

The Growth Triangle Region

A tour of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand

> Motaz Othman



Toba Lake/ Sumatra
بحيرة طوبا/سومطرة

Three countries, with numerous tourist sties, beautiful nature and a proud heritage host more than 50 million tourists annually from around the world. Yet, instead of competing, which can sometimes harm the competitors, they combine their efforts to promote themselves as a single destination.



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These countries are Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Their joint efforts are a reality on the ground rather than a plan on paper, as is the case in some developing countries. Under the slogan “The Growth Triangle,” those responsible for tourism in the three countries are working hard and sincerely with an indomitable team spirit to promote tourism in their countries. They organized a trip for the benefit of journalists and writers from several regions of the world. ITM (Islamic Tourism magazine) and its website (ITW) were chosen to represent the Arab-Muslim region.

We met in the Thai capital, Bangkok, on June the 6th 2008. A lunch was hosted for more than 500 people working in the travel industry. They all participated in a programme “The Growth Triangle Workshop”, in conjunction with the exhibition T.T.M. The directors of tourism in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand made short presentations on the attractive features and tourist attractions of their countries and the benefits of the cooperation they have undertaken.

Indonesia/ Sumatra

Our first stop was Indonesia - more specifically the island of Sumatra, the second largest island in the archipelago. We began our journey in the city of Medan, capital of North Sumatra province. Here, as in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, the signs welcoming the guests are “written” in flowers.

During a tour of the city we saw Maimoon Palace and the Grand Mosque in Medan, an architectural gem, built over the past

hundred years. Medan is characterized by its tranquil atmosphere. You can rent an apartment, suitable for Arab-Muslim families, at very reasonable prices.

The next day we went to see one of the world’s natural wonders; the famous Lake Toba, located 906 m above sea level, covering an area of 1700 sq km with a depth of 450 m. Surrounded by high mountains covered with greenery, the lake at this height gives the impression that we are



Toba Lake/ Sumatra

بحيرة طوبا/سومطرة



Flowers in the entrance of Medan City/ Indonesia

زهور تستقبل زوار مدينة ميدان/ أندونيسيا

on another planet. It is surrounded by huge tourism projects, including the "Pearl of Lake Toba" which should be completed in 2010. Undoubtedly the region will be a rich tourist destination. The many islands within the lake are inhabited by indigenous people. There are also historical monuments, including the tombs of kings who ruled over the region and were famous for their love of wars.

The main forms of recreation are boat trips across the lake and hiking to see the beautiful natural landscapes, such as waterfalls. You can also visit Samosir Island, in the heart of the lake, with several resorts and hotels.

Unique traditions persist, such as the prohibition on the wife to speak or to sit with her father in law, and the husband with his mother in law. They must communicate through a third party. More than half of the population of this province of Sumatra are Muslim. The remainder are Christians and the Indian and Chinese communities follow their own religion. The island of Sumatra is characterised by beautiful, exuberant nature, lakes and the goodness of its people. ▶



Toba Lake/ Sumatra

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Toba Lake/ Sumatra

بحيرة طوبا/سومطرة



The Grand Mosque/ Medan

الجامع الكبير/ميدان



Toba Lake/ Sumatra

بحيرة طوبا/سومطرة

Penang/ Malaysia

Our second stop was the island of Penang in Malaysia. I'd visited it before but was nevertheless surprised by its great prosperity and huge investments, particularly in the tourist industry (hotels, restaurants etc).

It is well known that this island is a popular destination for Arabs and many other tourists. It is the "Pearl of the Orient", thanks to its beautiful beaches, suitable for all kinds of water sports. There are many international hotels and resorts. The green mountains all around provide an additional beauty to the island.

Other attractions include the Indian and Chinese markets and many museums. The best food is sea food available in coastal restaurants. In Penang, Chinese, Indian and Malay (indigenous Muslims) coexist peacefully. The organisers arranged a special visit for us to Captain Ling Mosque.

Thailand

Penang is at the extreme northern end of Malaysia, on the Thai border. We went



Motaz Othman/ Sumatra

معتنز عثمان / سومطرة

there by bus to get to our third stop: southern Thailand. The land border is well organized, and the transition is easy. I saw the passage of many European tourists between Malaysia and southern Thailand. Our first visit was to the region of Wat-Hat Yai-

Nai, where we saw a huge statue of Buddha (35 m), the third largest in the world. The next day, we visited the lake and nature reserve of Tha-Leh-Noi, with an area of 450 sq. km. We toured the third largest reserve in the country by boat. This is the area for hundreds of ▶



Patani Central Mosque/ South Thailand

جامع فطاني المركزي / جنوب تايلند



Patani Mosque

جامع فطاني



The mosque that was never completed/ South Thailand

المسجد الذي لم يكتمل بناؤه/ جنوب تايلند

species of migrant birds and 180 species of flowers, including the famous lotus.

Generally speaking, southern Thailand is home to beautiful, natural landscapes, lakes and waterfalls. We also visited many villages and towns, such as the province of Narathiwat and the city of Patini, where the majority of the population is Muslim, and where we visited Patini Central Mosque and an incomplete mosque. It is said that a Chinese man visited Patini, hundreds of years ago and fell in love with a Muslim girl. He embraced Islam and married her. He began the construction of the mosque, but he died before the work was finished. It was used for prayers as if it had been finished. The residents decided to leave it as it was as a tribute to its founder. Then his sister came looking for him, and when she heard the news of his death, she committed suicide, unable to return to her country without her brother.

Overall, the Growth Triangle, namely the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, northern Malaysia and southern Thailand, has a very enchanting nature, with lakes, waterfalls and green mountains. Amidst great cultural diversity, visitors can sample original fish-based dishes and the simplicity of the inhabitants who preserve their ancient traditions, which are an added attraction. These countries are also promoting their tourist destinations at conferences and trade exhibitions offering five-star hotels at unrivalled prices. ■



The mosque that was never completed/ South Thailand

المسجد الذي لم يكتمل بناؤه/ جنوب تايلند



Patani Central Mosque/ South Thailand

جامع فطاني المركزي/ جنوب تايلند