

The Arab and Muslim Worlds

Tremendous potential for the development of adventure tourism

London-Karen Dabrowska

Tour operators from the Arab and Muslim world who participated in the Daily Telegraph's Adventure Travel and Sports Show held in London in mid-January were convinced there is tremendous potential for the development of adventure tourism in the region.

More than 250 exhibitors offered specialist holiday advice on planning trips beyond the normal ranging from far-flung islands and remote beaches to more active vacations including trekking, hiking, diving, cycling, white water rafting and safari. The show also featured talks and lectures by explorers, expedition leaders, climbers, divers, travel writers and photographers.

Destinations like Turkey and Oman cater to all aspects of adventure tourism: water sports, mountaineering and desert exploration. "Everything you want to do in adventure travel can be done in Turkey", Murat Ozguc of Kapadokya Balloons told Islamic Tourism. Man originally conquered the skies with the hot air balloon. He is convinced Turkey is the best place for ballooning in the world.

Chris Beal, long time adventurer in Oman who served in the sultan's army for 14 years, has joined forces with Rob Gardner of the Muscat Dive and Adventure Centre to bring together all the elements of adventurous and desert safari activity in "this beautiful and diverse country".

Featuring more than 1,700 kilometres of coastline, sun, sea and sand are in ample supply. Watersports of every variety from diving, snorkelling, windsurfing and deep-sea fishing can easily be arranged. The starkly beautiful ancient fjords of the Musandam Peninsula, with dramatic mountain-hugging roads, provide



Kadir Kaya promoting Turkey.

قادر كايا يروج لسياحة تركيا.

spectacular vistas. The Hajjar Mountains and Oman's highest peak, Jebel Akhdar or Green Mountain, provide some thrilling rock climbing experiences. Wahiba Sands, with its endless stretches of desert extending to the Rub Al Khali or the Empty Quarter is a good place to experience the Bedouin way of life, while the many wadis, or dry river beds, provide the unique thrill of "wadi-bashing" in rugged four-wheel drives. Majlis al Jinn, the second largest cave chamber in the world, complete with a subterranean lake is a cave explorer's dream come true.

The Jordanian Tourism Board which is focusing on promoting regional tourism and attracting visitors from other Arab countries and the Moroccan Tourist Board had

impressive, well illustrated stands. Jordan's wadi rum is probably the jewel in the crown of adventure travel. Geologists believe the valley resulted from a great crack on the surface of the earth caused by an enormous upheaval which shattered mammoth pieces of granite and sandstone ridges from the mountains of the Afro-Arabian shield. The Deputy Director of the Moroccan Tourist Office, Bashir Tsouli promoted trekking in Toubkal area which has a distinctly Himalayan quality, biking tours in the gorges and Kasbahs of the Atlas Mountains, desert camel safaris to the Hamada Plateaux with its lost oases and vast palm groves and a tour to the famous blue men of the desert.

Turkmenistan is a pioneer in adventure ➤

Exhibitions

جيف هان يروج لسياحة
العراق وأفغانستان.
Geoff Hann promoting
Iraq and Afghanistan.



الجنح الماليزي.
The Malaysian stand.



travel but for the General Manager of Owadan Tourism, Saparklych Rahmanov the future can only be excellent. There are only five tourist companies in the country and the industry has been growing from strength to strength during the past three years.

"Before, especially when we were part of the Soviet Union, our country was really unknown", Rahmanov said. Today he is a man with a mission: to open some pages of history and culture and provide a window on life and nature not only in Turkmenistan but also in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. "I don't sit in my office – my place is in the deserts and in the mountains. Owadan arranges jeep drives on sandy hills and horse and camel riding through the desert retracing the march of Alexander the Great. "The nomadic people of the desert are

very friendly with a clean heart – like that of a child. Every person has to make the tourist welcome and offer whatever has".

Another face of Central Asia was presented by KJTI Ltd (Karakorum Jeep Treks International) who arrange crossing of the Karakorum, Himalayan and Hindu Kush of North Pakistan: the highest ranges on earth. Their tours cover 4500km of unforgettably awesome scenery to meet people in one of the world's most isolated regions.

Mongolia, another isolated region was also introduced at the exhibition by Gloucestershire-based Far Frontiers Ltd. The company's director, Fiona Brijnath described a trip to the eagle hunters of the Altai, three hours flight from the capital Ulan Bator. An ethnic band of skilled Kazakhs hunt marmots and small foxes with majestic Golden Eagles.

The directors of Discover the World are concerned that Muslims do not visit Iceland and Greenland and are quick to emphasise their needs would be met. Prayer mats would be provided and even 'halal' meals could be arranged. No one could fail to be impressed by the east of Iceland, scoured by ice age glaciers. Typical of the region are steep-sided mountains, sheltered fjords and many pretty fishing villages. Inland, lies the fertile lakeside town of Egilsstadir a popular base for exploring. Around Lake Logurinn are Iceland's most extensive forests of native birch and introduced conifers and the island's third highest waterfall, Hengifoss. But it was not just an exhibition for tour operators. Charities like Care International UK and Medicines Sans Frontieres were keen to emphasise that tourists have a duty to 'put something back' when visiting people less fortunate than themselves. A number of travel companies were motivated by humanitarian rather than profit motives. Red Spokes Co UK with a left wing edge provides the opportunity for low wage earners to go on affordable holidays to remotest Scotland and the Karakoram Highway! Tribes Travel is a Fair Trade Travel company offering holidays which are not only second to none in terms of quality and excitement, but also benefit the local people, environment and wildlife of the destination.

Travel publishers, including Bradt who published a travel guide to Iraq in 2002, a travel guide to Kabul in 2003 and are about to publish a Baghdad guide, were very well represented at the exhibition. ■