

> Ramsau-Johannes Bardong

World Tourism Games in Austria

The Major Event in the Steiermark

During the World Tourism Games (WTS) from 21 to 24 June in the Dachstein-Tauern region, several hundred people involved in the business of tourism together with travel journalists from 41 countries participated at the invitation of the Austria Promotion Organization. Here the journalists were given the opportunity to become acquainted with the amenities of the area and at the same time participate in competitive sports.

The WTS was first initiated in 1996 by the Austrian Promotion Organization and takes place every two years in a different region. The games are intended to awaken interest in Austria and concurrently promote tourism. Participants from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Japan, Oman, New Zealand, Singapore, the Czech Republic, and the Ukraine were on hand. Dr. Peter Führlinger is responsible for Austrian Promotion for the Arab countries. Thanks to his efforts, the event was attended by many Arab guests in spite of competition from the World Cup taking place simultaneously.

Altogether 604 more or less athletic tourists sojourned to and fro from the sports areas in Ramsau, Schladming and the Dachstein glacier. In the ten competitive sports events - running, mountain biking, golf, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, triathlon, archery, beach volleyball and tennis - the participants displayed a fervent desire to do well.

THE REGION:

Dachstein-Tauern in Steiermark

The host state of the WTS - Steiermark - puts its emphasis on active holidays combined with healthy holidays. Sports is the reason given for two-thirds of the holiday-makers' choice of Austria as a destination. The starting point for most of the competitions was Ramsau which is the site of paradise for cross-country skiers in wintertime. The settlement directly behind



Flags of participants from all over the world
أعلام بعض دول العالم المشاركة

the Ski Centre Schladming stretches across 16 kilometres into the valley up to the cable car station. From there it is only a matter of minutes until you are in an entirely different world nearly 3000 metres high. The Dachstein glacier is one of the most highly esteemed tourist destinations in the Alps.

"We want to demonstrate that Austria is not only a great place for winter sports but an international tourist hub and a great place for holidays all year 'round. We hope the Tourism Games will help us prove that," Dr. Arthur Oberascher, the CEO of Austrian Promotion, told Islamic Tourism. The region has much to offer and is more than merely a summer ski area. Take, for example, the possibilities for hiking, climbing, mountain biking, river rafting, canyoning, and the so-called "Skywalk", a catwalk mounted on the glacier and jetting out into the air 2700 meters above sea level so that only a plate of Plexiglas separates the visitor from the earth 250 metres below. ▶



The Omanis at the award ceremony
العمانيان الفائزان في حفل تسلم الجوائز



At the opening ceremony
من حفل الافتتاح

Open for Arab Visitors

Whoever travels to Ramsau can enjoy – in addition to the sport facilities – authentic long-standing traditional culture. That is what Dr. Arthur Oberascher told me when I asked about the strengths of Austria when it comes to meeting the needs of Arab tourists. He is interested, of course, in the amazing ultra-modern developments in the Emirates and other Gulf countries, but realizes the main attraction of Austria. The Alps are banking on tradition, and in addition to a fantastic landscape hope that the warmth and individuality of the population of the Steiermark will be enjoyed by tourists. The World Tourism Games are intended to further enhance the image of Austria in the Arab world and Austria hopes to profit from the increasing interest in tourism evinced by Arabs.

Oman, the real winner of the Games

In Austria, skiing is the number one sport. Austria had no less than 166 participants in the games, some former professionals and some former champions. Children begin to learn to ski as soon as they can walk – and skiing is part of the normal curriculum in schools. With this background – 166 participants compete in all winter sport categories - it is no surprise that Austrian athletes won 59 medals and led the other countries in the country ranking. Nevertheless, as in all competitions, there was a surprise. The newcomer team from Oman – two participants Suleiman Al-Alawi bin Said and Suleym Al-Alwai bin Said - no relation despite similar names, employees of the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications, were able to attain fourth place in the country rankings with a total of eight medals, four of them gold! Should the men from Oman decide to take up skiing, Austria will have much to fear from this awesome competition.

As Arab guests are rare in the Steiermark, the Austrians are not yet always aware of cultural issues and this was shown during the award ceremony. The Games were sponsored by a brewery. The two extremely likeable men from Oman were given a keg of beer. The practicing Muslims took it all in stride and passed the keg on to the Dutch participants who were happy to have the

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The Skiing Competition
سباق التزلج



On the way to the Glacier on the Dachstein mountain

رحلة إلى الجليد على قمة جبل داشيشتاين

beer, as the Dutch football team was playing in the World Cup that evening and the Dutch visitors intended to view the game together and were grateful for the gift. It would have been a simple matter, though, to avoid such a faux pas. The Tourism Games are not only an international sports event. Although some of the participants and countries had a “do or die” attitude, the real aim of the games is taking part and enthusiasm for sport in the beautiful countryside. Events such as these promote getting to know one another and the exchange of ideas. Learning about one another’s culture is of utmost importance for tourism. As with sports, our magazine’s purpose is to be a medium for the understanding of culture differences. ■



At the buffet during the opening ceremony
من مائدة حفل الافتتاح