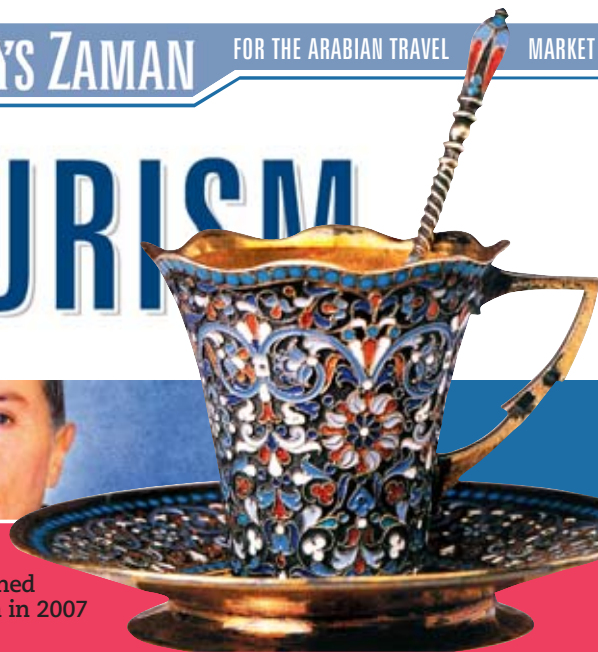


# TODAY'S TOURISM

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The luxury of sipping coffee

**13** Great potential for tourism with our neighbours in Mideast

**13** Turkish tourism earned \$18.5 billion in 2007

TRAVEL

## WORLD TOURISM SECTOR GEARS UP FOR ARABIAN TRAVEL MARKET

RÜSTÜ KAYHAN SOYDAN, DUBAI

The 15th Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which will take place this year at the Dubai International Exhibition and Convention Center on May 6-9, is expected to draw around 24,000 visitors involved in the tourism sector from over 100 different nations around the world. Among some of the nations joining in the exhibition for this first time this year are Bangladesh, Nigeria and Croatia.

The ATM exhibition was held for the first time in 1994, and representatives from Reed Exhibitions, which organizes the fair, noted that last year's edition attracted 20,000 visitors from 108 different nations.

The organizers of the exhibition will also be awarding the ATM New Frontiers Award to one of the participants in attendance at this year's event. The 10 states and nations up for this year's award are as follows: California, Peru, Greece, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nicaragua, China, Mozambique and Vietnam.

The organizers noted that the criteria taken into consideration in the awarding of this prize include efforts to maintain and develop tourism after natural disasters, to ensure that aid and assistance packages reach the correct targets and the level of support offered by local and federal governments for tourism. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 07**

SECTOR

## OPERATORS EXPAND CAPACITY AS INTEREST IN THERMAL SPRINGS BUBBLES OVER

İSA SEZEN, İSTANBUL

Turkey's hot spring centers, traditionally popular with older visitors for the treatment of various ailments, have undergone a transformation with new, five-star thermal facilities put into operation one after another.

The more traditional hot spring facilities have chosen to tackle their newfound competition with widespread renovations. The operators of these traditional hot spring facilities, most of which are run by municipalities, are renovating their facilities or building new ones in order to get a share from the ever-growing demand. They, too, have started to offer different alternatives such as luxury swimming pools, spa options, all-weather football pitches and trekking with to attract younger clients and newly married couples. Such hot spring facilities have a budget to fit every income group, with apartment-hotels and hotel room prices ranging from YTL 12 to YTL 150 daily.

Summer reservations for the hot spring facilities in Afyon and Bursa are already completely full, says Süleyman Nayır, the operations manager of the 1,900-bed Hüdaî Hot Springs, owned by the municipality in the Sandıklı district of Afyon. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 02**



PHOTO: DANA

Turkey's proximity to Arab countries, combined with simple visa procedures at the border, is attracting an increasing number of visitors from the Middle East and North Africa each year

## Arab tourists discovering Turkey

BÜSRA İPEKÇİ, İSTANBUL

Turkey's recent attempts to improve relations with Arab countries have positively affected the number of Arab visitors to Turkey. With its proximity to many Arab countries and relatively easy visa procedures for many of their citizens, Turkey has begun to attract more tourists from the Middle East and North Africa in recent years.

In addition to easy visa procedures with a regulation put into effect in 2007, advertisements taken out on Al Jazeera television by the Tourism and Culture Ministry have also played a significant role in increasing the number of visitors from Turkey's Arab and non-Arab neighboring countries.

Thanks to such efforts, the number of Arabs and Iranians visiting Turkey increased by 27.2 percent from 2006, reaching 750,000 in the first half of 2007, according to the Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TÜRSAB). The number of Iraqi visitors alone increased by 110 percent, with increases in travelers from Yemen and Kuwait at 36 percent and 35 percent, respectively. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 06**

## 15 Turkey strikes deal with Yahoo! to promote Turkey

Under leadership of Ertuğrul Günay, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is redoubling its efforts to promote Turkey abroad and plans to take advantage of the growing popularity of the Internet.



## 03 Exhibit recounts the centuries-long journey to Mecca

Bejeweled hangers, a silk-threaded camel saddlecloth, a wood-lacquered qibla compass, gold-gilded Kaaba locks and dozens of other sumptuous gifts that once traveled with the Surre-i Hümayûn (imperial convoy or caravan).



## 14 Star Alliance Member THY Eyes Gulf & Middle East

After securing a membership post with the Star Alliance, Turkish Airlines (THY) is looking new opportunities in the Gulf and Middle East market. Daily flights to Dubai were doubled in the first quarter of 2008



# OPERATORS EXPAND CAPACITY AS INTEREST IN THERMAL SPRINGS BUBBLES OVER



Turkey is among the top seven countries in the world and is the first country in Europe in terms of geothermal resources and potential. As a number of new, five-star thermal facilities have been put into operation one after another, the more traditional hot spring facilities have chosen to tackle their competition with widespread renovations.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Many people are booked under standby reservations, he said, adding: "There is an incredibly high demand. In order to respond to this demand, we are trying to complete the construction of 128 new apart rooms until July," he said. Fahri Ekren, the operations manager of the Oylat Hot Springs in Bursa, indicated that they had completely renovated the facilities, spending YTL 7 million, a figure that will undoubtedly prove a valuable investment as they are already booked at 87 percent capacity through the rest of the year. "Several years ago, the rich customers would come to visit, but when they saw the dilapidated facilities they'd often leave. Now, the courtyards of our hotels are full of luxury cars. We run at full capacity in summer. We are building a new 1,000-bed hotel in order to reach a yearly customer number of 300,000," he said.

Turkey is among the top seven countries in the world in terms of geothermal resources and potential -- and is first in Europe. Turkey's thermal springs have high a mineral density and are rich in magnesium, sulfate, sodium, potassium and calcium, and are far superior to the thermal springs in Europe in terms of their flow rates, temperatures, and various physical and chemical characteristics. The dense mineral content helps create high buoyancy, which eases movement for those who otherwise suffer impairments, and offers a relaxing and unique way to stretch, swim and perform aerobic activities. There are more than 1,500 hot springs with a temperature higher than 20 degrees Celsius and a flow rate of 2,500 liters per second around the country. Turkey has about 190 hot spring facilities in 46 provinces. The number of beds in the 10 facilities that have tourism investment certificates issued by the Culture and Tourism Ministry is 2,561, while that of 30 facilities that have tourism operation certificates is 8,562. Exactly 156 facilities that have about 16,000 beds have certificates issued by local administrations. In its tourism strategy for 2023, the Culture and Tourism Ministry aims to increase the bed capacities of the facilities to 50,000, 200,000 and 500,000 respectively in the short, medium and long terms.

The apartment-hotels and hotel rooms at the Hüdaî Hot Springs are also experiencing an increased interest. In Sandıklı, known as the "Thermal Town," there are 1,000 apartment-hotel rooms, 143 with private thermal baths. These apartment-hotel rooms can easily serve two people with its fully-stocked cupboards, including fireplace, TV set and fridge for YTL 20 for an overnight stay. Villas that are capable of serving up to six persons can be hired for YTL 90 for an overnight stay. The hotels provide their guests with free access to the rest cure centers, mud bath, the rest cure center, open and closed swimming pools, and many other features of the Hüdaî hot springs add to attractiveness of this location." Nayr stated that in addition to the ongoing construction of 128 new accommodation units, which are expected to be completed by July, they planning to

build another hotel with 500 beds. Another rising star of the hot spring business is Oylat in Bursa. İnegöl Mayor Alınur Aktaş indicated that while they were aware of the potential of the hot spring business, they had hard time in convincing the 80 shareholders of Oylat A.S. -- 17 percent of whose shares are owned by the municipality -- to renovate the hotels. Aktaş said that they had even taken shareholders to Czech Republic and other countries in order to show them first hand just how lucrative the thermal tourism can be. The 500-bed facilities were completely overhauled for YTL 7 million, and a new hotel was built, increasing the bed capacity to 1,000. The total bed capacity of six facilities, four of which are owned by Oylat A.S., is 1,500. After the hotels and thermal pools were renovated, the number of visitors to the regions doubled. Oylat A.S. hosted 135,000 people last year, and its target for the current year is to host 160,000 people.

Fahri Ekren, the operations manager, noted that the annual turnover of the facilities reached YTL 7 million, and the facilities operate at full capacity until the end of summer. "Here, the thermal water potential is capable of serving 7,000 people daily. In summer, we are unable to respond the demands because of insufficient bed capacity. For this reason, we are building a 1,000-bed hotel," he explained. He asserted that they were planning to complete several projects including luxury swimming pools, wooded areas and an astroturf football pitch.

