

# The FITUR Fair in Madrid

Active African Attendance and Limited Arab Participation

**Madrid - Motaz Othman**

The city of Madrid played host to the FITUR Fair, now in its 22nd year. Mr Moataz Othman, representative of Islamic Tourism magazine in Amman, Jordan, visited the fair and wrote the following report:

The FITUR Fair was held in an area that comprised eight large halls, half of which were dedicated to international participants, the other four to participants from the Spanish territories. The first three days were of particular interest to specialists and traders whilst the final few days were open to the general public. More than 170 countries- and regions- took part in the fair, including Spanish-speaking representatives from Central and South America. Many African countries also participated.

Whilst wandering through the various exhibition stands at the fair, we met Mr Heptamo Bekele, manager of the Tourism Promotion Sector in Ethiopia, who explained that his country had been a participant in the fair for the last three years- this year being its biggest. He stressed the importance of cultural and historical tourism in Ethiopia and said that there were many areas in the north of his country, for example, which are considered to be of special value and interest, such as the ancient cities of Axum, La Nipala, Condor ("city of fortresses"), and Bahr Dar, the source of the Blue Nile.

Ethiopia also had many areas of natural beauty, such as the Bali Mountain range, the walled city of Harar, with its many mosques, considered by Ethiopians to be the fourth holiest city in Islam), Nagash (destination of the first Islamic Hijra, or flight from persecution), and no less than seven tourist attractions recommended by UNESCO. Mr Bekele added that the southern region of Ethiopia is, moreover, equally famous not only for its varied culture but also its arts.

At the Gambian stand we met Mr Habib Drammeh, general manager of the Tourist



Authority in Gambia. He told us that there were more than five hundred species of rare bird, unique butterflies and magnificent foliage, as well as a moderate- mostly sunny- climate throughout the year, as well as glorious beaches.

A remarkable fact about Gambia is that the overwhelming majority of its citizens are Muslim - approximately 90% of the population.

At the Jordanian stand, a conversation with Mr Pedro Oviedo, office manager of the Jordanian Tourist Authority in Spain, revealed that Jordan not only participates annually in the fair but attends all the tourism fairs throughout Spain.

At the Spanish stand, we met Ms Elena Diaz who is responsible for marketing the Spanish Canary Islands- which total 7 islands huddled close together- famous for their fascinating natural beauty, the purity of their fresh air, and ideal resorts for people of all ages.

At the Barcelona stand, we met the promoter, Ms Veronica Rodriguez, who

expressed her admiration for our magazine. She said that in Barcelona there was an outstanding interest in promoting cultural tourism.

We also visited the stand of Malaga, a Mediterranean island regarded for its pleasant weather throughout the year, and considered one of the finest tourist destinations with its Marbella beaches. At the Kazakhstan stand, we had a meeting with Mrs Sanogash Ubakirov who told us that this was the first time they had participated in a fair in Spain.

We met Ms Patricia Grosfeld at the Dutch stand and provided her with the 5th edition of Islamic Tourism magazine which contains a report of Islamic Treasures in Holland. She expressed her admiration and showed great interest in the report. At the Romanian stand, we met an old friend, Mr Nikolay Yotovski.

After its closing, we wandered through the great city of Madrid, with its famous buildings, grand statues, public gardens, water fountains and attractive spaces. ■