

# Happy Yemen

## A strong spring season for tourism

Sana'a- Mohammed Assayed

Yemen is a peaceful country with cordial people where tourists are welcomed. It is called Happy Yemen. The country is the cradle of civilization and history. It conceals enchanting tourist treasures.

Those looking for natural wonders, heritage and culture will see their dreams come true. If you have an attraction for the sea, you will discover in Yemen beautiful beaches, clean with golden sands, and more than 120 splendid islands. In addition there are vast deserts, and mountains on which houses sleep: at night they look like suspended stars in the sky. There is also medical and religious tourism and cities designated world heritage sites. The list of tourist attractions is long.

### Tourist treasures

Yemen is a tourist country of good reputation, because of its rich and dazzling tourism assets. Its attractions form a beautiful canvas mixing natural beauty with the ancient treasures of history and civilization.

Happy Yemen assumed a significant historical and civilizational role. It was the relay station between the old civilizations of India, China, Mesopotamia and the Nile Basin, and those east Mediterranean and Europe.

The assets of cultural tourism are abundant in this country. They are the fruits of the work and creativity of man, through various historical periods. Cultural tourism is one of Yemen's most important forms of tourism. The country has an exceptional heritage: hundreds of historical and archeological sites distributed throughout the land.

Architecture is one of the most important elements of cultural tourism. Its original, architectural masterpieces are as old as the civilization of Yemen, which dates ➤



Old Sana'a

صنعاء القديمة



General view of Sana'a

منظر عام لصنعاء



The Yemeni President talks to the tourists

الرئيس اليمني يتحدث إلى السياح



Hadramaout

حضرموت

**Tourism in Yemen has attracted the attention of the authorities. That is not surprising because the President, Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh, is a great lover of travel. He walks through old Sana'a, to the astonishment of tourists and enjoys the delights of the city with them. Deep-sea diving, is one of his favorite sports. He frequently refers to tourism in his economic speeches. Yemen's Minister of Tourism, Khalid Al-Rowishan, is adamant he could not manage without the president's proposals for the promotion of the tourist sector.**

back 4,000 years. The country also has rich traditions including folklore and unique clothes, customs and habits which express the life of the inhabitants.

Yemen also has vast beaches extending for more than 2,500 km, and more than 120 islands on the Red, Arab and Indian Seas. These beaches and islands have natural treasures, and different kinds of birds, plants, marine life, coral reefs and precious stones.

Yemen is therefore one of the most distinguished countries in the world, a place of interest and great importance, because of its beautiful natural landscapes. These diverse treasures make it a privileged holiday destination, useful for therapy provided by the sun's rays. It is also the place for water sports, such as swimming and surfing. Fauna (with more than 1,250 varieties of fish) and the flora of its coasts are an attraction for divers, who are coming to the country in increasing numbers.

Those interested in mountain tourism, will find the Yemeni mountains combine natural treasures and the creativity of Yemenis. At the top of the mountains, one is astonished

to see houses suspended from the sky. Beautiful villages constitute a splendid panorama with terraced agriculture in the green valleys.

At the top of most mountains, are archeological sites, historic buildings, fortresses and citadels, separated by green valleys with cool, refreshing streams.

Yemen has recently managed to attract a large number of tourists, in particular from the Arabian Gulf. The nationals of these countries come there for medical treatment: Yemen has more than 80 thermal springs for the treatment of rheumatisms, skin and nervous diseases, and for rest. Professionals estimate there will be a notable development in medical tourism in the near future.

Desert tourism is also made possible by vast wilderness in the east and west, historical cities and easily accessible sites and attractions. Camels are a favorite with foreign tourists eager to follow the desert routes from Maarib to Hadramaout.

