

TODAY'S TOURISM

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10

15 About 1 million tourists expected to visit Manavgat Waterfall in 2008

04 Tourism operators seek longer visa terms for Russian guests

Tarkan to put mark on Turkish year in Russia

PHOTODIARİK ÖZTÜRK



Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay

Taking Turkish tourism sector to the next level

ERTUĞRUL GÜNAY

CULTURE AND TOURISM MINISTER OF TURKEY

The tourism sector makes great contributions to humanity in many areas, ranging from economic development to dialogue, from technological development to preservation of environmental and historical legacies, from promotion of a consensus culture to world peace.

Today, the priorities and strategies in the tourism sector overlap with the requirements and priorities of the globalizing world. Improving investment and business volumes at the national and international level, producing income, creating new employment opportunities and enriching social and cultural life, the tourism sector has widened its scope from the traditional sea and sun mentality to alternative areas of tourism. The Turkish tourism sector represents an important source of income for the country and has made significant strides in becoming competitive and successful in the global tourism sector. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 05**

WEF: Tourism potential undermined by terrorism, sanitation

A World Economic Forum (WEF) report states that Turkey's problems with terrorism, sanitation and transport infrastructure limit its overall competitiveness in tourism, leaving Turkey in 54th place out of 130 countries. The report, "Travel and Tourism Competitiveness 2007," also includes a travel and tourism competitiveness index which evaluates the performance of the countries based on the measures that have been taken to improve the travel and tourism sectors. The countries that implemented the most effective measures, including environmental policies, to attract tourism investors and consumers were ranked at the top of the list. On the list Switzerland features in first place and Turkey comes in 54th, despite its recent popularity among tourists. The ranking particularly considered regulations that facilitate tourism business, sustainable environmental policies, security and safety, health and hygiene, attention paid to tourism and travel, transportation infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, competition in price, human resources, and natural and cultural resources. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 05**

A HEARTY WELCOME IS THE REASON WHY TURKEY REMAINS THE FAVORITE FOR RUSSIANS

Turkey warmly welcomes Russians

E. BARIŞ ALTINTAŞ, İSTANBUL

Russia is a cold country; this is why most Russians love the sun. Perhaps that is one of the main reasons why they are the second largest group of visitors from any country to Turkey, whose western and southern coasts offer great beaches and the warm touch of the summer sun as well as a good standard of service for people who like the eat-drink-sleep sort of vacation. However, with some European resorts -- openly or covertly -- introducing quotas to limit the number of Russian visitors, being able to find a hearty welcome and the usual respect hosts should reserve for their guests is also a

reason for most Russians to prefer Turkey as a great place to rest, many tourists and tour operators agree.

"In my opinion, Turkey is a fascinating place; I hope I go there again. And using this occasion, I want to give all Turks a hot hello! Kisses," reads a message posted on the travel blog of mail.ru, the largest free mail service available to the Russian-speaking world and indisputably the most popular Russian site on the Web, with more than 30 million users three years ago. One message says Turkish men are too persistent but "they act wonderfully if you behave like a normal person," snaps another. "What are you talking about? It is the best country, and Turks adore Russians!" says yet another. A majority of travelers who have

been to Turkey leave very positive messages and get very defensive when replying to a negative message. Most users on the forum, like the average Russian tourist, emphasize Turks' friendliness.

The primary reason why Russians prefer Turkey, according to Vladimir Kaganer, the general director of Tez Tour -- one of Russia's largest travel agencies, flying thousands of people to Turkey every year -- is that they know they will have a good vacation by the sea. In an interview with weekly tourism journal Turinfo earlier this month, Kaganer said: "Turkish hotels offer that opportunity. Even now, a majority of Turkish hotels are booked 90 to 100 percent by Russian customers. I think the quality of the service they offer has improved." He

is quick to add that "the approach Turks have toward Russians is also very nice." However, he does not think that affection only goes one way. "Turks also love Russians more than European tourists," Kaganer says.