Oylat A.S. is holding talks with investors for the construction of a cable car facility. Ekren noted that room prices have not been raised for three years, and those who wish to cook for themselves are only charged YTL 30 daily for accommodation. Room prices range between YTL 50 and 85 YTL a day for open buffet meal services.

Zeki Çiftçi, the general manager of Asya Thermal Resort in the Kızılcahamam district of Ankara, suggested that there was an increasing interest in hot springs since people have started to pay greater importance to their health. The recent attempts to renovate the hot springs facilities, too, have boosted the attractiveness of thermal tourism, Çiftçi noted, adding that last year 190,000 people came to their facilities while they are expecting to host more than 250,000 this year. Noting the change in the age groups of the people who opt for the healing characteristics of hot springs, Çiftçi said: "Parents want their children to benefit from the healing power of the hot springs. In the past, these springs would be preferred by the people aged above 50, but now, people aged 30 and below too, show increased interest. For young people and children, we offer swimming pools, Internet cafes, playgrounds, cycling tracks and other activities."

Professor Zeki Karagülle, the chairman of the Hot Springs and Rest Cure Centers Association (KKMD), stated that as living standards of people rise, they prefer to show active interest in their health, which boosted the attractiveness of hot springs. He explained that the number of people who tend to spend at least one day in hot spring facilities in a year was 5.5 million in the 1990s, which has risen to 10 million today. "Actually, there has always been interest in hot springs. However, hot springs are more frequently brought to agenda nowadays. Investors and tourism operators have also seen opportunities in these areas, which boosted the importance of thermal tourism," he said.

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# Exhibit recounts the centuries-long journey of Surre-i Hümâyûn

Istanbul's Topkapı Palace is hosting an exceptional exhibition of pieces that once traveled in the Surre-i Hümâyûn processions to Mecca and Medina starting from the early years of the Ottoman Empire. The exhibition was inaugurated by İstanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş this week and will run until May 25

ANNE ANDLAUER ISTANBUL

Bejeweled hangers, a silk-threaded camel saddlecloth, a wood-lacquered qibla compass, gold-gilded Kaaba locks and dozens of other sumptuous gifts that once traveled with the Surre-i Hümâyûn (imperial convoy or caravan) have returned to where their journey began: Topkapı Palace in İstanbul.

The palace, which served as the official residence of the Ottoman sultans from 1465 to 1853, is currently hosting a rare exhibition recounting the annual Surre processions that used to travel to the Haremeyn (Mecca and Medina) during the religious month of Rejeb. İstanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş and Topkapı Palace Museum President İlber Ortaylı inaugurated the exhibit on Wednesday.

Surre-i Hümâyûn refers to the annual subventions or royal gifts that the Ottoman Empire's supreme ruler used to send to the holy lands as a sign of respect ("surre" means "money" or "purse" in Ottoman Turkish). The gifts were carried by both the Egyptian and Damascus pilgrimage caravans to the poor Muslims and the sharifs of the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina.

During a speech that preceded the cutting of the red ribbon, Topbaş congratulated the teams that worked in converting the palace's Has Ahırlar (imperial stables) section into an exhibition venue. "Each artifact is [as] precious [as the] other. They each reflect different beauties. We know that there are many



PHOTO: MUSTAFA KIRAZLI

artifacts waiting in depots to be brought into the daylight," Topbaş said. The city's chief official invited all İstanbul residents to "come and see the breathtaking collection of the Surre-i Hümâyûn, which reflects a deep respect towards the holy land [of Islam]."

## A critical piece of Ottoman history

The event -- which will run until May 25 -- is a first for the palace-turned-museum and gives an idea of the large sum of money that was devoted to this tradition. For that matter, Ortaylı described Surre-i Hümâyûn as one of the most im-

portant aspects of Ottoman history and both a duty and a right for every Muslim ruler.

"This turned into a tradition during the rule of Yavuz Sultan Selim [1470-1520]," Ortaylı recalled. Noting that the annual procession was a very costly duty for the Ottoman treasury, Ortaylı said Surre-i Hümâyûn convoys traveled continuously to the holy lands from 1517 to 1917.

As a result, the pieces on display cover four centuries of Ottoman history. The exhibit's catalog leaves few doubts about the outstanding nature of the event. Bejeweled camel chest-plates and head-

pieces shine in their glass showcase next to 19th-century Janissary weapons and 18th-century gravures representing the Surre procession.

Nearby, silver plates and enameled hangers from the period of Sultan Mahmud II rival with an impressive 18th-century golden hanger bejeweled with rubies, emeralds, turquoises, diamonds and chrysolites. A few meters away, visitors notice a heavy ceramic bowl filled with wheat presented to Hücre-i Saadet, sitting next to amber prayer beads and to an 18th-century tile panel depicting the Kaaba.

Other noticeable artifacts include letters of ap-

preciation from the period of Süleyman the Magnificent, a large yellow-and-white Kaaba binder, a bejeweled oil lamp from 1792, a few gold-gilded Kaaba locks and keys dating from sultans Murad III, Mehmet III and Beyazid II, as well as a collection of Surre books from the 16th and 17th centuries.

As Professor Ortaylı emphasized in his opening speech, the Surre-i Hümâyûn exhibition fulfills the duty of shedding light on a considerable part of Ottoman history, which started right from the early years of the era to only disappear when the empire disintegrated, a few years after World War I.

Perfection is  
hidden on details



# Improving ties prompt Turkish tourists to prefer neighboring Muslim countries

There has been a sharp hike in the number of Turkish tourists visiting Gulf countries as a result of Turkey's cooperation with its Muslim neighbors over the last few years in various fields, from the fight against terrorism to protecting water resources, which has contributed to the solving of problems and the strengthening of ties

BETÜL AKKAYA ISTANBUL

Improving political and economic relations between Turkey and its neighboring Muslim countries have recently given a boost to tourism prospects between them.

Turkey has cooperated with its Muslim neighbors over the last few years in various fields, from the fight against terrorism to protecting water resources, which has contributed to the solving of problems and the strengthening of ties. As a result, there has been a sharp hike in the number of Turkish tourists visiting these countries.

An official from Tarhan Tower Airlines, in a phone interview with Today's Tourism, said there has been a significant increase in the number of Turkish tourists visiting eastern countries in the last few years. "Turks have only recently discovered the beauties of its Muslim neighbors," he added.

According to the Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TÜRSAB), around 20,000 people from Turkey visited Syria in 2003, climbing to 248,000 in 2007. Factors that have drawn Turkish visitors to Syria include visa exemption, a promotional campaign that the Syrian Tourism Ministry recently started in Istanbul and the similarities between Turkey and Syria.

There has also been an increase in the number of Turkish tourists visiting Iran, another neighboring Muslim country. According to data released by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and posted on TÜRSAB's Web site, Turkish tourists visiting Iran account for approximately 13 percent of the total number of visitors to this country.

Sunay Ünlü Yücel from TÜRSAB's research and development department, notes in a report posted on the association's Web site that Iranian officials have recently been making a concerted effort to attract more tourists to the country. "Within this context, Iran seeks to act in cooperation with Turkey. Iranian officials state that they wish to develop a strategy on cultural tourism in the long term and take direct steps to this end," she remarks in the report.

Turkey and Egypt, however, have failed to meet their mutual tourism potential, largely because of the limited number of flights between the two countries, but tour operators and travel agencies have recently taken on the problem by the use of chartered flights. Another report by TÜRSAB reveals that the number of Turkish tourists visiting Egypt is lower than predicted by the agency. "Yet, there has been an increase in this number in the last few years, largely due to the attractiveness of cheap holiday resorts and the elimination of visa problems between the two countries," reads the report.

Egypt and Turkey, which signed a free trade agreement last year, are now working on a joint tourism venture with the objective of increasing tourism between the two countries. "Prompted by cheap hotel prices and the allure of the Pyramids, Turkish tourists are choosing to visit Egypt more and more," ETS International Tours Director Ibrahim Cenk Okumus was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency.

Another Arab country largely visited by Turkish tourists is Saudi Arabia for pilgrimages and umre (visiting the Kaaba and other holy places at times other than the pilgrimage period).

"Around 120,000 Turkish pilgrims visited Saudi Arabia last year, and we expect an increase in this number this year," a representative from Emir Tourism & Travel told Today's Tourism.

Noting that the number of citizens who are allowed to visit holy places in Saudi Arabia during the pilgrimage period are restricted by a quota set by the Saudi government, the Emir representative stated that the Turkish government tries to increase its quota each year. "The number of Turkish citizens who want to go on pilgrimage grows each year. For example, a total of 772,000 people applied to visit Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage, but only 70,000 of them were accepted. I believe this number will be increased after the government asks the Saudi authorities to grant a larger quota to Turkey during the pilgrimage period," he stated.

Last but not least, Turkish tourists are eyeing Dubai as a new tourist destination. The Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing held a workshop last year in Istanbul in cooperation with TÜRSAB, the Turkish Hoteliers' Association (TUROB) and the Turkey Hoteliers' Federation (TUROFED) in a bid to improve mutual tourism between Turkey and its Muslim neighbors.

"Dubai attracts more than 6.5 million tourists each year, and 37,000 Turkish visitors came to our country in 2006. Our objective is to increase this number because there is great tourism potential between the two countries," said Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing Overseas Promotion Manager Khalifa Ali K. Buamain. Officials from both countries are hopeful that tourism between Turkey and Dubai will increase in the years ahead.

