

# The Syrian Minister of Tourism:

## Positive results for our promotional campaigns

> Motaz Othman - Fitur/Madrid

Syria's participation in FITUR in the Spanish capital Madrid, held at the end of January, was the country's largest participation in an international exhibition. A high-level delegation headed by the Syrian Minister of Tourism, Dr. Saadallah Agha Al-Qala'a, with representatives of the hotel sector, travel agents and tour operators took part.

The large stand differed significantly from Syrian stands in previous international exhibitions. A dinner was organized to coincide with a press conference at the Hotel Melia Madrid to which over 500 tour operators and Spanish journalists, members of the diplomatic corps and directors of the Arab delegations participating in the exhibition, were invited. A variety of Syrian cuisines were presented. The Syrian Minister of Tourism held two press conferences: one at the Syrian stand and the other at the dinner. He spoke of Syria as a major destination for Spanish tourists, especially in view of historical relations since Phoenicians times, as well as during the Umayyad period when a link was

established between the two civilizations that extended for more than 800 years.

The minister said that Syria is one of the most secure countries in the world, according to the Davos report, where tourists feel as if they were in their own country. He added that tourism in Syria is one of the pillars of the economy and a bridge for cultural exchange. It has brought an income of approximately 2.7 billion dollars in 2007. Six million tourists visited Syria last year: 16,000 from Spain. They are generally interested in religious and historic sites and heritage. Spanish tourists can obtain an entry visa directly at the airport after coordination with travel agencies in Syria.

The minister said that investment in tourism has exceeded four billion dollars. The Damascus Fortress and the cities of Aleppo, Busra, Palmyra, and the castles of Husin and Salahuddin are registered as world heritage sites.

We have witnessed this in the ITB Berlin last year which saw a marked an improvement in the promotion of tourism to Syria. I asked the minister about the benefit of the promotional campaigns in exhibitions, and he confirmed that the increase in the number of German tourists after the Berlin Fair campaign has risen dramatically and significantly. "This encouraged us to continue the promotion in important international exhibitions", the minister said. ■

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