered it almost 200 years ago this month.

“I’m sure there is land there, and we even saw a part of it,” wrote British Captain James Cook after sailing to the Southern Ocean during his trip around the world. He understood that it would be hard to reach the Antarctic continent because of the harsh conditions. Well, Russians also knew that, but they went for it anyway.

## Rivals on the seas

The Russian and British empires had long been rivals on the

seas. So, when the famous British naval commander and explorer, James Cook, reported his supposed finding of a southernmost land, it became clear that its lawful discovery would only be a matter of time. Meanwhile, British seal hunters often sailed the Southern Ocean.

The Russians understood that the British were likely to discover the new lands. But since they had sailed among heavy ice since medieval times, the Russians had a certain advantage, and they knew ways to make vessels ice-prone and how to sail in extreme conditions.

In the early 19th century, at the time of the Napoleonic wars, the rivalry between the Russian and British fleets was intense. Who would be the first to discover the southernmost continent? After the First Russian Circumnavigation (1803-1806) lead by Ivan Kruzenshtern, the Russians were convinced that they could accomplish it.



## Preparation

On July 16, 1819, two Russian warships – *Mirny*, and *Vostok* – set sail from Kronshtadt, arriving in Rio de Janeiro by mid November. The 41-year-old second captain, Faddey Bellinsgauzen, who took part in the First Circumnavigation under Kruzenshtern, was appointed head of the new expedition,

which became Russia's first to the furthest part of the Southern Ocean.

The sailors were well prepared, stocked with fermented cabbage and lemons that are good sources of vitamin C to help avoid scurvy. To conserve the sources of vitamins, the sailors took advantage of every port of call on their way south, exchanging money and goods for fresh fruit. To stay warm, the sailors had a sizable stock of rum.

The crew took all precautions to maintain good hygiene – every day airing their clothes, frequently cleaning cabins and beds, and even having a Russian *banya* on board. In the end, only one sailor died during the voyage; the poor man succumbing to what was described as a “nervous fever” after crossing the Antarctic Circle.

*Vostok* was manned by a crew of 117 under Capt. Bellinsgauzen's command; while 73 sailors served aboard *Mirny*, which was headed by 31-year-old Lt. Mikhail Lazarev. These two ships, however, were different. *Mirny* was built by Russian naval engineers and had special features to protect its from the pressure of the ice. *Vostok* was built according to British designs and was plagued by problems; she had to be mended and repaired frequently during the expedition, and her weakness later played a role in the discovery of Antarctica.

Apart from the sailors, on board were a doctor, a painter, an astronomy professor and an Orthodox priest – the explorers needed religious services, and hoped to find natives on the land they were searching for, hoping to convert them to Christianity. The crew also had guns and cannons in case the natives were unfriendly. In the end, there was no one to convert or fight, which didn't make the expedition easier.



## Discovery

From Rio the ships sailed directly to Antarctic waters, where the crew saw new lands – for example, Sandwich Land, which had been discovered and named by James Cook; in fact turning out to be the Sandwich Islands. The Russians also discovered various islands, naming them after members of the expedition.

On January 28, 1820, the two ships closed in on the Antarctic shore. Lt. Lazarev reported “a mighty ice cover of great height stretching as far as the eye could see.” This was the Antarctic ice shield that covered the newly discovered continent. At the same time, the Antarctic winter had fully set in, and in order to rest and recover the Russian ships sailed to Port Jackson, (Sydney), Australia.

“Our ships were constantly among ice. People were suffering great hardships from the harshness of the winds that dominate these seas, and even more from the thick darkness, and wet and heavy snows that are often and abundant here. Frost accompanied us throughout our sailing. The ice mountains, some more than 400 feet above the sea [Russian feet, about 120 meters], and some wider than 15 miles in diameter, were our constant adversaries. We had to protect ourselves with the greatest precautions and the strictest vigilance. The tiniest mistake could have brought our ventures to ruin.” This is how Capt. Bellinsgauzen described the voyage in his report sent from Port Jackson to the Naval Ministry in St. Petersburg.