"Our tourists are warmer, more communicative and friendlier. They don't see Turks as second-class people." Russians have also changed, Kaganer asserted. "Earlier, Turkish hotel managers could not understand why in 'all inclusive' hotels they filled their plates to the top and did not eat anything. If you take a glass of beer, you should drink it," the managers said. Turkish managers were unnerved particularly by that habit and not by their being loud during dinner or on the beach. Now those problems are gone. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 02**



TURKEY BECOMES MITT'S FIRST EVER PARTNER COUNTRY IN 2008

İBRAHİM TÜRKMEN, İSTANBUL

Turkey will this year have the honor of being the first ever Partner Country for Russia's premier travel and tourism trade exhibition, the Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition (MITT), which takes place in Moscow's Expocentr on March 19-22.

The deal between Turkey's Ministry of Culture and MITT organizers includes a premier sponsorship package and allows Turkish

companies a considerable presence at the fair. Turkey, like many other destinations -- those in the Mediterranean in particular -- is very interested in increasing its number of visitors from Russia. Demand for overseas tourism has risen in parallel to per capita wealth in Russia, and thanks to its geographical proximity, Turkey has already become a firm favorite with Russian tourists. With a stand area of 1,254 square meters and over 500 Turkish companies represented at the exhibition, Turkey is one of

the largest exhibitors at MITT. It will occupy all of Hall 1 in Expocentr's brand new Pavilion 8.

MITT marks its 15th edition this year, and has seen increasing demand and prestige with each of the previous 14. It is the largest tourism exhibition in the Russian Federation, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central Asia and is consistently ranked by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as one of the five most important travel trade exhibitions in the world. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 11**

Russians make Antalya their vacation hotspot

SABAN GÜNDÜZ, ANTALYA

As their living standards increase in parallel to a surge in their oil and natural gas revenues, Russians are changing their holiday habits. According to estimates more than 10 million Russians will go on a vacation in 2008. Antalya is the top destination for Russian tourists around the globe. Out of the 2.5 million Russians who visited Turkey last year, 2 million spent their holidays in Antalya. This year a further increase is expected.

Mircalol Husanov, the consul general in Antalya for the Russian Federation, states Russians like the environment in Antalya and find it suitable for holidays. He notes that about 2 million Russian tourists visited Antalya last year. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 03**

Germans' rush in early reservations race may shut out Russians

AHMET YEŞİL, ANTALYA

Alanya Tourism Enterprises Association (ALTİD) Chairman Gülçin Güner has said there may be no vacancies available for Russian tourists, who usually make reservations at the last minute, due to high interest in early reservations. Güner said he believes 2008 will be a busy year in terms of tourism, saying that Germans in particular have shown a keen interest in early reservations. "Should the demand for early reservations remain this high, then Russians might find it difficult to find accommodation because they usually make last-minute travel plans. We advise Russians to make early reservations," she added. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 04**



SUNNY TURKEY WARMLY WELCOMES RUSSIAN TOURISTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"People traveled abroad, now they make money." He says an open buffet is no longer something extraordinary for Russians. "We don't get any complaints from hoteliers that Russian customers act worse than other tourists." Ahmet Barut, chairman of the Turkish Hotels Federation (TÜROFED), agrees. "Well for one thing, we as a country don't have the luxury to choose our customers. We consider ourselves lucky just being a neighbor to a country like Russia with such great tourist potential. Secondly, it is true that hoteliers had some complaints in the initial years, but most of those stemmed from traveling abroad for the first time. As they traveled more, naturally, as their experience of traveling abroad expanded the behavior people found less savory naturally normalized."

Barut also says that Russians are mostly quite pleased with people's attitudes here and the service. "The highest number of tourists out of Russia visit Turkey," he says, saying this serves to show that Russians are happy with the Turkish vacation. Sunri Corabatr, head of The Mediterranean Tourism Hoteliers and Operators Union (AKTOB), says that in addition to Turkey's climate, reasonable prices and the good quality of service, Turkey's hotels also offer physical proximity to Russia. Antalya's world-class facilities in particular meet Russian expectations, Corabatr maintains.

