vinetur

Russia’s new 35% spirits tariff will lift imported whiskey, gin and liqueur prices by up to 260 rubles a bottle

Analysts expect the clearest consumer impact in early 2027 after old stock runs out, with foreign assortments shrinking

Monday, November 16, 2026



Russia’s increase in import duties on spirits from countries the Kremlin classifies as “unfriendly” is expected to raise retail prices for imported whiskey, gin and liqueurs by about 200 to 260 rubles a bottle and reduce the range of foreign labels on supermarket shelves in 2027, according to alcohol-market specialists interviewed by the Russian newspaper Moskovski Komsomolets on November 15.

The measure took effect in November and lifted the duty on those products to 35% from 20%, the newspaper said. The change applies to imported distilled spirits from the affected countries and comes as Moscow continues to use tariffs and other trade restrictions in response to Western sanctions and wider political tensions.

Analysts cited by the newspaper said the higher duty will not necessarily show up in store prices immediately. Yuri Yudich, who heads the analytical group Alkoexpert, said the increase on pure alcohol content moves through the full pricing chain, including customs duties, value-added tax and markups by importers and retailers. Based on that, he estimated that well-known imported brands would become roughly 200 to 260 rubles more expensive for a 0.5- to 0.7-liter bottle. But he also said the short-term effect could be softened by existing inventories and by year-end discounting as retailers compete for holiday sales.

That means the clearest effect may not be visible until the first quarter of 2027, after stocks purchased before the tariff change are sold and New Year promotions end. Ivan Volkov, an independent alcohol-market expert interviewed by the paper, said the market has substantial reserves built up in recent months, which should delay the full pass-through to consumers. He said buyers would “inevitably” see higher prices on favored products once new purchases are made under the new duty regime.

For the Russian consumer, the impact is likely to be uneven. Several experts told the newspaper that buyers in the premium segment are less sensitive to price changes and may continue purchasing imported brands even if bottle prices rise. Volkov said a customer already paying around 5,000 rubles for a bottle of high-end whiskey is unlikely to be deterred by another 1,000 rubles. Yudich argued that many buyers of established foreign labels remain loyal to brands they have known for years and may absorb an extra 200 to 260 rubles on a bottle priced at 1,500 to 2,000 rubles.

The effect may be sharper in the middle of the market, especially for families that buy imported spirits only on special occasions. Experts told the newspaper that those consumers may either reduce how much they buy or switch to lower-priced alternatives, including Russian-made products or imports from countries outside the tariff measure. One likely result is a narrower imported assortment in mainstream retail, with supermarkets keeping only the best-known labels that reliably draw shoppers.

That shift matters beyond the spirits aisle. Imported whiskey, gin and liqueurs face a higher barrier to the Russian market, which could accelerate import substitution by domestic producers and leave less shelf space for foreign brands over time. Retailers also treat alcohol as a driver of store traffic, meaning changes in the spirits mix can influence broader beverage sales and related purchases during holiday shopping.

Ruslan Bragin, a member of Russia’s Guild of Marketers, told the newspaper that the tariff increase is a protectionist step designed to help local producers expand. He said many Russian distilleries have already added facilities capable of producing whiskey distillates and argued that the market has been moving gradually toward domestic supply in several categories. According to Bragin, gin sold in Russia is already about 90% Russian-made, while rum is about 30% Russian-made. He said imported spirits account for a relatively small share of total alcohol sold in Russia, where vodka, beer and domestically produced brandy remain more common purchases.

Still, analysts differed on how far local substitutes can go. Yudich said Russian producers may use the added pricing freedom to launch more products that resemble familiar imported categories, while Volkov was more skeptical that imports from “friendly” countries would fill the gap at scale. In his view, the practical result in 2027 could be a much smaller imported assortment, potentially limited to a handful of global brands with enough demand to justify higher costs and tighter margins.

The geography of the tariff is also complex. Bragin said the duty depends on where a product is made and on the corporate structure behind it. That means some rum from Latin America could still be affected if it is supplied through companies registered in countries on Russia’s “unfriendly” list. Tequila may be less exposed because it is

imported from Mexico, which is not on that list, he said.

The newspaper’s report said Russian authorities expect additional budget revenue from the higher duty, but the experts it interviewed warned that the fiscal outcome is uncertain. If higher prices reduce import volumes, total customs receipts could fall short of expectations. Bragin said revenue projections based on current shipment levels may prove too optimistic if importers cut the number of brands they bring in or reduce volumes on marginal labels.

The holiday period may temporarily mask those pressures. Yudich said retailers are likely to push aggressive pre-New Year promotions, and he argued that well-known alcohol brands remain important for attracting shoppers who also buy food, soft drinks and household goods in the same trip. He said chains may continue using parallel imports and accept lower margins on some imported spirits to preserve foot traffic. He also gave a rough illustration of the price gap in the holiday basket: a combination of still wine, sparkling wine and a Russian-made spirit costs about 2,000 rubles, while swapping the domestic spirit for an imported one raises the total to roughly 3,000 to 4,000 rubles.

Some experts also rejected the idea that the tariff shift will lead to a broad move into homemade alcohol. Yudich said he does not expect a mass return to home distilling or infused spirits, arguing that consumers generally see industrially produced alcohol as safer because it is subject to formal controls. That suggests the main adjustment will happen inside the legal retail market, through higher prices, fewer imported labels and more domestic alternatives.

Taken together, the November tariff increase points to a slower but significant reshaping of Russia’s spirits market. Consumers may still find their preferred imported whiskey or gin through the New Year season, especially if retailers are clearing older stock, but analysts interviewed by Moskovski Komsomolets expect the real test to come in early 2027, when fresh imports arrive under the new 35% duty and stores decide how much foreign shelf space is still worth carrying.