

Damascus hosts the International Symposium on Cultural Tourism & Management of World Heritage Sites

Cultural Tourism's Journey takes its First Step

The international symposium, Cultural Tourism and Management of World Heritage Sites, was held on 9 - 11 September, 2001, in Damascus, capital of the Syrian Arab Republic, under the patronage of Prime Minister Muhammad Moustafa Miro, in collaboration with UNESCO, The World Heritage Centre, al-A'idi Foundation for Heritage, and Sham Palaces and Hotels. Participants came from all over the world, not just Arab and Muslim countries, and included representatives of national and international organisations. The conference was a three-day affair, with an eclectic range of speeches and interventions. It was, by all accounts, a successful seminar in its arrangement, management and the variety of topics covered. In this issue, Islamic Tourism magazine publishes both the speeches of the Prime Minister of Syria and Dr Georges Zouain, Deputy General Manager of UNESCO, in addition to the recommendations of this important event.



رئيس الوزراء السوري يتوسط عدداً من المشاركين في الندوة.

The Prime Minister of Syria (centre) at the Cultural Tourism Symposium, Damascus.

Syrian Prime Minister opens Damascus Symposium:

Appeals for Arab Tourist Hereditary Project

Dr Mohammad Moustafa Miro, Prime Minister of Syria, welcomed participants to Damascus during his opening address at the international symposium on tourism. The prime minister conveyed the best wishes of Syria's president, Dr Bashar al-Asad, saying, "You have to apply this significant attempt to achieve your great ambition of launching a tourist, cultural and hereditary market based not only on wishes, but on practical plans and future aspirations, in order to join together the sequence of human culture and rich hereditary structure in this part of the world".

He went on, "These would be displayed and marketed by diverse tourist means in order to serve each other as well as to expose the cultural and human face of these sites in Iraq, Damascus, Yemen, Egypt, [and] east and west of Arabia, where man settled for the first time. They would also be the outset for every agriculture, industry and trade, as well as the model for every style of [clothing], food, accom-

modation and structure; and for every legislation, political, social and family organisation, as well as for [every kind of] knowledge, science, measurement and perfection; and as a starting point for significant moral and human values".

Miro urged the participants at the symposium to, "Think and work for setting up a comprehensive tourist cultural project bringing back to this geographical domain, including the Mediterranean countries, its prominence and significance.

These countries, including the shores of that sea, were a platform for historic, cultural, economic and commercial interactive partnership, [and] including all their capacities for [a] modern partnership might bring back for their people a new effective role in that area. Many countries are still competing with us to fill this vacuum, benefiting from the lack of communication in our countries and emergency development measures throughout periods of time, as well as the disruption of efforts, objectives, lack of assets and the absence of cooperation in various aspects, mainly cultural and hereditary".

He added, "I have looked into the agenda of this symposium and the titles of lectures and papers as well the submitted projects. I have also perceived the awareness of the direct relationship between the tourist culture and cultural and hereditary tourism, as well as between the plans of economic and social development with all their requirements and objectives.

"Every thorough analysis of the identity of heritage and culture in this part of the world expresses to us the characteristic(s) of its past. Since culture is manifested in the knowledge, traditions, understanding, philosophy, sciences and types of behaviour of individuals and groups, this means that they envisage the principal features of the national character and determine the extent of human freedom and the extent of its isolation.

Heritage is only the evidence and reference to the eternities, landmarks and antiquities which have still remained and [which] ➤

have] overcome the times and continued to hold their values". Miro continued, "The basic idea I would like to concentrate on - and go further into it - is the possibility of setting up a tourist Arabic project which starts from the cultural and hereditary characteristic of our countries, offering such a project strategic importance once joint financing is available. It also offers a variety of cultural and hereditary expertise, including an advanced tourist industry. This part of the world is singled out for its strategic efforts which have made the cultural, heritage and tourist interest the priority of every individual. Many of the developed countries have competed with each other in holiday and entertainment tourism.

We may also compete with these countries in setting up hotels, rest houses, theatres, cabarets, playgrounds and means of entertainment. However, these countries are not able to compete with us in cultural and heritage tourism as they do not possess the same wealth and history in this field. This will definitely lead us to believe in prospects [for] this huge project which requires regional and international cooperation as well as big investments and a tourist approach in which the tourist agent would act side by side with the cultural and heritage representatives [as] the basis for publicity, supervision and organised marketing. This would involve the contribution of many cultural, educational and service specialised establishments".