Tourist love in figures

Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism is spending \$10 million this year to promote Turkey in Russia. Russians love Turkey's sun and seas, but there is still much to tell them, as some among them can only name two cities in Turkey (Antalya and Istanbul). In 2007, Turkey hosted 2,465,000 Russian tourists, according to Tourism Minister Ertugrul Günay, up by 33 percent from 2006. Tour operators in Russia and Turkey expect that growth to continue this year. Russia sends the sec-

ond-highest number of tourists to Turkey after Germany, which sent 4 million people to the country last year. For Russia, Turkey is the top country residents choose for their summer vacation.

According to data from Russian governmental statistics agency Rosstat, Russians are traveling abroad with increasing frequency. In 2003, 5.7 million Russian citizens visited foreign countries for the sole purpose of travel or vacation, a figure that rose to 6.6 million the next year, 6.8 the following year, 7.8 million in 2006 and 9.36 million last year. Turkey remains one of the most popular destinations for Russians still. Last year, however, was significant, since the 30 percent increase in the number of Russian tourists in 2007 followed a 5 percent fall from 2005 according to 2006 figures. Indeed, the increase is so conspicuous that last month Turkish Airlines (THY) announced it would begin operating direct flights on March 31 between Rostov-on-Don, a city of 1 million, to Antalya, a favorite of Russian tourists in Turkey. In fact, THY has been planning direct flights for a long time.

Turkey and Russia need each other

Turkey and Russia greatly need each other's help in the tourism sector. Europe Turkey Tourism Council (ETTC) President Hüseyin Baraner said to the press during a meeting of the Russian Turkish tour operators in Moscow in January. Baraner says that Turkey and Russia need to come together and set up a Russian-Turkish tourism committee that would improve the sector for both countries. "We can find a place for ourselves in the world market by jointly creating new brands."

Günay, who was present at the same convention, highlighted that it was possible for Turkey to host even more tourists. "A majority of Russians still don't have passports," Günay said, underlining the country's 140 million population. "The number of tourists coming to Turkey is bound to increase as more people there get passports."

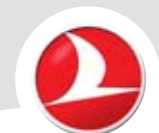


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Russians make Antalya their vacation hotspot

According to estimates more than 10 million Russians will go on a vacation in 2008. Antalya is the top destination for Russian tourists, among some 300 tourism destinations around the globe. Out of the 2.5 million Russians who visited Turkey last year, 2 million spent their holiday in Antalya. This year, a further increase is expected



Mircalol Husanov

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"This figure is a sign of the interest Russian tourists have in Turkey and particularly in Antalya," he says. "This year we will outnumber the German tourists, who are at the top of the list among foreign tourists visiting Turkey. We can do this if the rate of increase continues at this pace. We are pleased with so many Russians spending their holidays in Antalya. This shows that our countries and nations are indeed very close to each other," he notes.

Husanov details the features that draw Russians to Antalya -- its sea, mountains, lush greenery, perpetual sun and rich history. He also touches on the cultural similarities between the two countries. "Turkish culture is not alien to the Russian people. They have considerable interest in Turkish culture. Also, the hospitality of the Turkish people and their warmth are among the factors that prompt Russians to come to Turkey," he says.

The consul general notes that while Russians make great contributions to Turkish tourism, there are also some things that prevent them from visiting. He cites double booking as the most common problem Russian tourists encounter in Turkey. "According to studies, a tourist who leaves a country satisfied with their vacation experience will bring three new tourists next year. However, an unsatisfied tourist will result in 11 people not choosing that country. Therefore, it is vital to ensure tourist satisfaction. In this regard, the greatest responsibility lies with Turkish tourism operators. The agents working in this sector should be very careful. It is very important that emerging problems are solved amicably. Otherwise, small problems may lead to bigger ones. In particular, this year is very important. Last year, some Russian tourists found that they had no place to stay because of a double reservation. This year, similar incidents may increase. No one assumes responsibility for such problems. The hotel accuses the agency, while the agency blames the hotel. But the tourist is disappointed because he was expecting a good holiday. There has not been much change in the capacity of hotels this year, but an increase in tourist numbers is expected. This implies that reservations should be more carefully made," he says.

