

Berlin's International Tourism Exhibition (ITB)

Strong German-Arab Relations

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The flags were lowered at the entrance of the ITB in Messe, Berlin, as a mark of respect for the victims of the terrorist attack in Spain which happened a day before the opening of the exhibition. A minutes silence was observed for the dead. The fair did not attract as many visitors as expected. This had a devastating effect on Arab exhibitors. They turned out in force, along with Ministers of Tourism, who came specially to supervise the stands spending thousands on leaflets, travel and accommodation. Sadly their hopes were dashed.

الأجنحة الألمانية.
The German stands.



There were many explanations for the decrease in the number of visitors. Last year it was the war in Iraq. This year it was the state of the German economy. Some conference participants noted that the travel agencies in Germany are advising tourists and people don't see the need to visit the exhibition. Others blamed the increase in the number of travel and tourism exhibitions as well as the increased use of the internet at virtually no cost.

As usual, it was a five-day exhibition but the organisation was different. The first three days were for the general public while the other two were for businessmen. But this turned out to be a bad idea as many tourism ministers left after the first three days and did not benefit from contacts with

travel industry professionals.

According to the speakers, who gave a variety of presentations, itb is important because German tourists spend their holidays abroad. This could explain the intensive presence of international exhibitors and the weak participation of the German states. Many German exhibitors complained about the decrease in the number of incoming tourists, as did the British. But this is not the case with Spanish tourists - 70% of FITUR exhibition was reserved for Spanish exhibitors.

This year Qatar organised an impressive display with several functions and activities. The Qatar Tourist Board and Qatar Air organised a meeting to attract German visitors. ➔



The Arab-German Symposium.

الملتقى العربي-الألماني.

Islamic Tourism participated in the exhibition, visiting most stands to distribute copies of the magazine and to sign contracts for adverts and the website.

The Sixth Arab-German Symposium

The Sixth Arab-German Symposium was held on 14th March, during the third day of the itb. More than 350 Arab and German experts attended, together with ministers, economists, directors of hotels and tourism companies, and a large number of journalists.

The symposium was opened with a talk from Dr. Gunter Rexrods, head of the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce. Karl-Dieter Spranger, a former federal minister for economic cooperation then emphasised the dynamic of Arab tourism. Mr. Ali Mohammad al-Zarouni, the UAE ambassador, and head of Arab diplomatic missions in Germany, stressed the continuing and enhanced strength of Arab-German relations over the last few years. Mr. George Wilhelm Adamswitsch, the Deputy Economy Minister, mentioned tourist exchanges between

Germany and the Arab world. He told the meeting that his ministry has opened the first representative centre in the Middle East. Dr. Othman Aidi, head of the Arab Union of Hotels and Tourism emphasised the importance of German tourism. He also referred to the prediction that Germans will make up 10 percent of the world's tourists. Arab ministers also addressed the symposium. Mrs. Alia Boran, the Jordanian Minister of Environment and Tourism, concentrated on family tourism while the Syrian Minister of Tourism, Dr. Saadallah Aqa al-Qalaa, focused on the history of Syria, (once part of the old Silk Road) which he described as a museum that combines many cultures. The Yemeni Minister of Tourism, Mr. Khalid Abdullah Al-Rowishan drew attention to the oldest city in the world, Sana'a. The Libyan Minister of Tourism, Mr. Ammar Ltaytef, praised tourism for its vital role in raising economic standards and eradicating poverty. He referred to the new law of the right of investors to own land. Mr. Mitri Abu Aitta, the Palestinian Minister of Tourism, described his country as "The Cradle of Religions and Cultures".

Mr. Abdul-Jalil El-Pasha, the Sudanese Minister of Tourism, highlighted the treasures of his country and the good relations with Germany for more than 160 years. Mr. Mohsen al-Balushi, Deputy Minister of Tourism in Oman said real efforts were being made at present to introduce a single visa for Oman, Qatar and UAE.

Mrs. Nada Sardock, the General Director at the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, said that the number of tourist for 2003 has exceeded one million and emphasised Lebanon's natural beauty and its location between the sea and the mountains.

Mr. Raimund Horsch, head of itb, reviewed the benefits of the exhibition. Mr. Omar Abdul-Ghafar, the Middle East representative of WTO praised the growth in Arab tourism, despite its retreat internationally. Mr. J. Bogdanski, the marketing manager of Lufthansa talked about losses in the industry and the decline in first class fares.

Finally, Mr. Fred Van Eijk, the Executive Director of Qatar Tourism, highlighted Qatar's future plans and said that the country is ready to receive families and adventure tourists. It is going to host the Asian Games in 2006. ■