Almost a year later, in December 1820, the Russian ships again crossed the Antarctic Circle, returning to describe more lands. After a month, however, the condition of *Vostok* worsened to the point that it was too dangerous to sail on. In January 1821, the ships headed back, and on August 5, 1821, they returned to Kronstadt where Emperor Alexander I greeted them – a great honor for the crew, who were decorated with medals, titles and handsome new appointments. The whole voyage took 751 days.

The next time Russians landed on an Antarctic shore came 136 years later, in 1956, during the Soviet Antarctic Expedition, which founded and built the first Russian scientific research station in Antarctica. Named *Mirny*, the station honors one of the famous Russian vessels that discovered the sixth continent.

For further reading on Russian discoveries, check out our project on how Russians explored Alaska, or look at the greatest explorers in Russian history. For something more up to date, discuss why people in Russia hate Muscovites.

**RUSSIA BEYOND** : How fearless Russian explorers beat the Brits to discover Antarctica

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## **2017 International Tourism Results: the highest in seven years**



*International tourist arrivals grew by a remarkable 7% in 2017 to reach a total of 1,322 million, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. This strong momentum is expected to continue in 2018 at a rate of 4%-5%.*



Based on data reported by destinations around the world, it is estimated that international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) worldwide increased 7% in 2017. This is well above the sustained and consistent trend of 4% or higher growth since 2010 and represents the strongest results in seven years.

Led by Mediterranean destinations, Europe recorded extraordinary results for such a large and rather mature region, with 8% more international arrivals than in 2016. Africa consolidated its 2016 rebound with an 8% increase. Asia and the Pacific recorded 6% growth, the Middle East 5% and the Americas 3%.



2017 was characterised by sustained growth in many destinations and a firm recovery in those that suffered decreases in previous years. Results were partly shaped by the global economic upswing and the robust outbound demand from many traditional and emerging source markets, particularly a rebound in tourism spending from Brazil and the Russian Federation after a few years of declines.

“International travel continues to grow strongly, consolidating the tourism sector as a key driver in economic development. As the third export sector in the world, tourism is essential for job creation and the prosperity of communities around the world.” said UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili. “Yet as we continue to grow we must work closer together to ensure this growth benefits every member of every host community, and is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals”.

### **Growth expected to continue in 2018**

The current strong momentum is expected to continue in 2018, though at a more sustainable pace after eight years of steady expansion following the 2009 economic and financial crisis. Based on current trends, economic prospects and the outlook by the UNWTO Panel of Experts, UNWTO projects international tourist arrivals worldwide to grow at a rate of 4%-5% in 2018. This is somewhat above the 3.8% average increase projected for the period 2010-2020 by UNWTO in its *Tourism Towards 2030* long-term forecast. Europe and the Americas are both

expected to grow by 3.5%-4.5%, Asia and the Pacific by 5%-6%, Africa by 5%-7% and the Middle East by 4%-6%.



### **2017 results by UNWTO region**

International tourist arrivals in **Europe** reached 671 million in 2017, a remarkable 8% increase following a comparatively weaker 2016. Growth was driven by the extraordinary results in Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+13%). Western Europe (+7%), Northern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe (both +5%) also recorded robust growth.

**Asia and the Pacific** (+6%) recorded 324 million international tourist arrivals in 2017. Arrivals in South Asia grew 10%, in South-East Asia 8% and in Oceania 7%. Arrivals to North-East Asia increased by 3%.

The **Americas** (+3%) welcomed 207 million international tourist arrivals in 2017, with most destinations enjoying positive results. South America (+7%) led growth, followed by Central America and the Caribbean (both +4%), with the latter showing clear signs of recovery in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria. In North America (+2%), robust results in Mexico and Canada contrasted with a decrease in the United States, the region's largest destination.

Based on available data for **Africa**, growth in 2017 is estimated at 8%. The region consolidated its 2016 rebound and reached a record 62 million international arrivals. North Africa enjoyed a strong recovery with arrivals growing by 13%,

while in Sub-Saharan Africa arrivals increased by 5%.

The **Middle East** (+5%) received 58 million international tourist arrivals in 2017 with sustained growth in some destinations and a strong recovery in others.

