

Whoever visits it visits the whole world

Ten marvellous days in incredible India

India - Motaz Othman

A long friendship binds the author and the magazine Islamic Tourism with the Indian Ministry of Tourism, the office of Indian Tourism in Dubai and the regional tourism boards in India. It has been crowned by an invitation to visit India, to participate in the feasts and the festival of Pune and Bombay, as well as by the visit to the tourist exhibition of Kerala and the province of Goa.

India is one of the ten big countries in the world for several reasons. First by the extent of its territory, the diversity of its climate and the beauty of its nature: the gigantic chain of the Himalayas, the hills, the plains, the forests, the rivers, the cascades and the beaches of golden sands. Then, by its huge population of nearly 1.1 billion. Also it has a history of more than 5 thousand years and a multiplicity of religions, beliefs, ethnic groups and languages. All this gives it a great cultural diversity. It is visible in the numerous historic monuments such as the Taj Mahal one of the marvels of the world, as well as through hundreds of feasts and festivals that are held throughout the country. This is in addition to its strong economy and the highly developed heavy industry and particularly its advance in the development of computer programming and the production of nuclear energy. For all these reasons India is one of the main tourist destinations in the world, satisfying the needs of all its visitors. It has been said that the one who visited India visited the world.

Bombay

Bombay is a gigantic tourist city situated on the Arabian Sea. It is one of the oldest cities of the world. It was one of the stations on the silk road and a centre of export of Indian spices to the rest of the world. It was colonised by the English who changed its name to "Bombay" and it was also conquered by the Dutch and the



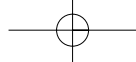
Millions of Hindus pulling Ganesh to the deep water
ملايين الهندوس يجرون أصنامهم إلى الماء

Portuguese who left their marks. Today it has more than 18 millions inhabitants. It is considered the western door of India since it is the biggest city on the western coastline. It is also considered the commercial, cultural and artistic capital of India since it hosts hundreds of artistic and cultural exhibitions annually. Millions of Indians emigrated to it from different regions to earn their living. Bombay is famous for its old constructions and its fine architecture such as the Gate of India, the Supreme court, the former Secretariat, the Academic buildings, the columns of Victoria and the buildings of the railroads. It is also famous for its boulevards covered with enormous very old trees and its public gardens. Bombay is characterized by its markets and shopping malls that offer different types of goods such as gold, jewellery, trinkets, clothes and leather of different kinds and at

reasonable and tempting prices. It is also known for its big luxurious hotels and numerous restaurants offering a variety of meals from Indian and international kitchens, especially its luscious fish dishes. Currently Bombay is one of the main cities joining the east and the west through its international airport served by most international airline companies. Bombay is a tourist destination, because of its tourist sites and also because it is a transit point to other Indian provinces.

The festival of Ganesh

There are around a billion Hindus in India, representing more than 70% of the total population. The Hindus have numerous feasts and festivals that are held through out the year. Some are celebrated throughout India - others only in some states or provinces. One of these festivals is the festival of Ganesh, a god represented by a man's body with the head of an elephant. The legend speaks of Ganesh, the son of king Shiva and queen Parvati. After his marriage, the king left immediately to go to war. Twelve years later, upon his return, one of the guards didn't let him enter the palace so the king decided to decapitate him. He learned later on that the guard was his son that he never knew. The king left the palace with the queen. Having found an elephant with its mother, he cut the head of the elephant and put it on his son's body. His wife told him: our son's ➤



City Tourism



Indian Door in Mumbai (bawabat Al Hind)

بوابة هندية في مومباي

present state is unacceptable. The king answered that Ganesh would be well liked and highly respected by the people. Ganesh is considered the carrier of good fortune. Whenever one wants to begin a new action, buy a new house, or get married, he comes to ask Ganesh to wish him every success. Ganesh also represents wisdom. Indeed, Hindus believe that the outside aspect of the human being doesn't have anything to do with his internal nature as in the case of Ganesh. The festival of Ganesh is held every year. The 10 days of the festival are fixed according to the Indian calendar. The preparations for this festival begin one month before. Families prepare statues of Ganesh of different sizes, dressed according to different tastes. Some gigantic statues are more than 50 meters high. The tenth day of the festival is the most important. Millions of Hindus in Bombay walk through the boulevards singing, dancing, and trailing the gigantic statues of Ganesh, as well as the other statues. They all head towards Chopatti beach and drown the statues. Then they return home, singing and dancing, dressed in their most beautiful clothes.

The city of Pune and its festivals

About 170 km to the East of Bombay is the city

of Pune. Even though the main festivities are bound to the festival of Ganesh, the festival of Pune is characterized by the predominance of cultural and artistic events: plays, dancing and singing by local groups, as well as music concerts, dramas and numerous films and sports events such as golf and car races. The festival also includes several programs for children. This festival is considered as the main feast, since public offices, and private enterprises stop work. Families visit each other. Major companies compete to sponsor the festival, which costs more than a million dollars.

The province of Goa

Due to the immense territory of India and its environmental and cultural diversity, the journey through Indian provinces looks like a journey to another country. This is what I felt at the time of my visit to Goa situated on the Arabian Sea. It is the smallest province of India whose population is mainly Christian. Goa relies mainly on tourism and is considered as the most open Indian province. There are lots of hotels and tourist stations on the golden sand beaches that attract tens of thousands of tourists from various countries between November and April. During this period the abundant rain between May and September makes Goa a green province. The journey from Bombay to Benja, the capital of

Goa lasts one hour. I arrived in Goa at the beginning of October and went to the luxurious tourist resort of Ramada on the south coast, through a country road mostly covered with palms and coconut trees. Sheep were grazing on the green plains. I could also see waterfalls, rivers and lakes. Road works were in progress for the next tourist season. The day after, the guide came with me on a visit to the historic sites of Goa, where I saw the Shiva temple, constructed more than 450 years ago. There are numerous Islamic engravings on its walls and windows. I also visited the church that is one of the main monuments of Goa. It is the burial place of Saint Francis who died in 1552. His remains are still intact and the natives consider this a miracle. The remains are brought down in November so that the visitors can see them. I also visited a number of beautiful beaches, especially the Dona- Pola beach. These two words are the names of two lovers with different social backgrounds who committed suicide here after their families refused to let them marry. This vast beach is famous for its different water sports, in addition to its restaurants and ledge overlooking the Arabian Sea. Goa is a clean tourist province in every sense of the word. It opens its doors to welcome tourists from all countries. It is in fact the Switzerland of the Orient. ■

