

Destinations

Newcomers set up impressive stands

London-Karen Dabrowska

Relative newcomers to the tourist industry, both in the Muslim world and elsewhere, set up impressive stands at Destinations, the Daily Telegraph's holiday and travel show held in London at the beginning of February.



Morocco

جناح المغرب



Islamic Tourism Stand

جناح السياحة الإسلامية

Following its rapprochement with the West, Libya flung its doors wide open to tourists and in 2004 welcomed 40,000 visitors. There are over 150 tourist agencies in the country. Many deal with hajj tours, but around 65 focus on general tourism and the market is growing and developing rapidly. Eight years ago, Jamal Sa'aid Fteis set up Akrno Tours offering journeys of discovery and inspiration to Libya. He was a boy scout, loved travelling and has never looked back. "I saw the opportunity – it was the right time".

According to Craig Baguley, the company's information officer, Libya has always been a safe country for tourists. Akrno offers tours of classical Libya, a desert and Roman tour and a diving and cultural tour. It has also organised a hajj. Tour operators, large and small, are now starting to include Libya, on their itineraries. Live Travel has a 2006 total

eclipse package including the jewels of ancient Greece and Rome set between the azure Mediterranean and the gilded Sahara. The company specialises in tours to special places – the inaccessible and the obscure. It was set up by the ardent and experienced voyageur, Phil Haines, who in 1977 became the youngest person to have visited all 193 sovereign countries in the world. His 20 year 'mission' was completed with a historic trip to off-limits Iraq. In 2002 Live Travel organised the first tour group to Afghanistan.

Silk Road and Beyond, an ambitious company which runs tours to Central Asia, Mongolia, a number of Middle Eastern destinations, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, has included an 11-day classical Libya tour in its latest brochure. According to Tanya Evans it is still too early to assess the demand.

Vietnam and Europe's Baltic states also made commendable efforts to promote their sites and attractions. They both started to embrace the tourist trade in the early 1990s. Vietnam was represented by Visit Asia which was also promoting Vietnam Airlines scheduled to begin direct flights from the UK by the end of this year. Hung Nguyen noted that most of the tourists visiting Vietnam are Europeans and Americans. But it is also becoming a popular destination for Asians. Visit Asia offers tours to the Mekong Delta, trekking expeditions, biking, train, golf, culinary and eco tours.

Like Vietnam, the Baltic states are not backward in coming forward when it comes to tourism promotion. Countries like Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania are becoming increasingly popular. "In the past people did not know what there was to see", Sally Chambers explained. In Riga, Latvia, ➤



France

الجناح الفرنسي



Turkey

تركيا



General view of the exhibition

منظر عام للمعرض



Brazil

البرازيل

the historical centre is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The city was founded in 1201 and was an important member of the Hanseatic League. Ceis and Kuldiga are two picturesque medieval towns. Vikings, Germans, Swedes, Poles and Russians have left the footprints of their heritage in the country.

Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, North Cyprus, Egypt and Dubai, all popular Middle East destinations, tried to add new dimensions to their promotions. Turkey and Dubai focused on holiday homes. Lutfu Pekel of Blue Cruise was offering cruises on gulets, wooden yachts equipped with all the comforts of home, around the Turkish coastline. He has made an effort to develop

contacts among Britain's Muslim community. "Muslims feel more comfortable when they visit Turkey – the food is halal, they can pray easily in mosques". Turkey is one of the success stories in tourism with 17 million visitors in 2004.

Like Libya, North Cyprus is breaking out of its international isolation and tourism is expected to pick up spectacularly once direct flights begin, probably in 2005. Terry Sterling, of Cyprus Direct, pointed out that the company had to stop selling tours as the hotels where his clients are normally accommodated were full. "Visitors are now being accommodated in peoples' villas".

Arab culture was promoted by a London-

based association, The Arab Group in Hounslow & Suburbs. Iraq also made an appearance courtesy of Geoff Hann of Hinterland Travel whose stand, manned in conjunction with Islamic Tourism Magazine, focused on sites dating back to ancient Mesopotamia.

Over 300 leading travel companies took part in Destinations, representing all corners of the globe from Paris to Gambia and the Cayman Islands to Thailand. Arab and Muslim states were not as well represented as at other international travel shows held in London last year and earlier this year. But, like other travel industries, their stands showed increasing sophistication and professionalism. ■