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# TURKISH BANKS SHIFT THEIR SIGHTS TO MIDDLE EAST

The increasing share taken by Turkish business in regional trade, combined with a Turkish foreign policy that is putting more focus on the Middle East in general, has encouraged Turkish banks to look to the Middle East to expand their business.



PHOTO: MUSTATA KUSEN, CHIAN

UFUK SANLI ISTANBUL

Turkish banks, which broke profit records last year despite the fluctuations in financial markets, have shifted their focus to countries in the Middle East, with large Turkish banks such as İş Bankası, Halkbank and Ziraat Bankası

targeting Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

The increasing share taken by Turkish business in regional trade combined with a Turkish foreign policy that is putting more focus on the Middle East in general have encouraged Turkish banks to look to the Middle East to expand their businesses. İş Bankası CEO Ersin Özince explained that

the Middle East region has great banking potential and that his bank had already carried out feasibility studies regarding both Baghdad and Damascus and would be opening branches in these cities in the coming year. As for Ziraat Bankası, which received permission to operate in Iraq after struggling for two years to get the go-ahead, it has now turned its attentions to Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, Sekerbank has Dubai in its sights. Sekerbank CEO Hasan Basri Gökten noted that due to the rising prices of petrol, a serious liquidity was emerging in the Middle East.

And thus Turkish banks, which had up until recently seen the Middle East region as advantageous mostly because of its low taxes, now have lofty goals for the region and are finally seeing the possibility of "real banking" in the Middle East. "I believe that there are great opportunities in both Iraq and Syria in terms of banking. In particular in Iraq, if a peaceful atmosphere could be established even to a small extent, we would very much want to make investments there," noted Özince.

Where Iraq is concerned though, the most courageous Turkish bank up until now has been Ziraat Bankası. Ziraat, at a time when Iraq was truly on the verge of civil war and when no other bank had made any moves, became the first bank to open a new branch in Iraq. It began talks with the Iraqi Central Bank in 2004, and following a two year struggle to obtain the necessary permission, this Turkish state bank made its first steps into the country by opening up a new branch in Baghdad amidst nothing less than chaos. Ziraat General Director Can Akın Çağlar noted that his bank's vision in the region is not limited to Iraq. "We are now also targeting Saudi Arabia. We would like to open two branches in Saudi Arabia, and thus widen our web of service within the Middle East," he said.

With Ziraat focusing its energies abroad in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, another Turkish state bank, Halk Bankası, has its eyes set on Syria. Officials from Halkbank stated that trade relations between Turkey and Syria have been growing recently. "Since this trade mainly involves smaller and middle-sized operations, we as Halkbank would like to play an active role in this process," noted one Halkbank representative. Currently, Halkbank officials are involved in meetings with Syrian banking officials, and it is expected that Halkbank will in fact obtain the necessary permission to move ahead with its plans in Syria by the end of this year.

In addition to the interest in Middle East banking potential shown by Turkish state banks, private Turkish banks are also displaying the desire to get involved in the region. Özince, who also heads the Turkish Banks Association (TBB), elaborated on what he perceives as the great potential presented by countries in the Middle East, noting that Iraq is at the top of this list. Özince reiterated that his bank would be opening branches in the region in 2009, thus taking the first steps toward more active involvement in regional banking.

Meanwhile, Gökten talked about the liquidity in the Middle East connected to rising petrol prices. "In order to take advantage of this atmosphere, we need to open up to countries where petro-dollars are abundant," he noted. Gökten explained that at this stage, Sekerbank is aiming to open up an off-shore banking establishment in Dubai and that in later stages his bank may take different kinds of steps but in the same region.

## Turkish banks in 20 countries

Until recently, the Turkish banking strategy within the Middle East was limited to the opening of off-shore banking establishments in Bahrain. The fact that the three Turkish banks that shifted their interests toward this region in order to escape high mediation costs have been publicly-owned banks -- Halkbank, Vakıflar Bankası and Türkiye Sınai Kalkınma Bankası (TSKB) -- is notable. According to data from the TBB, there are currently 11 Turkish off-shore banking facilities established in Bahrain. Turkish banks, which are active in 20 different foreign countries, have a total of 50 active branches abroad. Turkish İş Bankası, with 11 active branches outside of Turkey, has more foreign branches than any other Turkish bank.

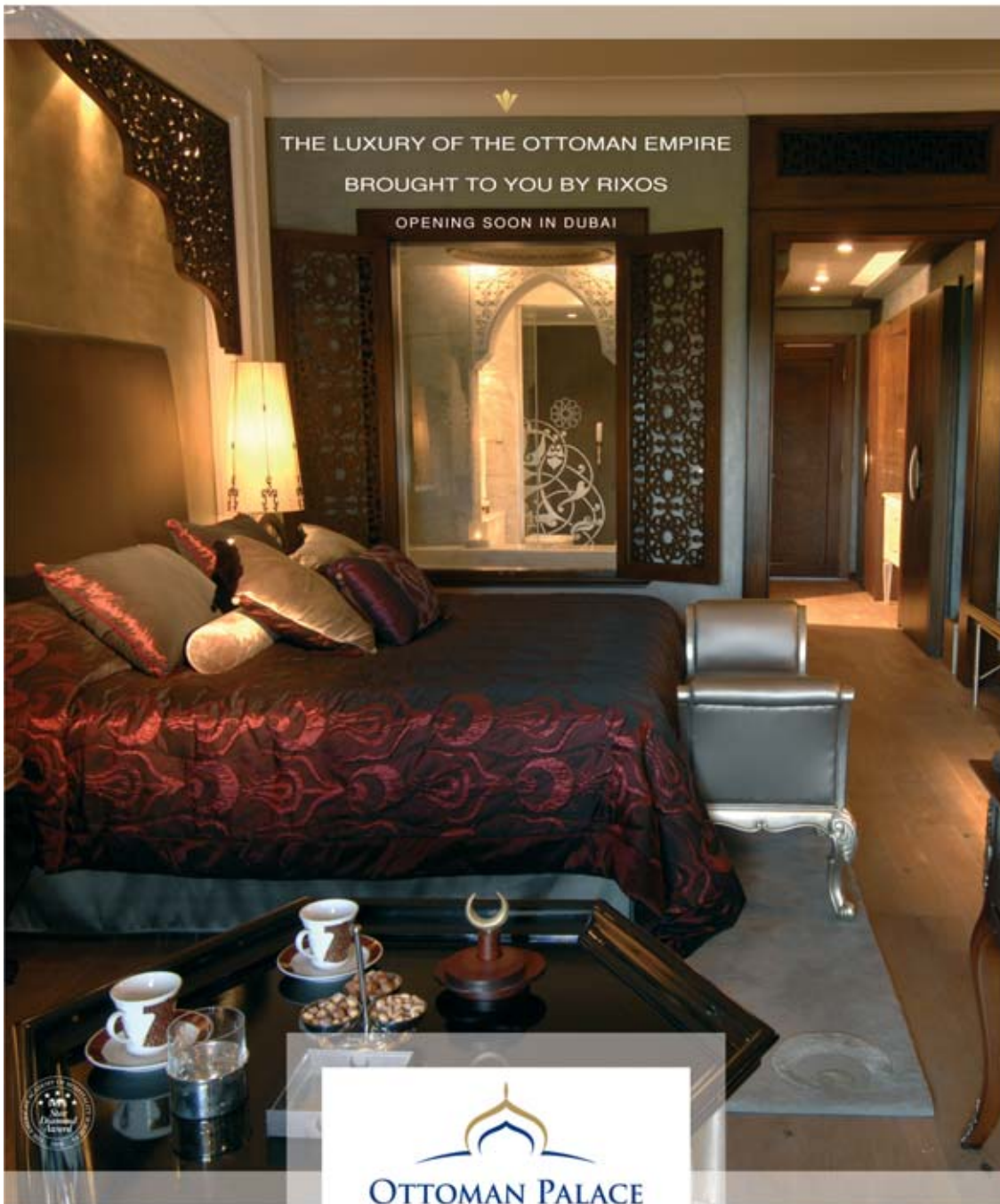
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# ARAB TOURISTS DISCOVERING TURKEY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

TÜRSAB Chairman Başaran Ulusoy told Today's Tourism that Turkey hosted 1.8 million visitors from Middle Eastern countries in 2006 and 2.2 million in 2007. "The percentage of visitors to Turkey that came from the Middle East -- not including Egypt and other North African countries -- was 8.99 percent and 9.7 percent of total visitors in 2005 and 2007, respectively," he added.

Erhan Çakay, deputy general director of İstanbul's Best Western The President Hotel, noted in an interview with Today's Tourism that out of the Middle Eastern tourists, most came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

For the three years before 2007, Arabs were required to apply for a visa and a document similar to a residential permit for stays longer than 30 days, causing a 50 percent decrease in Arab visitors to Turkey. With the new regulation in place, they are able to obtain entry visas for up to 90 days at border gates and airports in a simple process.

Cüneyt Mengü, the owner of Mercan Tourism, a travel agency focusing mainly on Arab tourists, told Today's Tourism in a phone interview that the Middle East had the potential to be Turkey's largest tourism market after Russia.

On the other hand, Nebil Çelebi, the owner of Hilal Tourism, told Today's Tourism that Turkey should focus also on attracting Europeans living and working in Middle Eastern countries, as their numbers are on the rise. "There are many global companies with branches in the Middle East. British expatriates for instance, whose population in these countries is significant, are interested in Kusadasi -- a district in the Aegean province of Aydın -- so we should really promote such locations," he added.