Husanov also notes that Russian tourists have complained about a general decrease in the quality of service provided by hotels. He makes suggestions on how to improve tourism opportunities during the winter season. "In winter, health tourism takes on importance. Unfortunately, the hotels here cannot make good use of their assets. However, they have the required infrastructure. For treatment, post-operative care and recuperation, hotels can offer holidays under a physician's supervision. Moreover, in terms of winter tourism, Davraz and Saklikent may be utilized for skiing. On the same day, a tourist can swim in the pool at the hotel and go skiing. Business and convention tourism, too, should not be ignored. Antalya is an attractive place for conventions in the winter," he explains.

He gives one further suggestion for Turkish tourism operators: "The big companies in Russia can be contacted to make deals in which their employees would vacation in Antalya. For instance, Gazprom has more than 100,000 employees. If suitable promotional campaigns can be run, they may choose Antalya."



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TOURISM OPERATORS SEEK LONGER VISA TERMS FOR RUSSIANS

'The Foreign Ministry does not currently require a visa for Russian visitors for periods up to two months. We will lobby the ministry to increase this no-visa duration to three or four months,' says AKTOB Chairman Sururi Çorabatır

Tourism operators in Antalya, the primary destination in Turkey for tourists from the Russian Federation, have asked the Foreign Ministry to issue visas for longer periods to facilitate a longer stay by tourists.

The Mediterranean Tourism Hoteliers and Operators Union (AKTOB) has applied to the Foreign Ministry for a review of visa terms. Pointing out that a visa is not required for short stays in Turkey for citizens of the Russian Federation, AKTOB head Sururi Çorabatır said: "The Foreign Ministry does not

currently require a visa for Russian visitors for periods up to two months. We will lobby the ministry to increase this no-visa duration to three or four months."

The Turkish tourism sector saw significant profits in 2007 as tourist numbers increased, and as in previous years, Antalya in particular was the leading destination for tourists. Russian tourists showed increased interest in this city that was previously viewed as only a domestic holiday location. In response to their interest, the tourism operators in the city decided to lobby for a visa extension.

As seen in the breakdown of nationalities of tourists arriving in Antalya last year, the Russian segment rose to 25 percent. This rate of increase, if it continues, will see Germans fall from the top of the list, where they have placed since the 1980s. Antalya alone hosted 1.8 million Russian tourists last year.

Çorabatır spoke to Today's Tourism, stating that Antalya's balmy climate and the short distance between countries appeal to Russian tourists and that competitive prices and high quality service are among other reasons for their choice. He asserted that the tourism facilities in Antalya were new and were on par with world standards. "Antalya lives up to their expectations," he said.

"The number of Russian citizens with a passport is increasing each day. Given the economic development in this country, it is obvious that more and more Russians will opt for Antalya for their vacations. Indeed, in the Russian Federation, the word holiday is now associated with Antalya before Turkey," he said.

This can be substantiated by the figures, although for now their interest is restricted to summer. In May, June, July and August, Russians prefer the 640 kilometer coastal zone of Antalya, though the winter months see a drop in Russian visitors. After October, they tend to prefer Egypt, which they often cite as warmer than Antalya. Antalya's tourism operators say however that this perception is wrong, noting that even in winter the difference in temperatures between Egypt and Antalya is only three or four degrees. They argue that Antalya can be a major holiday destination even in the off-season, a claim validated by meteorological figures. According to climate records, more than 300 days a year are sunny in Antalya, where the sun continues to warm the crystal coast even in winter. **Antalya Today's Tourism**



Germans' rush in early reservations race may shut out Russians

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In an exclusive interview with Today's Tourism, Güner noted that ALTID does its best to participate in any and all domestic and foreign tourism fairs in order to promote Antalya. These efforts are paying off as the number of European visitors in 2008 is expected to increase by 15 percent over last year, according to her.

Based on the turnout at fairs they attended, Güner said that Germans, who show particular interest in the Alanya, Side, Lara and Belek regions of Antalya, the British, the Belgians and the French follow the Germans in terms of interest in Turkey.

Noting that they are "very content with the high demand," Güner on the other hand underlined that this may bring along with it a "double season" problem stemming from excessive demand.

