

**Yemeni Architect Nabil Tahir Saleh Almakaleh**  
talks to *Islamic Tourism*:

# Arab and Muslim Countries are Precedents in Cultural Tourism

The architect, Nabil Tahir Saleh Almakaleh, is the general manager of the Architecture Studies and Training Centre in the General Organisation for Preserving the Historical Cities in Yemen.

The centre is concerned with research and studies relevant to the historical cities of Yemen. It also documents all materials and sources, including relevant articles, about these cities, their historical buildings, mosques, religious schools, boundary walls, citadels, forts, *khans*, *marani'* (water wells), *subul* (charitable water), and so on. Moreover, the centre is concerned with collecting all resources, studies and research that deal with any Yemeni or Arabian city or historical site.

Mr Almakaleh gave the following interview to *Islamic Tourism* on the occasion of the International Symposium on Cultural Tourism which was recently hosted in Damascus.

• **You have recently participated in the Symposium on Cultural Tourism in Damascus. What are your impressions of this conference?**

I was happy for the opportunity to participate in the conference. I have benefited from the participants' papers which certainly indicate the increasing awareness of the importance of the huge cultural heritage in our Arabian area as a solid ground for cultural tourism.

Our Arab countries are able to play this role as countries of culture(s) and history which we are able to explore and many of which are still buried and to be discovered and displayed to the world. On this basis, we are able to benefit from what was said in the conference and the recommendations to activate this in respect of Yemen.

• **What is the position of Yemen's activities in the area of Cultural Tourism?**

Tourism in Yemen is in fact cultural tourism

as it is full of historical landmarks, sites and cities.

Therefore, all tourist activities of the government, such as the General Organisation for Tourist Development, and the activities of tourist companies in the private sector, tend to revive the objective sites and publicise them. However, they are not progressive like other brother countries which preceded us in this respect, in particular in the continuous exploring of forgotten archaeological sites and cities, as well as in providing the infrastructure and facilities for the increasing numbers of tourists. Moreover, the government is busy with fulfilling the basic requirements for its citizens.

• **Are you concentrating exclusively on the city of Sana'a since UNESCO has classified it as a world heritage?**

The ancient city of Sana'a is of great interest and can be singled out and distinguished among other cities in Yemen for its size and diverse richness of cultural heritage, as well as being the archetypal historical city of the country.

• **What are the practical tourist projects in the city of Sana'a and its outskirts?**

Among the tourist projects in the Old City of Sana'a, for instance, the *khans* have been renovated and are now operating as centres for the various traditional crafts, arts and handicrafts. Many of the grand houses have also been renovated and restored to their former glory, some of which are now being utilised as hotels, in addition to those that already exist.

Another project is that of the Dhahar Plain, in a tourist area on the outskirts of Sana'a. This



المهندس المعماري نبيل طاهر صالح المقالع مدير عام مركز الدراسات والتدريب المعماري في الهيئة العامة للمحافظة على المدن التاريخية في اليمن

The architect Nabil Saleh Almakaleh

was the resort of royal families where stood the renowned palace of Dar al-Hajar.

Other historical locations that are not too far from Sana'a include Thala', Shabam, Kawkaban, and Tawila.

• **Do your projects include specific plans for preserving the environment as part of the general framework (of historical cities)?**

The issue of preserving the environment is very important to us. The near observer of the rehabilitation projects and the revival of quarters, adopted by the Organisation, would perceive that most of the projects that have been implemented so far have contributed to improving the environment of the historical cities.

The projects for paving and for orchards (*maqashim*) that are currently being implemented are funded by the Social Trust for Development. The gigantic project of the al-Sa'ilah Valley in the Old ➤

City of Sana'a, the water and sewage projects in Shabam, Hadhramawt and Zabid, in addition to the cleaning and litter programmes, are clear evidence of this environmental preservation.

There are also other projects, such as the tanks in the city of Aden and the paving of streets in the city of Jiblah, which plainly improves the environment of Yemen's historical cities.

• **Do your activities extend to other Yemeni cities such as Ta'izz, Aden, al-Hudaidah, Hadhramawt, etc?**

The activities of the General Organisation for Preserving Historical Cities at present includes all historical cities that are classified under world heritage.

These are Old Sana'a, Shabam, Hadhramawt, and Zabid, as well as other cities such as Aden and Jiblah. We are currently attempting to list other new cities as historical cities, including Sa'dah, Kawkaban

and Wadi Hadhramawt in addition to others too numerous to list here.

• **In concentrating on historical cities do you train people on how to effectively communicate with tourists?**

Of course, throughout its period and since the beginning of the 1980s, the General Organisation for Preserving the Historical Cities has paid quiet concern to this. It has sent many specialists to the Netherlands for special courses, but the shortage in financ-

ing has deeply affected the project. However, at present we have national cadres that are qualified for bearing the responsibility and managing all preservation works, from management, designing and planning, to supervision and organisation. There is also a collaborative programme between the governments of Yemen and the Netherlands which will be completed over the next five years, adopting a series of activities that will include qualifying and training cadres, in addition to educating citizens and local communities. ■

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The Sheraton Hotel in Sana'a