## Why else is Turkey a popular destination for Arabs?

Turkey's well-known natural beauties, temperate climate and relatively cheap prices when compared to European countries are all crucial factors in making Turkey a popular travel destination for Arabs. "The fact that Turkey's population is predominantly Muslim is also critical in drawing tourists from Arab countries -- and



PHOTO: TODAY'S ZAMAN

they feel more comfortable here," Mengü emphasized.

According to Çakay, in addition to global competition, prices are also important when tourists choose travel destinations. "Arab tourists prefer Europe during the spring months, but they mostly decide according to price," he noted. Increased charter flights between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries have also contributed to the rise in Arab tourists, Çelebi says, adding that "Turkish Airlines [THY] should launch more direct flights to Middle Eastern countries."

## Arabs spend more than Europeans do

An Arab tourist spends more than the average European tourist in Turkey. Europeans tend to prefer "all inclusive" accommodations and do not spend much outside their hotel. "In addition to this, Arabs also like shopping -- and they spend 1,000 to 1,100 euros per person, while Europeans spend approximately 700 euros [each]," Çakay notes.

Mengü, who did his doctoral thesis on the tourism potential the Middle East represents for Turkey, asserts: "Although the official amount of expenditures per Arab tourist is usually smaller, Arabs from the Gulf countries in particular may spend up to \$2,000 or \$2,500, according to research I have done."

Çelebi says that most Arab tourists coming to Turkey have high incomes and therefore they prefer four or five-star hotels, noting, "Turkey should promote itself and use its actual potential to become one of the favorite destinations for the Arab world."

## Saudis largest group of tourists

Saudis make up 70 percent of all Arab tourists traveling overseas. Saudi Arabia sends 5 million people abroad each year. The number of visitors coming from Saudi Arabia to Turkey has been on the rise since the year 2000. According to data from the Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat), Saudi

tourists come for vacation purposes most often, followed by business trips and visits to relatives.

Saudi tourists tend to spend a lot and prefer comfortable hotel accommodation or renting houses. They usually vacation along with their family and prefer to be close to other Saudi tourists. Meanwhile, the Tourism and Culture Ministry recently established a representative office in the Saudi capital of Riyadh.

## Black Sea Arab favorite

The Black Sea region is one of the areas in Turkey that Arabs favor the most. However, a lack of luxurious and sufficient accommodation has hurt the region's real tourism potential. Mengü emphasizes that Arab tourists, Kuwaitis in particular, show great interest in the Black Sea region. "If there were some high-quality accommodations, we could attract many more tourists. We must build luxurious facilities to draw more high-income visitors to the region," he stresses.

Çelebi states that Yalova, Bursa, Bolu and the Black Sea province of Trabzon -- its district of Uzungöl, in particular -- are among Arabs' favorite places in Turkey. Mengü goes on to say that the Termal district of Yalova, known for its thermal springs, would actually draw more visitors if only there were enough facilities to accommodate large numbers of people. "There is also the lack of sufficient transportation to some locations," he adds.

## Hosting Arabs is a different market

Arab tourists have different habits from Western European tourists. Their basic difference is the fact that they prefer destinations that appeal to their Muslim identity.

Mengü also argues that advertising campaigns and marketing should address each target Middle Eastern country separately, as each of them has unique values, despite their commonalities. Furthermore, booklets about popular destinations that are favored by Arabs, such as İstanbul, Bolu and Yalova, should be prepared both in English and Arabic, according to experts.

Travel experts stress that Turkey needs to promote tourism in Arab countries with advertisements exclusively prepared for such countries. They should not include anything that insults Islamic values.

Çakay notes that the biggest advantage of Best Western The President Hotel is the fact that it is included in the Emirates Airlines catalogue, underlining the significance of publicity. Meanwhile, Mengü notes that Mercan Tourism is expecting to host 15,000 to 20,000 Arab tourists between July and August.

Başaran emphasizes that although the number of visitors from Middle Eastern countries has increased in recent years, it is still not sufficient. "Yet the rising trend of Middle Eastern visitors in Turkish tourism is a significant indicator of our country's improving tourism relation with such countries," he notes. Furthermore, Başaran adds that Gulf countries are also targets of other countries with high tourism potential; thus the competition conditions are rather hard. "But Turkey offers a welcoming atmosphere, as well as many attractions and opportunities that could inspire high demand in the Arab tourism market," he concludes.



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## Parliamentary commission accepts draft amendment on real estate sales to foreigners

An amendment to the bill on land registries, which was recently annulled by the Constitutional Court upon an appeal filed by the Republican People's Party (CHP), has been accepted at a parliamentary commission. With the new amendment, the benchmark for real estate ownership limits for foreign persons and institutions has been changed from total provincial area to the total area of a given city center base.

The new changes reduce the total amount of land that can be sold to real foreign persons in comparison to the rejected

bill. Real foreign persons will be entitled to purchase property within the limits of areas allocated for development as long as the total land purchased by foreign persons in the city does not exceed 10 percent of the total land in a given province's city center. The bill cancelled by the Constitutional Court allowed for such purchases up to 0.5 percent of a province's territory.

A commission that will be made subordinate to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, which supervises the land registry, will be established to review requests for

changes to these restrictions, although the upper limit of 10 percent of a given city center cannot be exceeded. The commission will subsequently refer the proposals to the Cabinet.

Changes in the areas allocated for development must be forwarded by governorates to the commission by the end of the next January. Under the new amendment, the locations of military zones, military security zones and strategic areas shall be provided by the Defense Ministry to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing without delay. Ankara Today's Zaman

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## WORLD TOURISM SECTOR GEARS UP FOR DUBAI TRADE FAIR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Last year, the New Frontiers Award was given to the Cancun region of Mexico for the efforts to regroup and restart tourism efforts in the wake of the disastrous Hurricane Wilma that hit the area in 2005.

According to information on the ATM's official Web site, Turkey is to be represented at the exhibition by the Turkish Culture and Information Office. The Turkish exhibit at ATM, which will be headed up by Turkish tourism attaché Emin Kaya, will work to promote tourism and the cultural aspects of Turkey to visitors at the event.

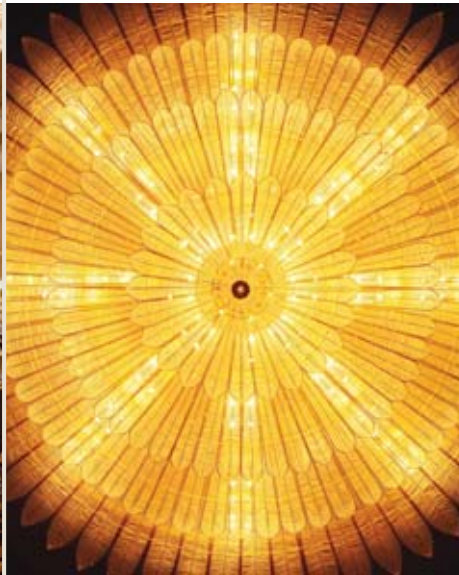
In addition to well-known names like Turkish Airlines (THY) and the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB), the Turkish exhibit at the ATM will also include representatives from 27 different tour companies as well as hotel groups, travel agents and investment groups.

The 14 different seminars scheduled to take place during the exhibition will aim to explore the various problems facing the tourism sector, allowing visitors and representatives at the exhibition to voice their thoughts and opinions on possible solutions. One specific topic will be how tourism firms and organizations can better meet the needs of the estimated 161 million vision-impaired people in the world when they travel.

Another topic marked for debate is how China and India, two countries which have both seen double-digit growth in the hotel sector over the past year, can acquire and retain qualified employees. According to research done by one employment agency, a full 80 percent of employees working in the hotel sector report that they want to change companies, while only 10 percent said they were satisfied with their current work place.

Visitors to the ATM will also be offered the opportunity to donate money to the Just a Drop charity. Just a Drop uses its funds to help bring safe drinking water to families and children living in difficult conditions throughout the world. This foundation, which started 10 years ago at the ATM exhibition, has managed to gather nearly 9 million pounds and help more than 800,000 people in 25 different countries.

While experts are estimating that Gulf nations will be hosting around 150 million tourists by the year 2020, it is expected that the ATM trade fair in Dubai, which in itself has become a center of tourism, business and trade within the Middle East, will attract scores of interested tourism sector investors and businesspersons.



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# HIDIV KASRI: A DREAM VENUE IN A GLORIOUS GARDEN

One the late 19th century Ottoman governors of Egypt, Hidiv Abbas Hilmi Pasha, needed to stay in İstanbul for a long time with the aim of gaining support to stop the British invasion of Egypt. Thus, in 1903 he purchased two wooden houses on the shores of the Bosphorus on the land where Hidiv Kasrı now stands. Then, the pasha asked Italian architect Delfo Seminati to build a glorious castle and a tower from which to view İstanbul on an area of 1,000 square meters



ISMAL KOCABIYIK İSTANBUL

Hidiv Kasrı, built on the request of Hidiv Abbas Hilmi Pasha in the Italian style in 1907 and set among centuries-old woodland on the Asian side of İstanbul, now plays host to engagement celebrations, weddings, gatherings and meetings. Hidiv Kasrı is known for its famous nightingales, and the garden surrounding the building is so full of roses that the building itself can seem to be an island in a sea of flowers. The building was the recipient of İstanbul's first steam-powered elevator, which leads to its tower -- from where you can see both Asia and Europe.

The palace has been extensively restored and its halls now serve as restaurants, offering buffet-style service at weekends and a regular restaurant during weekdays; the kitchen boasts some 55 different dishes. The halls also function as ideal venues for gatherings of anything between 25 and 400 people and are suitable for weddings, engagements and other meetings.