*Note: All results in this release are based on preliminary data, as reported by the various destinations around the world, and on estimates by UNWTO of still-missing data. UNWTO will continue to collect data and will present more comprehensive data by country in the April issue of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. Results for both Africa and the Middle East should be read with caution as they are based on limited available data.*

#### **Useful links:**

UNWTO World Tourism Barometer

UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2017 Edition

International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017

Infographics

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## **China Airlines, Air France to provide codeshare flights**



Taipei, Jan. 3 (CNA) China Airlines, one of the country's leading airlines, announced Wednesday it will partner with Air France to provide three codeshare flights a week from April 16, to better serve the Taipei-Paris route.

The route will be flown by Air France, which announced last month its intention to return to Taiwan after a hiatus of 20 years, flying from Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

CAL flight CI-9237 from Taipei to Paris will depart at 10:25 a.m. from Taipei and arrive in Paris at 4:20 p.m. every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday, while flight CI-9238 from Paris to Taipei will depart on Monday, Thursday and Saturday at 1:35 p.m. from Paris and arrive in Taipei at 8:15 a.m. the next day.

CAL said it has high hopes for the new services, explaining that since both airlines are SkyTeam members, the route could expand their mutual networks and eventually maximize benefits to the airline alliance.

Currently, EVA Airways, a rival of CAL, is the only carrier to serve the Taipei-Paris route, with one round-trip flight per day, which it has offered since 1993.

Johnson Wan (溫國祥), Air France-KLM Group's country manager for Taiwan, said Taipei will be the only Asian destination added to the Air France network in 2018.

Plans to reopen the Taipei-Paris route started nearly two years ago, Wan said, adding that the service could be especially appealing to business travelers, who are expected to account for more than half the passengers.

(By Lee Hsin-Yin)

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## **EVA Air ranked among world's 20 safest airlines**



Taipei, Jan. 4 (CNA) Taiwan-based EVA Airways (EVA Air) remains one of the safest airlines in the world, ranking in the top 20 on a 2018 list compiled by the website [AirlineRatings.com](http://AirlineRatings.com).

In its latest report published on Jan. 3, the airline safety ratings website said EVA had maintained its place on the top-20 list for five years in a row among the 400-plus

airlines that were monitored.

The safety rating for each airline is based on comprehensive analysis, utilizing information from the world's aviation governing bodies and leading associations, as well as government information and crash data, said AirlineRatings.com Editor-in-Chief Geoffrey Thomas.

However, the website does not consider just the number of incidents, he said.

"All airlines have incidents every day and many are aircraft manufacture issues, not airline operational problems," Thomas said. "And it is the way the flight crew handles incidents that determines a good airline from an unsafe one. So just lumping all incidents together is very misleading."

He said the top ranked airlines are standouts in the industry and are at the forefront of safety, innovation, and launching of new aircraft.

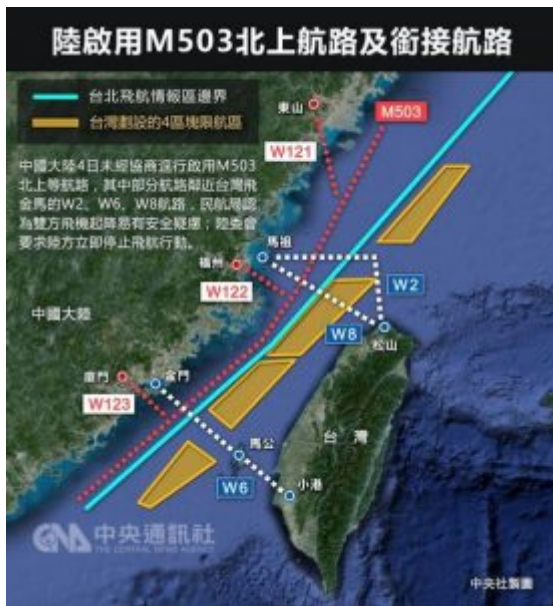
Apart from EVA Air, the other airlines ranked among the 20 safest in the world were Air New Zealand, Alaska Airlines, All Nippon Airways, British Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Finnair, Hawaiian Airlines, Japan Airlines, KLM, Lufthansa, Qantas, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Scandinavian Airline System, Singapore Airlines, Swiss, Virgin Atlantic, and Virgin Australia, in alphabetical order.