Güner also stressed that ALTID began work earlier this year on Alanya's promotion for the 2008 tourism year. She noted that as ALTID, they have attended fairs in countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Finland, Slovakia, Denmark,



Gülçin Güner

Latvia and the Czech Republic so far. "We received very positive reactions during the fairs we attended, and we believe that attending fairs promotes interest in Antalya and increases the number of reservations there," she added. Güner also commented on the impact the Turkish Armed Forces' (TSK) recent ground operation into northern Iraq has had on tourism. Saying that the operation did not significantly affect tourism, she said the fact that the operation ended close to the start of the tourism season was the most important reason for this.



AKTOB Chairman Sururi Çorabatır

Thermal Resort Oruçoğlu voted best spa hotel

Thermal Resort Oruçoğlu was awarded the Thermal and Medical Spa of the Year prize in the 2007 Spa Achievement Awards during Turkey's 1st National Spa and Wellness Congress, sponsored by the Culture and Tourism Ministry.

The hotel, which had been previously selected by Sabah and Hürriyet dailies as the best thermal and spa hotel, operates within the thermal tourism category and is the first five-star thermal hotel in Turkey. Working on a half-board system, the hotel has 300 rooms and 800 beds. The hotel was the first to introduce the spa concept to Turkey 15 years ago, and its experience has been crowned with this award.

The hotel's Spa and Wellness Center offers health, youth and beauty services including oxygenated and normal dermal care, mud bath, aroma therapy, a "Cleopatra" milk bath, face lift care, masks, hair care, total or local cellulite massages, therapeutic massage, underwater massage, stone therapy, fasting cures, solarium, Turkish bath, vapor bath, private family baths with whirlpool bath and sauna as well as a well-equipped physiotherapy and rehabilitation center that offers complete services under supervision of physicians and physiotherapy experts.

This center also contains a bioresonance anti-smoking therapy unit that helps smokers quit. This therapy unit, a first for Afyon, offers successful results for smokers really determined to break the habit. In addition, the laboratory in the spa center offers blood analysis to determine cholesterol, triglyceride, etc., levels. In the Spa and Wellness Center, mineral bone density can be measured and early diagnosis of osteoporosis can be made. Furthermore, body analysis can be performed and muscle fat ratios can be calculated.

The hotel has made a physiotherapy deal with Kocatepe University in Afyon and under this agreement costs for physiotherapy and rehabilitation can be refunded under the insurance coverage of Social Insurance for the Self-Employed (BAĞ-KUR), the Social Security Authority (SSK), and the Pension Fund (Emekli Sandığı).

The hotel has recently made a similar deal with AGIS, a major Dutch insurance company. Thus, those under AGIS insurance coverage will be able to get refunds for their accommodation and resort services if their treatment is recommended by a rheumatism expert. **Afyonkarahisar Today's Tourism**



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Taking Turkish tourism to the next level

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

With its ideal location where the Asian and European continents meet, its historical, cultural and natural assets and rich product range, Turkey has many competitive advantages in world tourism. These advantages give Turkey new opportunities for undertaking new and different tourism activities. In this regard, winter, health, faith and business tourism and similar areas represent the main competitive edge that Turkey enjoys.

Turkish tourism has progressed from earning \$7.6 billion from 10.4 million tourists in 2000 to \$16.8 billion from 19.8 million tourists in 2006. Last year, too, saw many positive developments in the tourism sector as about 23.3 million tourists visited the country. These figures put Turkey among the top 10 destination countries in the world.

With a rich cultural legacy, unique natural settings, tourism diversity, quality tourism facilities and hospitable residents, Turkey is capable of offering a full range of holiday experiences to tourists.

The accommodation facilities in our country are relatively new and comfortable compared to Europe's well-known destinations, such as Spain or Italy, and this is a great advantage for our country's tourism sector.

Antalya, Istanbul and other well-known cities are among the most preferred destinations.

Our ministry aims at ensuring sustainable growth in the tourism sector, developing tourism potential in the inner regions of the country and using tourism as a strong tool in local and regional development. It is our target to make Turkey among the top five destinations in the world by 2023 by creating new investment areas, increasing product diversity and establishing high standards. The figures from the year 2007 show that there is a good possibility or our achieving this goal.