## The story behind the building

One the late 19th century Ottoman governors of Egypt, Hidiv Abbas Hilmi Pasha, needed to stay in İstanbul for a long time with the aim of gaining support to stop the British invasion of Egypt. Thus, in 1903 he purchased two wooden houses on the shores of the Bosphorus on the land where Hidiv Kasrı now stands. Later on, the pasha bought the 270,000-square-meter garden consisting of wooded slopes and the headland behind the houses. After demolishing the wooden houses, in 1907, the pasha asked Italian architect Delfo Seminati to build a glorious castle and a tower from which to view İstanbul on an area of 1,000 square meters. Hidiv's family stayed in the palace until 1937, when the İstanbul Municipality bought the building and its grounds. The palace remained uncared for until it was restored by Celik Gülersoy in the name of the Turkey Touring and Automobile Association in 1984, after which it served as a hotel for a while. The palace was restored once again in 1994-1996 and later taken over by Beltur, under the auspices of the İstanbul Municipality.

## The halls of the first floor

A star-and-crescent emblem surmounts the entrance of the chateau-style palace. Round marble columns, terraces, the pasha's bedroom, the tower, marble, wooden and crystal halls were constructed according to neo-Classical, neo-Islamic and neo-Ottoman architecture styles. Flower, fruit and game animal motifs dot the walls, designed to have a European architectural flavor. Entrance floor is divided into a number of individually designed halls.

One descends to the marble hall via a few steps. Immediately after you enter you will see a monumental fountain with mosaics on your right, featuring a frog figure -- a common Art Nouveau motif. A floor-to-ceiling iron-framed window is also a striking feature. The marble terrace of the hall with its İstanbul view supports the balcony of the rooms above, thanks to its 24 white marble columns. The pink, white and green chandelier in the hall, like a flower, was the first of its kind in Turkey. When illuminated, the hall seems fit for a fairy palace. The concave hall is entirely paneled in mahogany-colored wood and features the best wainscot in İstanbul, while the wooden hall's paneling features depictions of various fruits and is constructed from oak. Gold-plated baskets of flowers hang from the ceiling and over the door of the crystal hall, which is wholly decorated with crystal mirrors. The hall has a fascinating atmosphere with its scintillating walls, bejeweled ceiling and brass flambeaus.

The hall with the pool has also Art Nouveau characteristics; the walls are covered with both wooden paneling and mirrors. The pool itself is made of marble. Another interesting thing about the hall with the pool is that you can reach all of the other halls via communicating doors -- it has also has an elevator connecting it with the second floor. Thus this hall is placed at the very center of the other halls and reflects features from each of them with its marble pool, wooden and mirrored walls.

As you go upstairs there are six rooms on your right, which are above the marble hall. Three have large balconies onto the inner garden, which is surrounded by yews and filled with roses. There are two bedrooms in the first floor, one belonging to Hidiv himself -- both have en suite bathrooms. There are huge wardrobes in Hidiv's bedroom and one of the mirrored doors of the wardrobe is actually a secret entrance to the hall at the center of the first floor. The bedroom also contains a beautiful Art Deco chair.

This magnificent architectural feature can be reached in one of two ways, either by elevator or a main staircase. The tower contains an additional storey with its own balcony, as well as being surmounted by a high terrace, which offers one of the best views of the Bosphorus. The wooden paneling on the inner walls of the tower and stairs is Romanian pine and the original elevator still functions. The terrace is the ideal place to relax and soak up the inimitable Bosphorus atmosphere, while sipping tea to a soundtrack of chirruping birds.

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# Antalya, an unexplored holiday paradise for Arab tourists

**KENAN BAŞ** ANTALYA

Antalya has made significant progress in the field of tourism since the mid-1980s, becoming the number one destination of Western European and Russian tourists. It is said to offer the best hotels and holiday resorts in the world, attracting nearly 8 million tourists in 2007 alone.

However, despite growing worldwide interest, Antalya still remains an unexplored vacation paradise for tourists from Arab and Middle Eastern countries. No Arab county is listed among the top countries from which tourists visiting Antalya hail. Arab countries do, however, constitute a remarkable market which ensures that Turkish tourism is extended throughout the entire year. Considering this opportunity, some companies have already taken action to address this situation.

Antalya, attractive for its sea, sand and sun, offers vacation opportunities year-round. Winter sports and tourism are also an option in Antalya, which is located on the slopes of the Taurus Mountains, which run across southern Turkey.

Further efforts are being made in Antalya, which has some of the world's best hotel facilities and entertainment venues, to appeal to Arab tourists, including chartered flights to be launched in July-August between Dubai and Antalya. The flights, spearheaded by Belmondo Travel, will promote and improve tourism between the United Arab Emirates and Antalya. Belmondo Travel board member Koray Turan says not many tourists come from some Arab countries despite regular flights between these countries and Turkey, and underlines that prejudice and a lack of promotion play the greatest role in this.

"We go after the Germans to bring them here, while the Arabs are searching for ways to get here. The potential is incredible; these are very wealthy people and countries," Turan said. Noting that a large promotional event was held in January targeting the Middle Eastern market, Turan said 15 tour operators were invited to Antalya from the UAE. Meetings with these operators resulted in a



Konyaalti Beach



Manavgat Falls



Konyaalti Beach

decision to launch chartered flights between Dubai and Antalya in on Fridays in July and August. Turan said there would be 12 flights, including those scheduled for the Ramadan holiday, in total. Stressing that the goal is to 2,000 tourists from Dubai to Antalya on charter flights this year, Turan said: "Even the most modest tour operators fly with a Boeing 747 from Dubai. Flights abound to countries in the East, including Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand. Dubai is an important hub and terminal. A number of planes take off in Istanbul, land in Dubai and depart for their final destination from there. Likewise, Dubai is a central point for European flights as well. As such, there is a

wealth of options for flights routed through the city. As such, it holds incredible potential. Half of Dubai's population, or 2 million people, go on vacation every year."

Turan stressed that tourists from the UAE have great buying power. He further said: "The first question they asked when I scheduled a chartered flight was how they would convince these people to board a chartered flight simply because these flights do not offer a business class option. Turkish Airlines [THY] promised that they would offer flexible seating. We would like to take people with such requests on THY to Istanbul. Some have said they would not board a chartered flight, no matter what."

Turan further said: "Paris and London are

familiar places for these people. They have recently been confronting problems in getting visas. They were used to staying there for a long time during holidays and vacations. For instance, we know that some own vacation houses and some rent villas for long-term stays in Denmark and the Netherlands. The tour operators did not believe what they saw when I took them to Antalya. I tried for three months to convince them to come here. They liked our hotels and accommodations very much. We also showed them historical and cultural places as well as the entertainment life. Antalya is a new destination, and there is a growing interest in it."

Ali Baras, an operations manager with Alkaber Tourism Antalya-Marmaris, which has

worked in the Lebanese and Jordanian markets for a decade, says that Antalya can become the most popular vacation destination for Arab tourists. Noting that boat tours in Manavgat and "Turkish nights" are particularly appreciated and enjoyed by Arab tourists, Baras underlined that the only current trouble was that the holiday season is very short. Recalling that the season starts late and ends early because schools go on vacation later in Arab countries, Baras said: "For years we have expended efforts to have chartered flights in June. Arabs are people who make their decisions at the last minute. While having coffee tonight, for example, they'll decide to travel somewhere tomorrow."

Baras, who has pushed authorities to launch serious promotional activities that reach out to this market, said: "Last year we saw the first Syrian plane landing in Antalya. It could have carried 165 passengers, but we saw as few as 30-40 on that flight and the number stayed below expectations throughout the season. The most that flew was 60 in August. The reason? Are there not enough customers? No, this is not the problem. We failed to find hotels in the Lara-Kundu region. Large companies reserved the entire place. A lot of passengers can come, but there aren't enough beds for all."

As for why few Arab tourists frequent Turkey, Baras says: "Arabs are not like Europeans; they like to spend their vacations with their family, not just as a couple. They have family vacations just like we do. Also, it is very difficult to find space in Antalya's hotels in July or August. Depending on their financial situation, they travel to the US or to Europe and prefer Egypt as an alternative to Turkey. Turkey can become a leading actor in this market if it turns to serious promotion and takes proactive steps."

Agne Tur Deputy General Manager Serife Kaya said: "Arabs are unaware of the investments that have been made here. They are surprised to see the luxury and high quality on offer here. They are unable to imagine the sea, sun, nature and culture of Antalya and even get angry at us simply because we have not been promoting these places. Very little information is available about Antalya, and some even think that Antalya is somewhere in Africa -- but this is our fault."



## Arabs Favor Antalya

Kaya underlined that increasing number of Arab vacationers would make Turkey more competitive in the region and vis-à-vis its competitors. Speaking on the hotel preferences of current Arab tourists to Antalya, Kaya said: "They prefer five-star chain hotels in city centers and resort hotels in the Kundu-Lara area. Entertainment and food are their favorites. They mostly prefer villas with private swimming pools. Some do not have their meals at restaurants, but rather ask for private chefs to cater their meals."

The common goal of tourism enterprises in Antalya is the launch of direct flights between Antalya and Arab countries. Business interest groups are pushing government to make this happen. Mediterranean Tourism Hotels and Enterprises Union (AKTOB) Chairman Sururi Corbatir drew attention to the importance of direct flights, saying: "We have to expand our market. We have some priority goals and destinations like Kuwait, Syria and the UAE. For example, there are many foreign investors in Dubai. They look for places to get away from the scorching hot season. We want them to come here to Antalya when they decide to take a vacation. Direct flights are a possibility. We are currently doing some research and hope to have direct flights starting next year. We plan to attract relatively wealthy customers to Antalya."