The Syrian Prime Minister concluded, "I tried in this meeting to refer to a number of ideas submitted for research and discussion. The Syrian government, which pays great concern to tourist promotion and is devoted to encouraging economic investment, such as tourist investment, ensures that it is willing to consider the results of your discussions and implement your suggestions, and adopt your plans".

Georges Zouain, UNESCO, opens Damascus International Symposium on Cultural Tourism

The privilege I have of opening this international symposium on cultural tourism on behalf of the General Manager of UNESCO, Mr Kwishiro Matsura, is a delight for me personally as [it is] being held in Damascus. This occasion has also delighted me as an Arab in charge of heritage at UNESCO.

The symposium is a clear reference to renewing cooperation between Syria and UNESCO, particularly as Syria plays [such an] an effective role in the organisation's activities.

Moreover, the symposium, which gathers a number of specialists and officials in the fields of tourism and heritage, allows us to look forward with

promise [as regards our heritage] for the benefit of our people.

Today, the Arab world possesses huge hereditary wealth, particularly Syria where civilisations and cultures [have] succeeded throughout its great history. Therefore, we should, during these three days, exchange expertise and views about the best way of using our heritage for the benefit of our people, disregarding the traditional tourist



الدكتور جورج زوين ممثل المدير العام لليونسكو.

Dr. Georges Zouain, Deputy General Manager of UNESCO

factor in order to reach a tourism agenda that is consolidated in comprehensive development. [Thus], we have to enquire:

How can we make heritage as [a] revenue for our countries and a tool for development?

What can we do for tourism to become a cultural interest for the foreign tourist who visits us, and [at the same time] an economic and social interest for us?

How can we employ our heritage effectively without damaging it for the next generations?

Let me stress that tourism, which is the first international industry, is not the only means of cultural tourism, but it is the basic factor among the capabilities [for] employing heritage in the local economy. However, we are absolutely aware that there are other economic missions for cultural heritage in development.

We also know that cultural tourism cannot by itself move the economy should it not assimilate customs, traditions, fine arts, innovation, arts, and so on.

Living heritage, active [and] consolidated in society, participates in the national development and people's progress. [It makes] a nation proud of its heritage and culture and collaborates in the progress of mankind. Within this framework [of] living cultural heritage, oriented towards development, I would like to send a special salutation to the country hosting us today. [And] I would also like to recall in this respect the important role UNESCO plays.

The cultural modernisation [which] the President, Bashar al-Asad, is launching today, [is] based on [an] original background of successive civilisations which offered the world values and innovations relevant to human beings and the universe. This modernisation, which is accomplished by preserving moral values and by [a] high transparent spirit of leadership, [is] characterised by a sense of openness towards others and [belief] in the capability of Syria to contribute [towards] enrich[ing] the movement of history, civilisation and innovation. We are fortunate at UNESCO that this civilised trend is well reflected [in] the relationship between Syria and UNESCO, as Syria is practising its role in enriching the cultural and spiritual values of UNESCO which represents the conscience of the world. At the beginning of this year, Ambassador Amir Esber, the Syrian representative at UNESCO, took the initiative to establish the Poet Ambassadors Community, and he was unanimously elected as its president. The International Academy for Poetry was [likewise] established with the collaboration of UNESCO in Italy, and the Syrian representative at UNESCO was elected as a member of the academy board there. On behalf of UNESCO, Mr Kwishiro Matsura, its General Manager, has expressed his gratitude to Syria before the high commissioners for the positive efforts undertaken by Syrian representatives at UNESCO during [the] Taleban [movement's] destruction of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan.

Recommendations of the International Symposium on Cultural Tourism in Damascus

Below are the main recommendations issued by the symposium for those working in the general and private tourism sectors:

1- Planning a policy for tourism development inspired by the principles of perseverance, provided it [will] not affect the cultural and natural revenues of tourism [and] in order to provide prosperity and welfare, as well preserve security for these revenues, their originality and cultural values for the sake of future generations.