The website also listed the 10 safest low-cost airlines, namely Aer Lingus, Flybe, Frontier, HK Express, Jetblue, Jetstar Australia, Thomas Cook, Virgin America, Vueling, and Westjet, in alphabetical order.

(By Lee Hsin-Yin)

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# Taiwan calls for talks with China on aviation issues



Taipei, Jan. 7 (CNA) Taiwan is calling for discussions with China on issues related to aviation management in the Taiwan Strait, in the wake of China's recent unilateral activation of four aviation routes close to the median line of the strait.

Last week, China reneged on a 2015 cross-strait agreement with Taiwan and unilaterally activated four new aviation routes in the Taiwan Strait – a northbound path on the M503 route and three east-west extension routes called W121, W122 and W123.

The M503 at its nearest point is only 7.8 km from the centerline of the strait and close to the Taipei Flight Information Region, while the W122 and W123 are close to Taiwan's offshore islands of Matsu and Kinmen, respectively.

China's move to open the four flight routes without prior negotiation with Taiwan has sparked concerns in Taipei about potential intrusions into domestic flight routes to and from

Matsu and Kinmen.

Detailing such concerns, Lin Kuo-shian (林國顯), director-general of Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), said Xiang'an International Airport, under construction on China's southeast coast, is just 10 kilometers from Kinmen.

The Xiang'an airport in Xiamen, which is being built to ease congestion at Gaoqi International Airport in the same city in Fujian Province, is scheduled to be completed in 2020, he noted.

If the new airport begins operations without prior cross-strait negotiations, it will have a huge impact of air traffic in and out of Shang Yi Airport in Kinmen, as it is even closer than the Gaoqi airport, Lin said.

Expressing similar views, another CAA official Shiue Shao-yi (謝紹宜) said it is essential for civil aviation authorities in China and Taiwan hold discussions on flight route controls and other relevant issues before the Xiang'an airport opens.

He declined, however, to comment on aviation experts' speculations that when the new airport opens, a new flight route will be launched from Xiang'an to link with Taiwan's domestic routes to and from Kinmen.

It is not yet clear what routes Xiang'an airport will use, Shiue said.

(By Wang Shu-fen and Evelyn Kao)

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# Taiwan protests China's unilateral launch of new flight routes



Taipei, Jan. 4 (CNA) Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) protested strongly on Thursday against China's unilateral announcement of new flight routes close to the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

At a press conference, MAC Minister Chang Hsiao-yueh (張曉軍) said the decision was unacceptable, particularly if China intended to exert political pressure on Taiwan and impose a military threat under the guise of initiating new flight routes.

She called on China to immediately stop all flight operations on the routes and to initiate communication between the aviation authorities on both sides of the strait.

Such a move should have been discussed through cross-strait consultations, Chang said in response to an announcement by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) earlier in the day that China was opening the M503 and other connecting routes to northbound commercial flights.

The CAAC said the move will help ease air traffic congestion

along China's southeast coast, meet the increasing demand for air travel west of the Taiwan Strait, and improve aviation safety.

The M503, which was opened in 2015 to China's southbound commercial traffic, was designed to avoid the routes used for domestic flights between Taiwan proper and its outlying Kinmen and Matsu islands and thus ensure aviation safety over the Taiwan Strait, the CAAC said, adding that it will maintain communication with its Taiwanese counterpart on the issue.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND), however, said it was strongly opposed to China's latest decision, which was taken without any consultation with Taiwan.

If Chinese airplanes intrude into the air space east of the median line in the Taiwan Strait and pose any threat to Taiwan's aviation safety, Taiwan's military will take action to intercept, warn and repel the intruding aircraft, the MND said.

Meanwhile, the Presidential Office said the Taiwan government was fully aware of the situation and will ensure the country's aviation safety and national security.

China's decision on Thursday followed a similar pattern as when it first decided to open the M503 route for commercial flights. At that time, China started with an announcement on Jan. 12, 2015 that it planned to launch four new flight routes over the Taiwan Strait, including a north-south M503 route.

The announcement drew strong opposition from Taiwan, which expressed fears that the plan would compromise aviation safety in the region and infringe on Taiwan's sovereignty.

