

Libya:

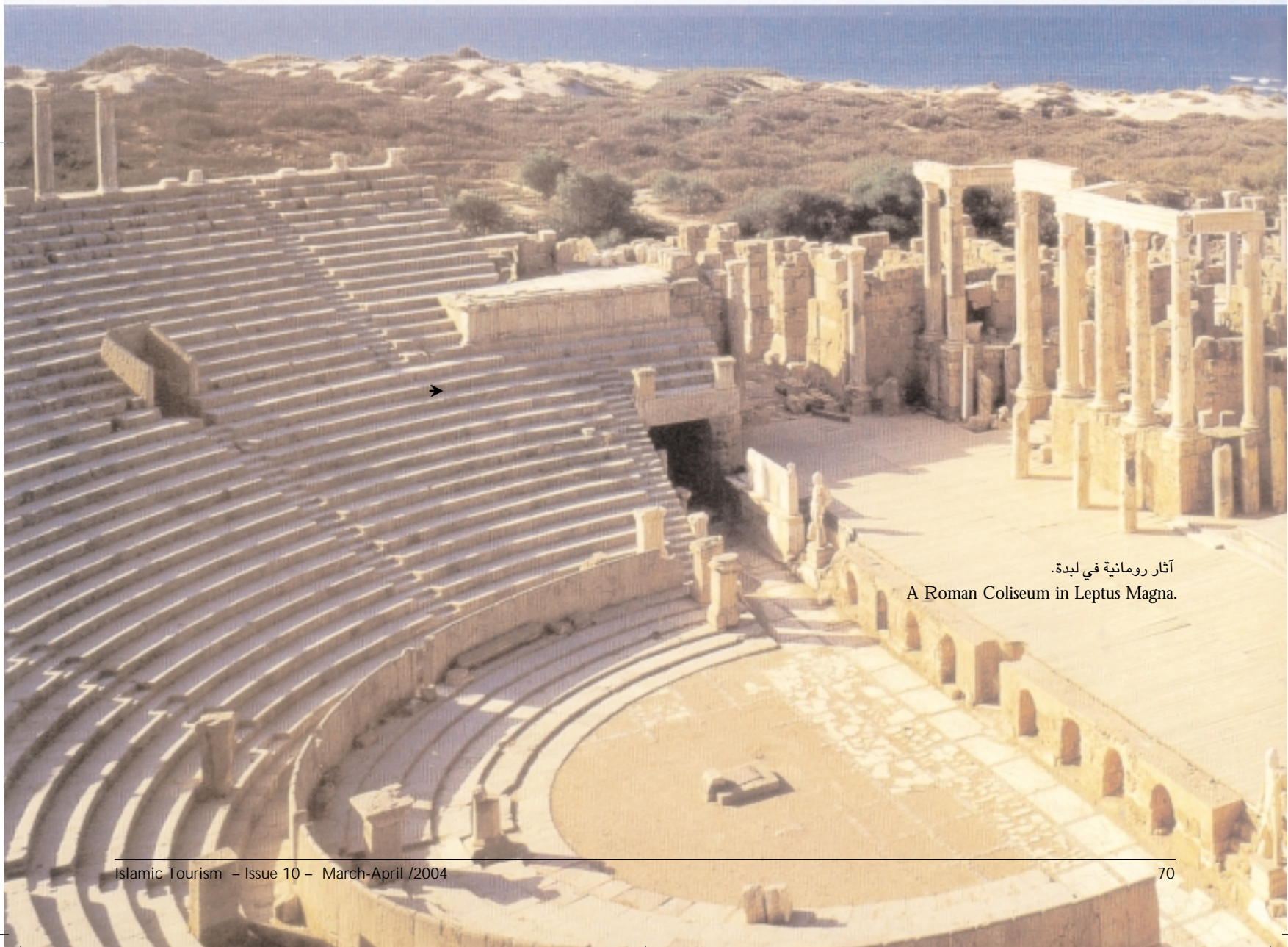
A Non-Western Style Tourism

Nizar Abboud-Tripoli

Nizar Abboud had a 10 day visit to Libya north and south. He reports on the jewels in the crown of Libyan tourism and the potential for foreign investment and development.

It only takes three hours to fly from Europe to Libya. We found ourselves in a world light years away from life in the West.

The past resists change forcefully: without the past there is no future. In Libya the past is alive, it will never die. The vestiges of Islamic and Roman civilisations tower over the Phoenician heritage in Leptus Magna, Sabratah and Cyrene (Shah'hat), as well as in the capital, Tripoli. Corrosion has dealt a death blow to the pyramids from the times of the Hittites, which historians insist, were built centuries before the pharaohs. The minarets high in the skies of towns and villages are a testimony to Islam's long history in this land - some one thousand and four hundred years.



آثار رومانية في لبة.
A Roman Coliseum in Leptus Magna.

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Drawings on the cave walls.

To the extreme south, the cruel, arid desert environment has affected wadies and plains. The beds of ancient rivers have changed, together with fallen desert mountains and lake bottoms that have dried up, metamorphosing into beautiful relics drawn by a heavenly brush with an orangey sun. There are sands mixed with different minerals, some no longer found today, that might have come from a meteorite.