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# Öger Tur aiming to attract mature holidaymakers to Turkey

KENAN BAŞ ANTALYA

Turkey is already proving a hit with retirees looking to live in sunnier climes in their later years and now Öger Tur is hoping to tempt vacationers from the same group to the Mediterranean resort of Antalya with its "advantage card" for German tourists over 55.

The card incorporates a number of benefits for those taking vacations of between eight and 12 weeks, including free airport transfers, free rental car and free hairdressing. Services associated with the card even include watering of flowers at the European homes of the tourists spending their vacation in Antalya and dog walking.

Öger Tur General Manager for Turkey Recep Yavuz said that the card, introduced last year, has been most satisfactory. Stressing that Turkey has so far failed to benefit from winter tourism, while 500,000 tourists visit Spain off-season every year, Yavuz underlined that creative and attractive projects should be developed to appeal to mature

European tourists. Noting that they reached 2,000 German tourists this year through to the advantage card they had introduced, Yavuz added: "Some 500,000 tourists paid visits to Spain last year in winter times. We would not have held a single meeting here if 50,000 of these had come to our country."

Yavuz who said that the advantage card was created to meet the practical needs and demands of tourists, added that holders of this card will be entitled to a variety of free services. Recalling that they carried out thorough research before introducing the advantage card, Yavuz explained: "These people go somewhere in wintertime anyway. We did some research to identify their expectations and needs. The card was designed to respond to these needs and demands. It will be improved based on customer demand. For instance, this year the card will feature entitlement to 100 credit units to be used for free phone calls."

Noting that those covered by the advantage card have a habit of hav-

ing long vacations, Yavuz noted that these people's priorities mostly include health, food and language, and that the card reflected this. Recalling that a group of staff competent in German language assist card users 24 hours a day, Yavuz also underlined that they provided a free check-up service.

Noting that they throw a party for their guests every month, Yavuz said: "Because they stay for a period of 12 weeks, we gathered them together every month; some came from Alanya and some from Kemer. We ran a survey at the end of that night. This year, the total number of participants in the event increased to 2,000. Next year, we will double this figure. None of the respondents stated he or she won't come next year in our survey."

Yavuz underlined that the dog-walking and garden-care services offered to card users made them far more content to take long vacations. He also stated that their research had shown a German would spend more money in his country than on vacation in Antalya using the advantage card.



# THE LUXURY OF SIPPING COFFEE

Upon leaving my homeland and traveling through Greece and Turkey for the first time, I was faced with the challenge of finding that coffee fix that had become such an important part of my day

SHARON CROXFORD ISTANBUL

When I left Australia just under 11 years ago, I knew I was leaving behind, among other things, the strong café culture of Melbourne.

Originating with the Italian communities that thrived in the major cities of the country, cafés became a part of the mainstream food world. I grew accustomed to strong Italian coffee, either a cappuccino in the morning or an espresso or café latte later in the day.

Upon leaving my homeland and traveling through Greece and Turkey for the first time, I was faced with the challenge of finding that coffee fix that had become such an important part of my day. I looked forward to tasting my first tiny cup of the thick, treacherous black-looking stuff. I remember I was sitting in a small local restaurant near a beach on Santorini. I prepared myself, ready to sink into the whole experience, to soak up the ambience, to enjoy the whole process of slowly drinking the coffee. The first sip stuck to my lips and crawled down my throat like a scratchy, sandy mouthful of thick, bitter gloop.

Onward and eastward to Turkey and my touristy trip around western shores, up through the middle and onto to Istanbul, saw my tongue and taste buds struggling against the harshest instant coffee I had ever encountered. Finally, I left Turkish and Greek shores and headed for London, but the London coffee story of a decade ago was worse than anything I had encountered around the Aegean and Mediterranean. Having decided to reside in London for the foreseeable future, I adjusted my expectations and lived in a haze of "real" coffee deprivation for years. Of course I made it at home and found it on my trips to Italy and France, but sadly, each time I visited Turkey I clenched my teeth as I achieved my caffeine requirement each day.

Then, one morning, about nine years ago, I stumbled across the first Fez café in the Grand Bazaar. The place looked inviting, the aroma of Italian-style coffee, the illy signage and the friendly staff almost had me begging for a seat. But more than that, the coffee was amazing. I ordered a café latte and instead of the insipid variety that would be served up in London, I found a strongly flavored brew sitting under thick, not too hot milk. I think I made my decision to move to Istanbul then. If I could everything else that Istanbul was and good Italian-style coffee, I did not need anything else.

It was a couple of years later that I actually made the move and settled in Amavutköy and then another few before moving to the Halic. While living along the Bosphorus, I was within a short distance of many good cafés, perhaps none serving as good a coffee as Fez and the few places I had sniffed out in Beyoğlu, but I was not at too much of a disadvantage. Moving to the Halic did, however, bring back vague memories of the deprivation I felt when I first left Australia.

When the Red Bull race came to buzz through our days along the Halic in late May or early June of 2006, a concerted effort was made to clean and tidy the shoreline. Before the paths were rebuilt, the grass re-laid and the trees pruned and clipped into shape, walking along the shoreline was a little like picking your way through a wasteland. A breath of life was brought back to part of the stretch between İnkapınar and Fener.

The following year, a very last-minute effort saw the remainder of the

area up to Balat neatened up. Both jobs in reality were quick and probably a little hasty, as concrete was still being laid the day before the big race. At some point between the two labors, a small peninsula about midway between the Atatürk Bridge and the sea police headquarters was secured behind a fence. It was the perfect place for a café and my interest was heightened by the possibility of a civil place a short walk from my front door. As I passed the spot every time I left Fener in the direction of Taksim or Eminönü, I would peer over the fence as well as I could. Being in a bus was infinitely better than passing in a taxi as I could check on the building works with an almost unobstructed view. Walking afforded little benefit as the fence was made of sheet metal.

My parents were due in Istanbul in September 2007, and I had visions of us walking down for a leisurely brunch, sitting outside enjoying the view across the water, the sound of occasional boat put-putting by lulling us to relax. I was also excited about the chance of having a place so close to home where I could sit back and relax while drinking a good coffee, or a tea -- my years in Istanbul having broadened my drinking habits in that direction. I could take the paper, Today's Zaman of course, and read about news inside and out of Turkey. Yes, it would be safe to say that I anticipated the opening of the shore-side place with a fair degree of optimism.

My parents' visit came and went. The building project was painstaking, precise and a complete contrast to the work that had gone into repairing the surrounding parkland. I missed the grand opening. I think I was in London at the time, but one day I passed and the fences were down, cars were parked and a formally dressed doorman stood by to welcome visitors. Not long after I dropped in to test my vision of the long yearned for café on my virtual doostop. It was a cool day, I had my paper and some notes that I needed to read through, and I stepped into the immaculate foyer with great expectation. Minutes, or perhaps only seconds later, all my hopes were dashed. I was quickly surrounded by what seemed like 10 waiters all dressed in neat, clean black and white. I was escorted quite formally to one of the neatly laid, orderly arranged tables and given a menu.

I left my newspaper folded in my bag. It was not Fez, or Simdi, or even The House café. I could not slip down into my reading or work and comfortably while the hours away. I put my disappointment away as I took up the menu. And there I found the silver lining. The food on offer was sound, typical Turkish fare at very reasonable prices. I looked around and noticed baby chairs and the non-smoking signs and despite the obvious loss of a place to lounge and relax, it suddenly became a good place to bring my 2-and-a-half-year-old daughter for a quick excursion and some firm sitlax. In summer we could sit outside without fear that she would run away, the perimeter secured by a wire fence. The coffee would not be strong and Italian the way I liked it and I would still need to visit Fez, by myself, newspaper in hand to reach out to the reminders of the café culture I left behind all those years ago, but my life had changed a little since then. Overly efficient waiters in a smoke-free, child-friendly place with good simple food at affordable prices were what I needed now and would probably grow accustomed to, too.

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# TOURISM DEMAND IN ÇEŞME SURPASSES ALL EXPECTATIONS

Russian travel agencies have overwhelmed their Turkish counterparts in the Aegean resort of Çeşme, reported an official from the Destination Izmir publicity organization, adding that an increasing number of Syrians and Iranians have also been making reservations for the coming summer.

Destination Izmir's Yakup Demir, director general of the Ilca Hotel in Çeşme, told the Anatolia news agency that Izmir's EXPO candidacy, although the city ultimately lost out to Milan, had proved sufficient driving force to push up hotels reservations in well-known Turkish holiday resorts such as Antalya, Çeşme and Kuşadası.

"There is growing demand for Çeşme for summer 2008, with a 30 percent rise in reservations made for Izmir and Çeşme hotels. Both foreign and domestic tourists have grown in number, Russian and German tourists in particular have started forming groups big enough to fill a hotel for an entire holiday season," Demir said. "Çeşme is a firm favorite with domestic tourists and so Çeşme should aim to strike a balance between foreign and domestic visitors," he added.

Stressing that Turkey is beginning to appeal to the more conservative people of Syria and Iran, Demir added: "We have been in touch with Syrian and Iranian agencies and are making research into Iran tourism. Kazaks also have great economic potential, and they put it into use in the form of investment and holidays in Turkey. We have great expectations from that region this year."

