

# Third Conference On Moroccan Tourism

## A show of confidence in the promising future

Essaouira - Nour-eddine Saoudi

The 3rd Moroccan National Tourist Conference showed that the Moroccan tourism sector is in fine form with good future prospects despite some failures. The conference was held in the beautiful city of Essaouira, with a rich historical heritage on 3rd - 4th December. Its slogan was common insight for active responsibility. The conference, organized by the National Federation of Tourism with the support of the Ministry of Tourism, evaluated the achievements of the ten year plan 2001-2010.



From left: Taarji, Shaabi, Azoulay and Douiri

من اليسار: التعارجي، الشعبي، أزولاي، والدويري

Unlike last year's conference in Marrakech, the atmosphere was marked by a climate of openness and optimism about the future of tourism in Morocco. The country is seriously committed to its ten year plan, with a target of 10 million tourists by 2010. This general satisfaction is explained by the record

results of the sector in 2005: six million tourists, 40 billion Dh (nearly \$4 billion) and a growth of more than 17% compared to 2004. During the opening session, Mr. Adil Douiri, Minister of Tourism, the Craft Industry and the Social Economy, emphasised that nearly six million tourists visited Morocco in 2005,

including 3.3 million foreigners and 2.7 million Moroccans residing abroad. He added that it is a record figure for the country confirming that the targets of the ten-year plan have been met. Tourist income reached 40 billion Dh, compared with 34 billion in 2004. ➤



From left: Shaabi, Azoulay, Douiri and Bikrate

من اليسار: الشعبي، أزولاي، الدويري، وبكرات

Mr. André Azoulay, Adviser to King Mohammed VI and President and founder of the Essaouira-Mogador Association, underlined in his short speech that tourism plays a major role in Morocco's economic development. He added that the rise of Essaouira, which chose culture as the durable engine of development, became a tangible reality, clarifying the efforts made by local activists during the last decade, to promote this city which has been listed as a World Heritage Site.

The President of the National Federation of Tourism, Mr. Jalil Belabbas Taarji, affirmed that the vision of 2010 becomes more credible daily. He also indicated that it would be necessary to pay special attention to training. The opening meeting was addressed by the President of Essaouira's Town Council, Mrs. Asmaa Shaabi and the Governor Mr. Abdessalam Bikrate, who highlighted the province's tourist attractions, while calling for greater efforts to promote this destination and preserve its ancient heritage.

During the conference, the strategy for 2006 was presented. It focuses on increasing hotel capacity and upgrading the quality of tourist services to overcome the set backs of 2005.

An "E-tourism" strategy worked out by the Moroccan National Office of Tourism was also presented. It aims at promoting the electronic marketing of the Moroccan product, so that it can compete effectively, regionally and internationally.

During the final press conference, the Minister of Tourism pointed out the principal achievements of 2005; the establishment of the National Observatory of Tourism, the increase in the budget of the National Office of Tourism to 400 million Dh and the setting up of a platform for regional tourist centres. He also expressed his concern about the slow rate of extension of hotel capacity, marketing of tourist projects and the construction of new hotel units. Administrative obstacles hindered the completion of seaside resorts outlined in the Azure Plan.

In answer to a question by the representative of Islamic Tourism related to the interest and role of the government in safeguarding ethical values during the development of tourism, Mr. Adil Douiri, affirmed that this aspect is fundamental to ensure the continuity of tourist activity. The government will give it the required attention.

At the time of this significant debate, Islamic Tourism magazine, held the attention of the



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majority of the participants who expressed their admiration for its high quality. The representative of the magazine presented the complete collection of Islamic Tourism to the king's adviser Mr. Azoulay and the governor, Mr. Bikrate. They expressed their admiration for its quality and the various languages in which it is published.

The conference attracted more than 200 professionals, representing the various branches of the tourist sector: restaurants, hotel, agencies, guides, and the media. It is a preparatory event for the 6th International Tourism Conference which will be held in Tangiers in February 2006.

Islamic Tourism's representative also took an active part in the 4th Festival of Artistic Tourism, organized by Essaouira's Ministry of Education and Tourist School and visited the four-star, 156 room, Riyadh Mogador Hotel, which, in line with Islamic law, does not serve alcohol. The schools students and professors praised the content and production of the magazine. ■