2- Setting up media and educational programmes for local people as ➤



جانب من الحضور في الندوة.

Participants at the Symposium.

well as tourists in order to encourage mutual understanding and [to promote] respect [for] the lifestyles of local people(s).

3- Focusing on the objectives of dialogue among cultures, preserving the originality of heritage sites, and transferring their meanings and values [as a] strategy of tourism by adequately expressing the [importance of] sites and museums.

4- Enhancing coordination and improving tourism development policies, as well as preserving cultural heritage by giving priority to protecting the irreplaceable cultural revenues.

5- Working [with] relevant authorities to pursue [the supervision of] tourism development and securing the preservation of natural, cultural, archaeological, structural and natural heritage, in particular through undertaking field studies and setting up plans and [special] projects to manage [and control] the areas where such sites exist, as well as maintaining archaeological protectorates [within] isolated areas.

6- Using those sites that are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites (such as Damascus, Bosra, Aleppo, Palmyra and Todmor in Syria, for instance) to set up [good] management plans, determine best methods, focus on their maintenance and protection. Such plans might eventually be applied to other archaeological, cultural and natural protectorates.

7- Developing historical documentation and scrutinising heritage sites through [the utilisation of] modern media technology and telecommunications, as well as providing visitors and tourists with information, educating local people, and securing an administrative system that [takes into account] the importance of such revenues.

8- Mobilising all economic, administrative and institutional means to achieve the contribution of local people in the design, implementation and management of tourism projects; and ensuring that such are deserving of revenues.

9- Promoting and pursuing tourism companies and those working in the field of organising tours [as] real partners in preserving cultural heritage and protecting the environment. These include individual, national and international initiatives of looking after heritage and sticking to instructive methods of employing archaeological sites, and the extent of [their] containment, as well as contributing towards educating tourists and informing them of the significance [of heritage sites] by securing jobs for those working in this sector.

10- Urging investors in tourism infrastructure to take inspiration from local architectural characteristics, and employing local revenues and expertise.

The results and recommendations of the symposium can be built upon and pursued in the future through:

1- Publishing the symposium's proceedings, in Arabic, at the earliest

opportunity, including the recommendations and results extracted from interventions; securing its promotion through the ministries of culture and tourism, through tourism companies, through members of UNESCO and the International Tourism Organisation, as well as through other governmental organisations.

2- Setting up flexible methodology in terms of regional consultancy to coordinate a policy of cultural tourism and enhance, at international level, the publication of information on hereditary revenues and their capacities.

3- Providing qualitative information about the cultural revenues of the specific country and area in question, particularly through organising activities and cultural demonstrations abroad.

4- Giving priority to setting up archaeological protectorates, including the "forgotten villages" in the chain of calcified plains located in the areas of Aleppo and Idlib, by mobilising various institutions, including local authorities, to achieve local economic, cultural and social development.

5- Enlisting new sites (relevant to both culture and nature) as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. For example, in Syria, these would include sites such as Afamia, the "forgotten villages" that are located in the chain of calcified plains in Aleppo, and medieval citadels.

6- Developing the mode of exhibition for museums, improving them, facilitating how to receive local and international visitors, and designing and setting up new museums by paying special attention to proper programming and instruction via modern communications technology.

7- Reviewing the policy of entry charges and using the income from selling entry tickets to archaeological sites and museums to maintain, preserve and develop heritage in accordance with international tourism regulations; benefiting from the experience of other countries in relation to legislative, administrative and institutional aspects.

8- Mobilising administrative, economic and institutional means to preserve the technical and professional qualifications by facilitating transportation, improvement and marketing.

9- Promoting, developing and marketing cultural tourism around those sites listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in order, if necessary, to delimit the density of tourists; modifying residence for tourists, and subsequently increasing the incomes of local people.

10- Promoting and marketing tourism with neighbouring countries through mutual cultural and historical projects.

11- Developing and promoting individuals tourism, as well as group tourism, by specifying mutual interests through creating new forms of entertainment and nature explorations.

12- To execute these recommendations, a certain policy of employing and rehabilitating prerequisite frameworks must be adopted to adequately preserve the cultural and natural heritage, manage and market it, as well as set up tourist guides. ■