

Jordan

Promotion emphasizes religious tourism

>By Ian Stalker

Jordan, which has seen some of its landscapes appear in such movie blockbusters as Indiana Jones and the Final Crusade, has truly gotten involved in show business.

The Jordan Tourism Board staged a tourism show for buyers from the Americas, with the event a first for a country that wants international travelers to view it as a stand-alone destination, rather than an add-on to Egypt or other countries in the region, and so it is promoting varied vacation options, among them visiting the ancient Nabataean city of Petra, where structures were literally carved from rock faces.

"A few months ago Petra was nominated as one of the world's New Seven Wonders," Naïf Al-Fayez, managing director of the Jordan Tourism Board, said. "This is indeed an honor because Petra is a world wonder. "Nevertheless, Jordan is filled with many other wonders – archeological, historical and religious. We have a unique blend of natural sites and state-of-the-art services."

Al-Fayez noted that the show was held at the Dead Sea, "the same lands where Cleopatra enjoyed our largest natural spa and where the three monotheistic religions claimed their origins and the Bible unfolded many stories." Jordanian Tourism Minister Mahan Kati told delegates that the country's National Tourism Strategy – launched in 2004 and which called for doubling tourism receipts by 2010 – is on track, with the country actually having surpassed targeted receipts in 2007, when tourism revenues topped US\$2.3 billion. That represented a 12.2 per cent increase from 2006, she said while speaking to the show delegates.

The previous night, Kati noted that Jordan has



Dead Sea

البحر الميت

numerous Biblical sites, something that isn't always realized internationally. "Jordan is the land of the Old Testament and the birthplace of civilization," she said.

Kati later told a news conference that Jordan has doubled its hotel rooms within the past five years, and she praised her country as a safe one, despite its location in an often volatile region. Tourism officials are also touting Jordan – home to dramatic desert landscapes that sheltered the likes of T. E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, and which harbour a surprising number of animal species – as a place for nature enthusiasts, with the country having varied wildlife found in different types of terrain. Jordan may again find itself at the centre of international tourist trade attention, with negotiations that could see the World Tourism



Petra

البتراء

Forum held in Jordan next February said to be in the final stages. The World Tourism Organization has given its blessing to Jordan hosting the event, which would be expected to attract 2,000 to 2,500 participants. ■