In addition to traditional sun, sea and sand tourism, we are attempting to put our historical and cultural assets to use in tourism and increase prod-

uct diversity by investing in cultural sites and thermal spring areas. We also want to use product-oriented promotion by developing different advertisement and promotional campaigns designed specifically for different markets in our target countries.

Turkey's primary promotional strategy can be described as destination-oriented promotion and marketing activities, in addition to promotion that aims to create brands at national, regional and local levels. Under its general promotion strategy, our ministry is conducting destination-oriented promotional campaigns that highlight overall quality, emphasizing tourism products which are designed for target groups, making use of famous faces and supporting all of this through public relations efforts.

Our primary aims include promoting our unique Mediterranean country, our quality tourism facilities and the hospitality of our nation, in addition to our easily accessible location and rich cultural heritage. We want to develop Turkey's image as a clean, healthy and secure destination.

In line with these targets, we will prepare promotional videos to highlight the eastern and southeastern regions, Antalya, the Aegean region, Cappadocia, spa and thermal tourism locations and will ensure worldwide distribution of these videos for 12 months.

With the www.goturkey.com project, we are planning to make use of novel technological developments in our promotion activities. This easily accessible Web site, which is offered in several languages, provides images and videos about culture and art events, tourism opportunities, accommodation possibilities and other interesting information. It will help prospective tourists to plan their holidays online so each one can have a vacation fitted to their needs.

We will also offer high-profile products focusing on conventions, golf, faith tourism, thermal tourism, health, winter sports, city and cul-

Günay: In addition to traditional sun, sea and sand tourism, we are attempting to put our historical and cultural assets to use in tourism and increase product diversity by investing in cultural sites and thermal spring areas

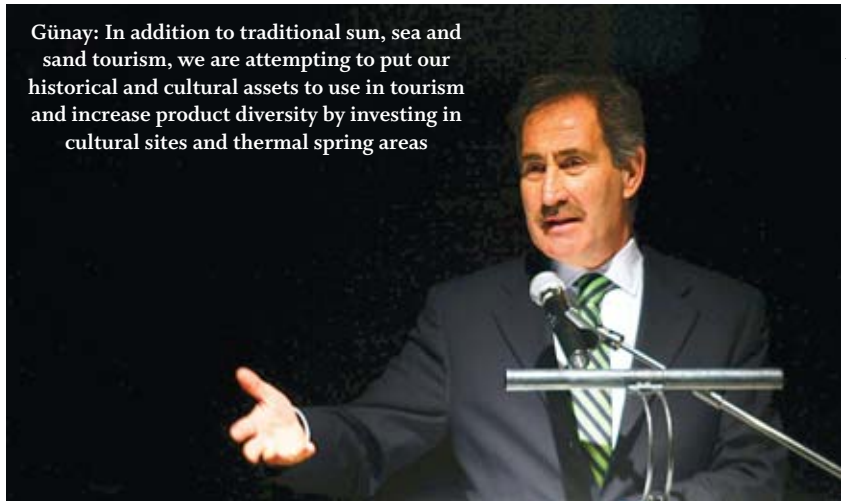


PHOTO: MEHMET ALI GÜNAY

ture, yachting and other areas.

Istanbul has an important project for 2010 as it has been designated a European Capital of Culture. We will continue to lend support to this project.

The making of Istanbul a European Capital of Culture in 2010 is becoming more and more meaningful given the development the region and our country is going through.

Turkey will be the guest country at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the biggest of its kind, and this will help us to promote culture, art and litera-

ture as well as tourism for our country. It will also have important consequences with respect to further integration with Europe.

As part of its promotional work, our ministry attended 139 fairs last year and is scheduled to attend 142 in 2008. We prepared year-long promotional campaigns and unveiled them at the start of this year.

We are working to highlight Turkey's wealth of nature, culture and history as well as the hospitality of our people. We will extend our communication network by using the latest

technology to improve the competitiveness of our tourism sector in the world.

We are preparing to implement regional and sector-based incentives for developing new tourism products. In 2008, the Culture and Tourism Ministry will develop and implement projects for seven tourism corridors, four ecological tourism areas, 19 "brand" cities and 10 tourism cities as part of the action plan.

I believe that our country will take its tourism sector to the next level.



