

# Biskra the bride of the desert welcomes:

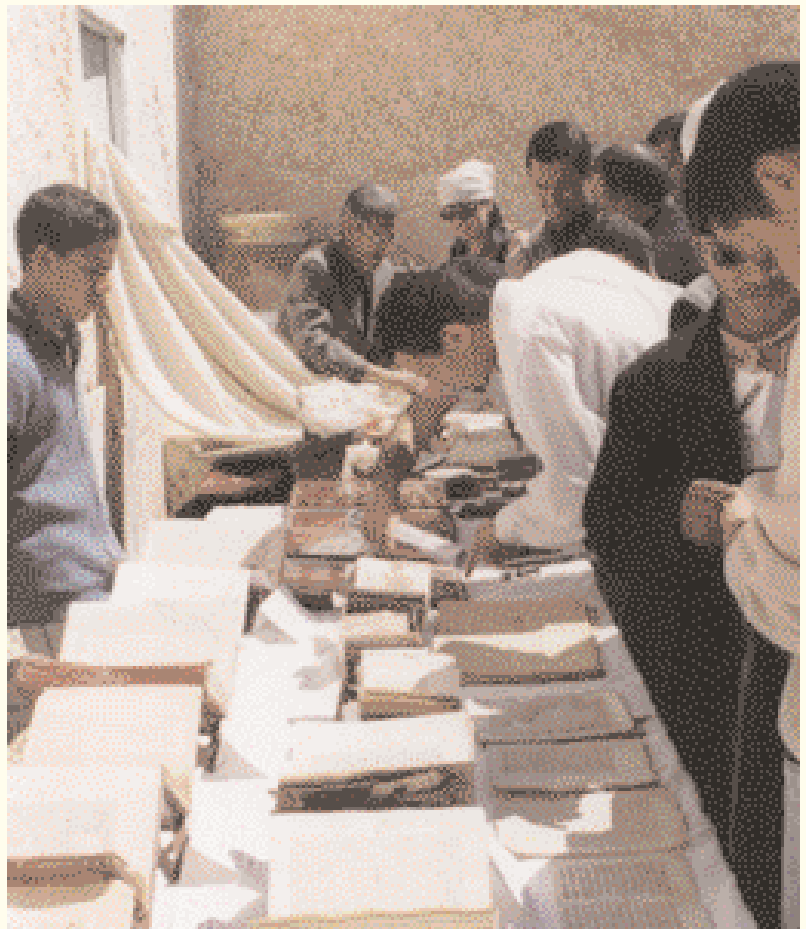
## The Second Festival of Desert Tourism

Biskra - Mounir El- Fishawy



A rare eagle

أحد الصقور النادرة



Rare manuscripts exhibited by Shaikh Mukhtar Mosque

معرض للمخطوطات الإسلامية النادرة بجوار مسجد الشيخ مختار

When the airplane landed in the Wilaya (province) of Biskra, arriving from the capital Algiers, the Arab and foreign guests (journalists and European tour operators) were received by the Wali (Governor), his assistants and the people in charge of the

tourism sector.

All came to Biskra to participate in the activities of the Second Festival of Desert Tourism, that this Wilaya organized from 25th – 28th March, 2006.

The people in charge received their guests

with music, famous songs and folkloric dances in the Wilaya. Mrs. Sabrina Hriresh Basha, Director of Tourism of the Province, specially greeted the representative of "Islamic Tourism" for being the first among all the guests to have visited Biskra and ➤



The Minister of Tourism, Mr. Nouredine Mousa opens the Tourism Village

الوزير نور الدين موسى يفتتح القرية السياحية

written about it in 2004. "I welcome you and your Islamic Tourism magazine again to Biskra the sweet city, the bride of al-Ziban", she said warmly.

### Why Biskra is the sweet city

The inhabitants of the province of Biskra spoil their city by calling it the Sugar City - its dates (Deglet) are the sweetest in the world and so transparent that light passes through them. That is why the dates are also called "Noor" (Light).

The word "al-Ziban" is the plural one of "al-Zab", date palm oasis in South Algerian dialect. They call it "Bride of al-Ziban" because of its wonderful natural beauty. It looks like a bride in the desert with about four million trees in the many oases. Approximately a third produces dates of the "Deglet Noor" type.

Biskra is also a cradle of civilization, science and culture. It is a centre of religious diffusion and an attractive tourist region, strategically located en route to Auras Mountains and the desert.

These characteristics and the rich festival programme resulted in Biskra being given the privilege of organising the Festival of Desert Tourism 2006 by the Ministry of Tourism. It competed with other 12 Wilayas of the Algerian Sahara, apart of Tamanrasset, which won last year.

### Tourist visits and multiple activities

Biskra has a large number of historical Islamic sites. The most famous is the mosque of Sidi Oqba Ibn Nafia Al-Fihri, which we described in issue 15 of Islamic Tourism. Another great mosque, an extension of Sidi Oqba has been built along

with a Koranic school to teach boys and girls Islamic sciences based on the model of the Egyptian University of Al-Azhar.

The guests visited the region of Sidi Oqba and the mosque of Sidi Massud (one of the leaders of the army of Oqba Ibn Nafia), whose mausoleum is in the place where he was martyred, according to Mr. Gharssat Hussein, the Imam.

The region of Sidi Massud comprises of the municipality of Shatma, characterized by the abundance water sources and brooks. The visitors took numerous photos of this wonderful, scenic area.

The municipality of Mshonesh, with its magical mountain landscapes with great trees, palms, brooks and small waterfalls, is famous for its pottery and mud houses. Another landmark is Khanqat Sidi Naji, which includes the mosque of Sidi Mubarak, constructed in 1602.

The complex is inhabited by the five families who came to the area with Sidi Mubarak. He called it "Naji" after his grandfather.

The visitors also toured the region of Zaatsha, in the municipality of Tolka, where the best quality dates are cultivated.

There are more than 1.5 million palms. Local attractions included the mosque and Koranic school of the Zawia Othmania (equivalent of a religious brotherhood) where boys aged between 6 and 18 learn Koran and religious sciences. This Zawia has old, unique Islamic manuscripts. The program of visits also included the visit to localities such as Al-Kantara, Sidi Jalal, Al-Besbis and others.



Water ways and date palms in Sidi Massud  
أحد الجداول المائية والنخيل بمنطقة سيدي مسعود

### Celebrations and exhibitions

The Algerian Minister of Tourism, Nouredine Mousa accompanied his guests to inaugurate the festival. He also introduced the tourist village, a large area with 14 tents, each representing a Saharan Wilaya and displaying its finest products.

Before each tent entertainment was provided by a folkloric band and dancers and shots were fired into the air to welcome visitors. The festivities included horse, camel and motor cycle races.

### Deep in the desert

The Arab and foreign guests had a few unusual experiences such as eating exotic dishes: dubara, shakhshukha, cuscus, frika soup and whole roasted lambs. They admired the rich desert heritage not only in Biskra but also in the wilayas extending from the coasts of the Mediterranean to the desert of Southern Algerian.

The natural landscape was amazing: green mountains with leafy forests and charming oasis of palms, plains and mountains.

In the Auras you can see rock inscriptions from the first inhabitants of the Algerian desert. We look forward to studying them at the Third Festival of Desert Tourism 2007 in Algeria. ■