### **A president in love!**

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### **Al-Rowishan – 'Spring of Tourism'**

He is known as the "Architect of Sana'a, the capital of Arab culture", the "Restorer of the spirit of Yemeni cultural" and the "Discoverer of the creative subject". Intellectuals and journalists call him the "Spring of Yemeni tourism". It is a name which he truly deserves, because he is passionate about tourism and has great hopes for its future development. He is the first Yemeni politician to initiate the principal project to restore the original ➤



The Yemeni President is a keen diver

الرئيس علي عبد الله صالح يمارس سياحة الغوص

colors of houses in old Sana'a, bringing back their charm. The Minister for Culture and Tourism, Mr. Khalid Abdullah Al-Rowishan, directed the department of tourism since May 2003, when it faced many difficulties exacerbated by the attacks of September 11, which resulted in a loss of an estimated \$145m.

Al-Rowishan says: "Certainly, Yemeni tourism paid a painful price following the events of September 11 and the war against terrorism. We had to react quickly, by adopting an emergency strategy to put an end to the deterioration of the sector, aimed mainly at creating a healthy environment, developing more tourist facilities and services such as the issuing of visas at the airport, and other points of entry, for the nationals of more than 45 countries in Europe and the Gulf.

We launched promotional campaigns for Yemeni tourism in regional and international markets. We participated in tourism exhibitions and international festivals, such as Milan, Berlin, WTM in the UK, Madrid, and ATM in Dubai, in addition to TopResa in France, and exhibitions in Japan and Russia.

We also highlighted the positive aspects

of Yemeni life and the climate of safety and stability which prevails throughout the country, contradicting distorted images and erroneous conceptions. We initiated a public relations campaign abroad, inviting famous personalities and foreign journalists from France, Germany, Italy and Spain, to counter the disinformation. The results were amazing, and reflected positively on tourist numbers which reached 273,000 in 2004, an increase of 41% on the 2003 figure, which recorded the arrival of 154,000 visitors; income from tourism has risen to \$214 million in 2004. This figure may be modest when we consider Yemen's enormous tourist potential and we envisage great improvements in future.

Mr. Al-Rowishan adds: "The other aspect of our strategy is to exploit 'the security element' in our battle, because security and safety are the keys of success in the tourist industry of any country. Yemen, thanks be to God, enjoys security and stability. The period of kidnapping tourists is over and, it is no longer necessary to have security men on most tourist routes. Yemeni tourism has now been given a new lease of life and another phase in its

development has started.

We are also attempting to attract Arab tourists, in particular from the Gulf, taking advantage of changes in the international climate. Arab tourists are no longer eager to go to Europe or America, for fear of being accused of terrorism, because of the events of September 11. The campaign to promote Yemen in Arab markets is already bearing fruit: the surge of Arab tourists from the Gulf reached a level exceeding our forecasts. They accounted for 60% of visitors to Yemen.

### **Yemenia Airlines, another success**

Yemenia Airlines were one of the significant factors in the revival of tourism in the country. Islamic Tourism met Captain Abdul-Khaleq Al-Kadi, Chairman of the airlines who affirmed that his company had taken the initiative to sponsor the tourist industry since the 70's. He had a dream for Yemen to become a peaceful tourist destination of international fame. And this dream is coming true.

Captain Abdul-Khaleq Al-Kadi, known for his competence and dynamism, stresses that his company has an annual strategy aimed at the development of international and local tourism in Yemen. His strategy is to regularly participate in international tourism exhibitions and Arab tourism festivals and activities. Yemenia currently focuses on new tourist markets and the development of Pan-Arab tourism and distributes booklets in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

Captain Al-Kadi adds that one of the objectives of the development of tourism in Yemen is to invite journalists and businessmen and acquaint them with Happy Yemen, as well as the investment opportunities in the tourist sector. We will develop tourist programs at promotional prices. The company highlights deep-sea diving in the Red Sea and the Arab Sea. It is also advertising in the most prominent Arab and international periodicals and prepares a comprehensive book on tourism programs in Yemen at competitive prices.

Like a phoenix, Yemen's tourist industry has risen from the ashes and is growing from strength to strength. ■