

# African States Eager To Promote Islamic Sites

> By Karen Dabrowska

African countries at this year's World Travel Market (WTM) were eager to promote Muslim sites and develop the Islamic tourism market.



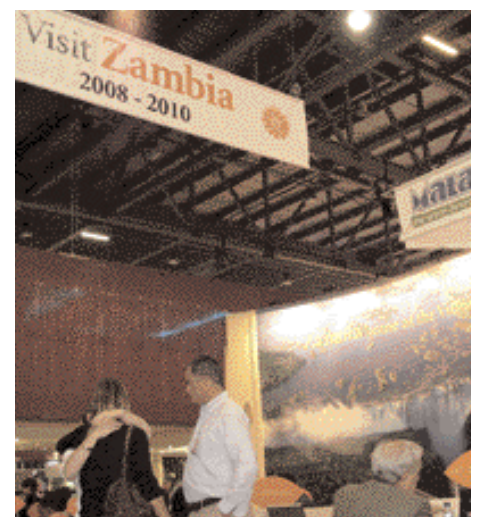
The WTM, held in London's Excel Exhibition Centre between November 12th – 15th, is an annual, four-day business to business exhibition, which provides an opportunity for the whole global trade industry to meet, network, negotiate and conduct business. This year's exhibition with 5,402 exhibitors from more than 200 represented regions and countries was the biggest to-date.

Many African countries have large Muslim populations, there is sensitivity to Muslim culture and tours which follow the journey's of holy men or focus on historic sites are a possibility.

The General Manager of Ethiopian

Quadrants PLC, Tony Hickey, envisages developing an Islamic historic route tour. It would include Harar the city of more than 100 mosques and the longest (15.1km) cave in Ethiopia named after the Muslim mystic Sufi Omar. Islam in Ethiopia dates back to 615AD when the first Muslims came to Axum as refugees after being persecuted by the Quraysh tribe in Mecca.

Hickey emphasized that relations between Christians and Muslims are exceptional: in Wollo intermarriage results in names like Mohammed Ts'ai. In Addis Ababa a mosque stands next to a church and they use each others grounds for celebrations and activities. ▶







In Nigeria Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha are marked by the durbar, a magnificent display of royal pageantry with five thousand men riding decorated horses.

Islam first arrived in Nigeria in the ninth century and was adopted as the religion of the majority of the leading figures in the Bornu Empire during the reign of King Idris Aloma (1571-1603). He introduced Islamic courts, and established mosques. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Fulani Islamic leader Usman dan Fodio led a jihad against Kano, removing its Hausa king and reforming the government and religious authority.

The city of Katsina is home to a famous 18th century mosque featuring the Gobarau Minaret, a 50 foot tower made from mud and palm branches.

The name of the city of Sokoto is derived from the Arab word suk (market). It was the seat of the Sokoto caliphate and an important seat of Islamic learning in Nigeria. Kano grew to be a prosperous centre for trans-Saharan trade in gold, leather, ivory, and salt, reaching the height of its wealth and power in the 14th century, when Islam gained a growing following. By the 15th century the first Central Mosque had been erected in the city. Formerly walled, most of the gates to the old city survived. The old city houses the vast Kurmi Market, known for its crafts. Old dye pits, still in use today,

are nearby. The Emir's Palace, the Great Mosque of Kano, and the Gidan Makama Mosque are also in the old city.

The peculiarity of Islam in Senegal is the existence of religious brotherhoods, the most prominent being the Murids, the Tidjaniya, the Qadriya and the Layennes. The Murids religious centre, Touba, is host to one of the biggest mosques in Africa. They believe that work is a form of prayer. One of the leading Murid spiritual guides was the late Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853 – 1927) with a large following in Europe and the USA.

Audrey Koumba of Mbolo Tours in Gabon envisages the development of a tourist route following the journey of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba after he was expelled from Senegal to Gabon for his anti-colonial activities against the French. "It is possible to see the country by following the route he took", Ms Koumba said.

Uganda, with the second largest mosque in Africa, also has the potential for the development of Islamic tourism which could be combined with a visit to the source of the Nile and a safari.

"Three quarters of the world's 1500 gorillas are found in Uganda. It is also the home of tree-climbing lions which are only found in Uganda and South Africa", said Rashid Kiyimba, the Managing Director of Brovad Tours and Travel. "Arabs don't have an



Rashid Kiyimba

رشيد كيمبا

interest in Uganda but we will try to promote Islamic sites".

The New Old Kampala Mosque on Kampala Hill is the seat of the Ugandan Muslim Supreme Council. Completed in 2007, the gigantic building is visible wherever you are in the city and is Kampala's largest attraction. Uganda's second largest mosque, Kibuli mosque, is on Kampala's Kibuli Hill.

Ninety-percent of Gambians are Muslims. Gambia became a Muslim state largely due to the efforts of 19th century Muslim proselytizers.

"If Muslim people visit they should feel at ease", emphasised Olivier Petit, General Manager of Sunbeach Hotel & Resort. "Muslim guests, no matter where they



come from, have have a special brotherhood due to their religion. The staff at Sunbeach Hotel & Resort tell visitors they are welcome in their new home”.

Djibouti has been Islamizing during the past ten years due to the influence of Dubai, the biggest investor in the country. More and more women are wearing hijab, and mosques are being built.

“You drive along the highway in the countryside and you see small mosques in the middle of nowhere”, said the Director of Sales and Marketing at the Djibouti Palace Kempinski, Mr Albert Stienissen. His hotel responded to the increasing Islamic influence by providing a prayer room, and halal food. In October the hotel hosted a major Islamic banking conference. This year it received the excellence hospitality award from the globally renowned 7 Stars & Stripes, a world recognised hospitality accreditation organisation for hotels which achieved excellence in standards and services above five-star level.

The potential of Islamic tourism has also been recognised by the tourist industry world-wide. According to the World Travel Market Global Trend Reports 2007, released in conjunction with the exhibition, there is an important, untapped potential and business opportunity for halal tourism - a form of religious tourism defined as activities permissible under Islamic law

Ms Parita Chitakasem, WTM’s Asia Pacific and Australasia Travel and Tourism Manager said: “As witnessed by the continued number of religious tourists visiting Iraq, Halal Tourism has the potential to develop into one of the most resilient forms of tourism.

“The Vatican set up its own budget airline to transport pilgrims to holy sites in 2007 and there is potential for the development of a halal airline which could provide halal food, calls for prayer, Korans in seat pockets, religious programmes on the inflight entertainment system and separate sections for male and female passengers.

“Another potential option is to explore women only hotels to overcome Muslim women being unable to book hotel rooms without a male guarantor, which is the case in Saudi Arabia.” ■