Çeşme had about 1,000 tourists from Iran last year, Demir noted, and is expecting a 50 percent rise this year. "Some people are made uncomfortable just by the idea of Iranian people spending their holiday in Çeşme. To me, holiday habits have become quite diverse in recent years. If you ask me why Iran: Its people love traveling, they choose Çeşme because they are close to the Turkish people," he said, adding that Iranian visitors generally come in September.

## Wealthy tourists are big spenders

Some wealthy Russian, Syrian, Iranian or Kazak tourists enjoy the power of their money in Çeşme and have been known to rent out entire facilities during their stay. "They sometimes rent out swimming pools for certain periods or hours

## TAV intent on becoming leading force in construction

TAV Construction, which has become an international trademark with its steadily increasing business volume and successful projects, is taking determined steps toward becoming a leading force in the construction industry.

Established in 2003 within the structure of TAV, which was founded in 1997 by a joint venture between the Tepe and Akfen groups after being awarded the contract for the Istanbul Atatürk Airport international terminal project, TAV Construction has taken significant steps toward becoming an international trademark in Turkey in airport construction projects and airport operations since the day it was established. Thanks to its rapid growth and new investment opportunities, TAV Construction, with its headquarters in Istanbul and with active offices in Cairo, Doha, Dubai, Tunis and Tripoli, has so far signed numerous construction contracts for more than 2,560,000 square meters.

Besides airport construction activities and providing technical maintenance and repair services with its experienced staff, TAV Construction also provides consultancy services in the field of airport infrastructure, an increasing requirement worldwide.

TAV Construction, which has an important position in its area of activity with its technical expertise and experience, has formed strategic partnerships with world giants such as the Japanese Taisei, the Brazilian Odebrecht and the Lebanese CCC as well as undertaking work on its own.

It has so far accomplished such projects as the Istanbul Atatürk Airport international terminal, the Esenboga Airport international and domestic terminal in Ankara and the Izmir Adnan Menderes Airport international terminal. It has also updated the domestic terminals at the Atatürk and Adnan Menderes airports. In addition, TAV Construction has completed Tbilisi and Batumi international airport projects in Georgia. The company is also overseeing numerous projects in the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Tunisia and Libya. *Istanbul Today's Zaman*

during which nobody else can swim, and they sometimes make utterly personal demands, such as, 'I want to rent out the bay for three hours.' Well, these are demands made by rich people," said Demir. Russian tourists in particular were keen to rent out beach clubs, and tourism operators do whatever is in their power to meet those demands, he added.

Eighty-five percent of tourists to Çeşme

come for the sea and sand; 10 percent for cultural purposes and windsurfing, and the rest have personal connections to the city, Demir noted. "Çeşme is a sought-after tourism location in winter and summer alike. Domestic and foreign demand is growing steadily. Our sea and sun are really beautiful," he said, explaining that such a resort had no need to be modest about its many assets. *Istanbul Today's Tourism with wires*



Çeşme

PHOTO: ALI RIZA KARASU

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# Steady increase of Middle Eastern vacationers in Turkey

BAŞARAN ULUSOY\*

In 2005, a total of 1,898,230 people visited Turkey from Middle Eastern countries. The following year, the total number of tourists who visited Turkey decreased by 6.18 percent, with Middle Eastern tourists dropping by 5.98 percent. However, in 2007 we observed a dramatic increase: The number of tourists visiting Turkey from Middle Eastern countries reached 2,270,348 -- a 27 percent increase over 2006. The portion of Middle Eastern tourists in the total number of tourists visiting Turkey was 9 percent in 2005 and this number increased to 9.73 percent in 2007.

As is common knowledge, the Middle East includes countries that have coasts on the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. The following countries are located in this region: the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Iran and Israel. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) and Egypt and other northern Africa countries are not included in the statistics above.

Fifty-seven percent of the tourists who visited Turkey in 2007 were from EU countries, and 20 percent came from the Russian Federation. The share of Middle Eastern countries also constitutes a significant portion at 9.73 percent. However, I have to emphasize that this number is not sufficient. On the other hand, the growth tendency of the portion of tourists coming to Turkey from Middle Eastern countries shows that Turkey's tourism relations are developing with these countries.

While evaluating the processes in the region in terms of tourism, one should not forget the political conditions in the Middle East, Turkey's occasional tensions with its neigh-



Başaran Ulusoy

bors, the crises and instability that the first and second Gulf Wars created and other threats that negatively affect tourism.

Another important point that should not be ignored is that since the Turkish tourism business began to develop rapidly after the mid '80s there has been an emphasis on Europe and America in the sector in terms of Turkey's advertisement campaigns. However, after the '90's Turkey's strategy has called for diversification of tourist sources. So Turkey took new initiatives in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific regions in order to diversify its tourism services and markets.

Here I want to add that the Middle East is not homogenous; there are some major differences among the countries in terms of tourism and market potential, so broad evaluations of the region would not be entirely meaningful.

Nonetheless, we assign great importance to developing our tourism relations with our neighboring countries and undertake particular initiatives and activities for this reason.

If we look at the issue in terms of countries, Iran ranks first, sending 1 million tourists to Turkey annually. Israel follows Iran with 500,000 people and Syria ranks third with 330,000. Iraq ranks fourth, sending 180,000 tourists annually. Jordan follows them with 60,000, Lebanon with 45,000 and Saudi Arabia with 41,000. The United Arab Emirates sends 13,000 tourists annually, Kuwait sends 12,000 and the numbers for the other countries are below 6,000.

As the Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TURSAB), of course, we perceive these numbers as low and believe that we can raise them further. We believe that we need to increase our market share, especially in the countries that have a significant potential for high-end tourists. However, we should not forget that these countries, especially the Gulf countries, with their high-end tourist potential, are also targets of Turkey's rivals and there is a strong competition in these countries.

In the evaluations of the market potentials of Middle Eastern countries and the strategies to reach these countries we should evaluate the market potential of each country separately.

All in all, our association assigns great importance to developing our tourism relations with our neighboring countries and other Middle Eastern countries and increasing our market share in these countries. However, in order to reach our long-term goals in these markets, we need to employ much more effective advertisement strategies.

There is a consensus about Turkey's potential for maintaining its rapid development trend and analyses confirm this tendency. Let's expand this great potential together.

\* Başaran Ulusoy is the chairman of the Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TURSAB).

## Tourism is a sound investment with a bright future

MURAT DEDEMAN\*

The investments made in the Turkish tourism sector during the last 20 years and the positive contributions the sector has made to the country's economy are clear indications of the potential of the sector to undertake big projects and play a lead role in the country's overall growth. Our target is to ensure that tourism in Turkey, already in the top 10 destination countries worldwide, makes the great jump to the top five.

With a rich geography, the most beautiful coasts of the Mediterranean, backed by mountains, a history dating back 10,000 years, rich culture and folklore, delicious cuisine and hospitable people, Turkey has competitive advantages in the world tourism market. These advantages are permanent and do not change depending on the atmosphere or market conditions. As in many other sectors, these advantages do not flee to other countries with the lure of low labor or input costs.

The Turkish tourism sector earned \$18.5 billion from 23.3 million tourists in 2007. The price and quality balance is the competitive advantage of the Turkish tourism sector. Modern accommodation facilities, successful tour operators, an ever-increasing fleet and vast network of Turkish airlines have played great roles in this success.

Tourism investments are regarded as sound investments with a bright future. Annually, about \$2 billion is invested in the tourism sector. Along with the textile and automotive sectors, tourism is among the sectors that receives the greatest share from investments in the Turkish economy.

We are glad to observe that tourism investment is also increasing in Anatolian cities. Companies in Anatolia are starting to transfer the funds they obtain from other sectors to the tourism sector. Tourism investments in Anatolia should be encouraged if we want to foster the tourism sector in every part of the country and throughout the year. To this end, well-planned regional incentives will be needed.



Murat Dedeman

In addition to diversification and the spread of tourism, we should try to expand our share in foreign tourism markets. Currently, 80 percent of foreign tourists arriving in Turkey are coming from European and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. However, there is a vast Arab geography to the south and a rapidly growing Asia to the east. Escalating oil prices have added to capital growth in Arab countries, and there is an increasing trend in consumption in developing countries in Asia, particularly China and India. More and more travel abroad is from the Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Fostering the activities of our tour operators in these markets and ensuring greater growth in our airlines' network is particularly important in accessing these markets.

Furthermore, the center of capital formation has shifted from Western to Eastern countries; there is incredible capital growth in Asia and the Middle East. The recent fluctuations in the US and European finance markets in particular have urged this capital to seek new investment venues. We should find ways to attract this capital to the Turkish tourism sector. Special incentives for major tourism projects are very important to attract this capital.

\* Murat Dedeman is president of the Turkish Tourism Investors Association (TTTD).