Beijing eventually agreed to move the M503 six nautical miles to the west of the median line in the Taiwan Strait and use it only for southbound flights. China also canceled its plans for the other routes.

The M503 flight path, therefore, fell 10.2 nautical miles west of the median line and was officially opened on March 29, 2015 for commercial flights, following consultations with Taiwan.

(By Miao Zong-han, Lin Ke-lun and Evelyn Kao)

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## **Number of US Tourists Visiting Russia Grows 25% in 2017 – Russian Trade Envoy**

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) – The number of American tourists visiting Russia has grown significantly this year, while Russian exports have also performed well, the Russian Trade Representative in the United States, Aleksander Stadnik, told Sputnik.



“Today, American tourists visiting our country rank third after Chinese and German tourists. Since the beginning of the year, the total flow of tourists from the United States to Russia has grown by a quarter,” Stadnik said on Thursday.

Stadnik noted that between 270,000 and 280,000 US tourists visited Russia in 2017.

“That is nearly double the number of tourists from the United States in 2013, after their number decreased in 2014 and 2015,” Stadnik noted.



Russia-US relations have deteriorated since 2014 after the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine and Crimea's reunification with Russia. The

United States and some of its allies have imposed several rounds of sanctions against Russia.

**READ MORE:** Russia Notifies US of Rejection of Several Agreements Within Open Skies Treaty

In addition, the United States has accused Russia of meddling in its 2016 presidential election. Russia has repeatedly refuted allegations of meddling and called the claims groundless.

### **US-Russia trade turnover**



The US-Russia trade turnover has increased by 15-17 percent this year and hopefully the growth will reach 20 percent in 2018, Aleksander Stadnik told Sputnik.

"We expect the year-end results to show that trade turnover has risen by 15-17 percent. We will aim for at least 20 percent next year," Stadnik said Thursday.

This year's results indicate an increase of about 2.7 billion dollars in trade turnover as compared to 2016, he added.

Stadnik noted that non-commodity goods account for about 97.5 percent of Russian exports to the United States.

“At the same time, there is growth in exports of our non-commodity, non-energy goods by almost 20 percent, high-tech goods by more than 42 percent, innovative goods by 28 percent, and machinery and technical products by almost 22 percent,” he said. “Commodity exports, despite only amounting to 2.5 percent, have also grown by more than 20 percent.”

Stadnik also said that Russia’s imports from the United States are almost 100 percent non-commodity goods, which grew by 16.5 percent this year.

The import of high-tech goods increased by almost 24.5 percent, innovative goods by 21 percent, and machinery and technical products by 20.5 percent, he added.

“Russian and American business circles are actively seeking new opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation,” Stadnik said, adding that they are looking into developing sustainable trade, unified and transparent mechanisms and standards for commodity flows, transport and logistic infrastructure.

Stadnik said that regardless of the current state of relations between Russia and the United States in terms of trade and economics, the two countries’ business communities continue to actively engage in mutually beneficial cooperation.



**READ MORE:** Strengthening of Sanctions to Be Overwhelming Risk for Russia-US Ties – Kremlin

The trade envoy noted that Russia supports such cooperation at the highest levels, citing President Vladimir Putin's meeting with the heads of some 150 US companies at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, as well as meetings that the Russian Trade Minister and Economic Development Minister held with US business leaders in New York to the invitation of the US-Russia Business Council.

"There were no such initiatives taken by the US," he added.

## **Western Sanctions**

"The whole period of the latest western sanctions demonstrates that Russia has been successfully resolving import substitution issues with respect to essential goods – the best example is agriculture – as well as attracting investors," Stadnik said.

Stadnik noted that some investment banks have warned of alleged dangers of investing in Russia given the sanctions, but added that there is no stopping Russia's economic growth.

"But this is mainly Western banks, such as Merrill Lynch," Stadnik said. "Russia cannot be stopped by sanctions. This is not a slogan, it is an objective reality, confirmed by the growing macroeconomic indicators and the growing authority of our country."

In the spring of 2014, after Crimea reunified with Russia, the United States and EU restricted the access of the largest Russian banks and companies to Western financing and introduced sectoral sanctions.

SPUTNIK