Yes, we felt that the place in the southern desert near Ghat is from another world. It could perhaps resemble Mars which seemed near as we gazed into the night that engulfed the magic Akakus mountains on New Year's eve - far from candles or electric lights, with our shadows getting longer in the light of the half moon of Thul-Qa'adah. Wadies cut thousands or million years ago. The wadies seemed endless, extending for hundreds of kilometres over sand roads which make the traveller feel he is flying over turbulent clouds or rough seas.

Here we followed remains not of the sand but of the grandfathers of civilizations, etched on the walls of stony caves. They painted sheep, cattle and deer, hunters, carriages

رسوم على جدران الكهوف.



Mr. Ammar Ltayef joins the celebration.

السيد عمار لطيف يشارك المحتفلين.

and camels to say: "yes this land was not as dry as it is now - it was a land of rivers, green pastures and civilizations". Using the yellow yolk of the eggs of ostrich and red stones, the first man drew his stories on the caves of Akakus and Ghadames, when no man knew the shape of letters or pens.

Libya with its huge land area - about One million seven hundred and seventy thousand Sq. km. - is full with all that could excite the curiosity of the tourist. Blue skies and warm weather during the desert winter days are guaranteed. There is a long, warm summer where unspoilt beaches that extend for two thousand kilometres can be enjoyed. The coast is clean and often virgin but the remnants of past civilisations show that Libya has been inhabited since ancient times.

The tenth Ghat festival was rich with the art of the Tuareg tribes. Their music was not confined to borders. Here came the tribes with their artist groups from Niger, Chad and Nigeria, as well as Sudan and Libya itself. The story is told by the dance and tunes while the white camels were taking part in the dance adding flavour to the colourful folkloric customs.

The Minister of Tourism

The Minister of Tourism Mr. Ammar Ltayef, (known in Libya as of the Secretary of the General Peoples Committee for Tourism) told us that there are abundant natural resources in his country useful for the promotion of tourism. "We in Libya have the most important heritage centres in the Mediterranean. In Cyrene (Shah'hat) in the east of Libya you can find Greek civilization preserved with its streets and theatres. Entire cities have been left standing for thousands of years.

To the west of Tripoli, in Leptus Magna there are Greek, Phoenician and Roman ruins. To the south, there are the civilizations of the Garamants and the first man dating back more than seven centuries. Germa, is the site of the Hittite pyramids that may be smaller than the Egyptian ones but they were built in the same style and may even pre-date their Egyptian counterparts. In the Museum of Germa mummies that were embalmed for thousand of years in the region of Jaghboub near Egypt have been preserved in their original form. There is also the Islamic civilization that was first ➤

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established in the middle of the desert in towns such as Zuwailah and then moved north."

Cultural Traits

The minister pointed out that Libya has comprehensive strategic tourism plans based on its unique identity to ensure that tourism does not repeat the experiences of other countries - nothing more than hotel complexes on the Mediterranean coast that are only different from those of Europe because of their cheap prices. Libya is determined to make the tourist feel that he is not in the West.

For the oriental tourist, the country offers a mixture of Arab and African cultures: the desert with its white camels, green tasty Libyan tea with its traditional rituals and the art of the desert preserved for thousands of years. Most important is the culture of the Libyan nation that makes the tourist feels he is at home: generosity, hospitality and friendliness will make the tourist welcome as soon as he or she leaves the airport or port.

Tourism Plans

After a long period of neglect, Libya started developing its tourist sector. The dependence on the oil, industry and a focus on agriculture overshadowed tourism.

The Minister Ammar Ltayef says: "We, in Libya, decided to enter the tourism market. We have an ambitious plan to develop the two tourism sectors, cultural and entertainment, on the coast and adventure travel in the desert. We want to ease visa requirements and construct marinas so that Libya becomes a good mooring station for yachts travelling between the ports of the Mediterranean".

He added that a dialogue has started with four or five European companies to build and run hotels and resorts. The plan also includes the participation of Libya in world tourism and travel markets, taking part in festivals abroad and establishing a dialogue with businessmen who will be invited to invest in the country. The law of investment guarantees exemption from taxation for up to eight years. Libya now receives about half a million visitors every year. The new plan aims at increasing the number to ten million in ten years time and providing investors with a good opportunity to invest in the tourism services sector.



The sand hills of Akakus mountain range.

تلال رملية ترافق سلسلة جبال أكاكوس.



General view of Tripoli.

منظر عام لطرابلس.

Above all tourists will find peace in Libya. They will not be harassed or attacked. Libya is far from the violence and instability to engulf other Middle Eastern states.

The minister was keen to emphasise that in addition to Libya's cultural heritage and historic sites there is a vital hotel sector waiting to be developed. There are numerous investment

opportunities for rest houses and resorts in the heart of the desert and near historic sites. Antiquities must be protected from amateur "culture vultures" and organised, criminal looters. There is no lack of optimism - the future is bright and brighter still. "We promise tourists that they will not be content with just a single visit to Libya". ■