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# STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER THY EYES GULF & MIDDLE EAST

After securing a membership post with the Star Alliance, Turkish Airlines (THY) is looking for new opportunities in the Gulf and Middle East market. Daily flights to Dubai were doubled in the first quarter of 2008 to meet increasing demand from Gulf travelers. THY is also increasing the frequency of its flights to Doha, Sana'a and Bahrain in the hope that the connecting flights coming from Europe will be handled by its fleet. Currently Turkish Airlines is leading the charge in increased seat capacity and passenger count in the Association of European Airlines (AEA) -- representing 33 major airlines. In the Middle East, THY will begin flying to

Aleppo on May 15 and to Tehran on May 24, bringing the number of flight destinations to 17. THY formally joined The Star Alliance on April 1st and the move was seen an important breakthrough for the airliner. The Star Alliance is seen as the most important conglomerate in the world aviation business, and it includes major brands such as Lufthansa, United Airlines, US Airways, Air Canada, SAS, All Nippon Airways, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airlines, Austrian Airlines, Swissair and Air China. General Manager Temel Kotil says the airline's membership in the Star Alliance is the most important deal in the 45-year history of Turkish aviation, noting

that membership in the alliance will provide Turkey with full integration with the world aviation network. Kotil emphasized that THY's membership will render Istanbul a major flight center of the world, like New York, Paris, Frankfurt, London and Singapore. The Star Alliance is the largest and most awarded airline alliance in the world. THY customers will be able to earn airline miles and use them for any member airline company at the same level -- with the exception of certain deeply discounted classes. In addition, a premium customer of any of the member companies of the alliance will have access to the airport lounges of all member airlines. Also, flight

schedules will be coordinated to permit almost seamless travel that may include several different carriers within the alliance on a single ticket. Furthermore, special fares for round-the-world and multi-stop travel will be available from the members of the alliance at a reduced cost. The members also enjoy cooperation in development of a common information technology platform. THY becomes the second largest airline company in the alliance after Lufthansa. It is expecting to increase the number of transit passengers by 50 percent to 1.5 million while also planning to boost the number of total passengers to 23.5 million by the end of

this year. THY Chairman Candan Karlitekin also stressed that the membership is an important step taken on the way to becoming a well-respected global player in the world aviation business. As the THY management, they made decisions not only to ensure success in the near future but also to guarantee reaching company goals for the next 10 to 20 years, he said. "We want to realize our dreams as well as our targets, and this is why we are working so hard. We believe the partnership and competition will make us stronger, and thus we have decided to continue our journey with the Alliance," he said. *Istanbul Today's Tourism*

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## Gülhane to be home to museum of Islamic science and technology

YASIN KILIÇ İSTANBUL

The world's first museum of Islamic science and technology, a project backed by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism in cooperation with the Greater İstanbul Municipality, will open in İstanbul's Gülhane Park in May.

The museum will include pieces underscoring the contributions of Islamic culture to the scientific world and the general development of modern science. It is to host visual representations of some of the observatories, hospitals, chemical mechanisms and universities Muslim scientists helped create, in addition to models of some of Islam's most prominent science-oriented achievements.

İstanbul Mayor Kadir Topbaş, noting that preparations for the museum were complete, said during a function at the municipal headquarters last week that the museum "will introduce and display many of the works produced by Turkish and Muslim scientists well in advance of the industrial revolution."

The Historical Islamic Science and Technology Museum, to be managed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is being created in cooperation with the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA), the Greater İstanbul Municipality and Professor Sezgin of Frankfurt University. In the initial stages, the museum will display 140 different pieces, though over time the number of displayed items is expected to rise to 800. A special Science History Library will also be included as part of the museum.

The municipality has given permission to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for the use of its Has Stables as the venue for the museum over the next decade. The museum grounds occupy a 3,550-square-meter area and span three different buildings. Some of the items on display at the museum will be copies of original inventions and discoveries from between the eighth and 16th centuries. Items to be displayed include examples of devices and tools used in geography, astronomy, oceanography, machinery, geometry, optics, medicine, chemistry, mining, physics, mechanics, war and architecture.

Plans for a "Young Inventors Atelier" to be opened next to the museum are also under way. Backed by the municipality and TÜBİTAK, will allow youngsters to, in Topbaş's words, "Get support for their projects from university professors." He added, "In this way, we will see our youth turn the hobbies and dreams they keep in their minds into reality."

### Founding father Fuat Sezgin

Sezgin has been carrying out research on Islamic scientific history for more than 50 years and is considered a world authority on the subject of scientific history. It was in 1954, after finding deficiencies in the work and research of Semiticist Carl Brockelmann in the area, that Professor Sezgin began to take serious interest in Islamic scientific history. In 1982 he formed the Arab-Islamic History Institute at J. W. Goethe University and the following year, he established a museum on the same subject at the university.

Linguistically, Sezgin is well-equipped for research in this area; he speaks 27 languages, including Syriac, Hebrew and Latin. Awards he has won include Saudi Arabia's King Faisal Award (1978), Germany's Federal Service Cross (1982) and Superior Service Medal (2001) and an Islamic sciences book award in Iran (2006). Sezgin was also selected as an honorary TÜBA member.

His main published work is the 12-volume "Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums" (History of Arabian Literature) 1967-84.

## Yahoo! to promote Turkey

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is redoubling its efforts to promote Turkey abroad and plans to take advantage of the growing popularity of the Internet to introduce the world to some of what Turkey has to offer. Within this framework, the Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in New York has reached an agreement with Internet search engine Yahoo! to start promoting Turkey in eight nations. Ads aimed at promoting Turkey will be displayed in Yahoo! Pages in the US, Germany, England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Israel.

Meanwhile Expedia.com, the world's most all-encompassing Internet travel portal with an estimated 55 million users, has created a special four-page site focusing on Turkey. The site includes information on

Turkey's history, culture, city-based holidays and the Aegean and Mediterranean Turkish coastlines. This is Expedia's first such cooperation with Turkey, and users can read about sporting events and festivals taking place in Turkey and also make reservations for travel there on the site.

The ministry has released statistics for tourism levels for January-March 2008, showing an increase of 14.73 percent over the same period last year; total visitor numbers in the first quarter were 2.98 million.

While 49.56 percent of the tourists visiting Turkey were from Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member nations, 31.85 percent of these same tourists came from Eastern Europe. The number of tourists arriving in Turkey from OECD nations increased by 16.97 percent, more than the gener-

al trend, whereas those from Eastern European nations increased by slightly less, 10.91 percent.

In terms of individual nations, Germany was in first place between January-March 2008, representing 18.86 percent of tourism to Turkey, while Bulgaria was second with 7.58 percent, followed by Iran with 6.15 percent, then Russia, Georgia, England, Azerbaijan, Greece, France and the Netherlands.

Focusing solely on March, ministry statistics show that Turkey experienced an 18.67 percent increase in tourism over the same month in 2007, hosting 1.31 million visitors in that month alone. Of these, 693,643 were from OECD nations, of which 350,256 were from Eastern Europe. These figures represent an increase of 22.78 percent for tourists from OECD nations and 11.53 percent for Eastern Europe. **Ankara Today's Tourism**

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# TODAY'S TOURISM

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## Founding father Fuat Sezgin

Sezgin has been carrying out research on Islamic scientific history for more than 50 years and is considered a world authority on the subject of scientific history.

## Antalya courting wealthy tourists to fill luxury villas

HÜSEYİN SÜMER ANTALYA

▶ Wealthy tourists have become one of the new targets for hoteliers in Antalya province seeking to fill their new luxury villas this summer.

The villas are being offered for anywhere between \$4,000 and \$15,000 per night and include everything from nannies to private chefs, as well as business centers, saunas and much more. In short, these villas offer every kind of service you can imagine. And thus, in an attempt to bring about an increase in profits from tourism, as well as to underscore that Turkey is not a "cheap tourism" nation, holiday facilities in Antalya have turned their focus to wealthy visitors hailing from both Europe and the Middle East.

One of the first Antalya hotels to move in this direction was Belek's Ela Quality Resort Hotel, which is owned by Ahmet Akbalik of Özak Textiles. With its specially designed villas for wealthy customers, Ela Quality Resort Hotel has succeeded in attracting guests from Russia, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and various Middle Eastern countries. Ela Quality Resort Hotel CEO Vadi Karatopraklı has also noted that his establishment aims to attract wealthy Turkish customers as well.

Karatopraklı notes that a new dimension

has been added to tourism in Turkey with villas going from between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a day, and that in order to market these more expensive accommodation types, special marketing teams have been created by the hotel. These marketing teams have engaged in major publicity campaigns in several countries, from Russia to Ukraine, Switzerland and Middle Eastern nations. Karatopraklı also states that special agents have also been hired to get out the word about these villas in the domestic arena. As a result, occupancy rates for VIP customers who will stay in these villas this summer is already at around 30 percent.

The all-inclusive system that has for years been an aspect of tourism in Turkey has, Karatopraklı maintains, managed to bring many facilities here to the point of bankruptcy, notably by attracting guests who don't spend much. Hotel managers in Turkey are thus now searching for new concepts and are feeling the need to review prices in 2008 once again.

Karatopraklı says prices this year have increased by about 40 percent compared to last year but that the internal political tension in Turkey does not look set to have any affect on tourism in general. He notes that barring any large crisis, tourism will remain on its positive course in Turkey.

"In order to achieve the goal of bringing in \$85 billion in 15 years, we need to raise the per capita spending of tourists who visit Turkey from \$780 per person to around \$2,000 per person, which is why we need to turn our attention to quality. The quality of hotels in Turkey is higher than those in Spain and Greece. We need to turn this into an opportunity," he notes.

Ela Quality Resort Hotel opened during the 2007 summer season and managed to achieve an 80 percent occupancy rate in its first year. While its prices have increased this year, it expects an even higher occupancy rate of 90 percent. The hotel, which hosted 17,000 guests last year and saw a \$22 million turnover, has goals for this year of 30,000 guests and a \$40 million turnover. Another factor at work here is that both Russian and Turkish tourists have learned to negotiate the early reservations system better, which has also worked to change the hotel's tourist profile. While Turks in particular experienced problems finding spaces last year, they account for 20 percent of this hotel's occupancy this year through the early reservations system. While Russians make up a full 50 percent of the other guests for this coming season, the other 30 percent are made up of European tourists.



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