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EXPO 2015 WOULD SAVE IZMIR 25 YEARS

Will EXPO 2015 be in Izmir or Milan? Izmir seems to be more advantageous than its rival, owing to its larger investment potential, and would attain its goals set for 2040 25 years ahead of plan, in 2015, if it wins the bid. In such a case, the pearl of the Aegean would attract a great number of domestic and foreign investors. Sixteen million visitors are expected to attend the EXPO 2015 Izmir universal exhibition, for which the government has allotted \$1.3 billion.

Izmir is entering the last stage of the race with Milan to host the EXPO event, also known as the world's history, culture and education Olympics. If it becomes the winner in the voting, to be held in the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE) general meeting in Paris, Izmir will be able to make 32 years of investments in seven years. In other words, it will attain its 2040 goals 25 years ahead of the expected time. For the city, EXPO will serve as a facilitator to achieve its goal to become a center for fairs and conventions. Izmir will become a renowned city in the field of health, owing to its proposed theme for the EXPO: "New Ways for a Better World and Health for Everyone."

The Izmir Metropolitan Municipality has reported that the city has undertaken lobbying activities abroad to promote Izmir's candidacy for EXPO 2015; municipality authorities expect remarkable growth in the city's economy as a return on the 15 million euro budget. Estimates underline that the project will increase the business capacity of the city, current predictions run from \$15-25 billion. The expected number of visitors to the organization for a six-month period is 16-20 million. This implies that 40 million visits will be made during the event. The average daily number of visitors to the EXPO site is expected to be around 300-360,000.

The exhibition site in Inciralti will include an amphitheater, an EXPO lake and tower, an outdoor theater hall, 94 pavilions, 103 restaurants, 30 stores and public areas and sites reserved for general services and visitors. Seventy-six of the pavilions will be reserved for participant countries. The site will be arranged to host 35,000 shows with 75,000 actors, actresses and artists. The number of people to be employed on-site for the six-month period is 1,200.

The circulation in the number of visitors will positively affect transportation, infrastructure and tourism activities in the city. Experts estimate that the city's thermal tourism potential will attract a large number of visitors to Cesme, Karaburun and Seferhisar.



PHOTOS © TODAY'S ZAMAN

If it wins the bid for the EXPO 2015 event, Izmir, the pearl of the Aegean, is expected to attract at least 16 million domestic and foreign investors in one year.

Amid the preparations for EXPO in the city, the Metropolitan Municipality is sponsoring a number of projects; the municipality has made a total investment of \$1 billion in the last three years, paying careful attention to prestigious projects that will create synergy owing to EXPO. To this end, city authorities reserved a large area called "New Izmir" for skyscrapers, residences and business centers. With the adoption of new development plans that will dramatically change the outlook of the city by the Municipal Assembly, the project will be transformed into the Manhattan of Izmir.

On the project, Izmir Mayor Aziz Kocaoglu says: "The tourism and service sectors are known for their contribution to the generation of employment. This project will attract great sums of investments to the city and resolve the unemployment problem. It will meet the city's need for skyscrapers. At least \$10 billion in investments will be made. There will be no unemployment problem in Izmir. In the early

stages, about a dozen land owners showed interest in making investments. There are a lot of options and alternatives for this project. There are many who are interested in building hotels, business centers or malls. Our goal in the project is to prepare a portfolio of investments for investors. Let us assume that an investor comes from China or the US to Izmir. He seeks to build a hotel, but there is no previously reserved area for this purpose; he seeks to build a hospital but finds no appropriate place to erect it. The same also applies to industrial zones, fair area and convention centers. There is no infrastructure or foundation for this. We are trying to remove this deficit. We have determined the future of the city via the development plans. Investors will be able to make sound decisions when they arrive in the city, owing to the new development plan."

The EXPO 2015 Izmir Secretariat says that the total budget allocated to the organization is 1.3 billion euros, whereas the total amount of

investments to be made in relation to EXPO will be 461.1 million euros. Of the total figure, 75.6 million euros will be reserved for investments related to urbanization and infrastructural services. A total of 14,000 people will work in the fair zone. Some of the infrastructure investments in relation to the EXPO event in Izmir in the following seven years include a fast train project that will reduce the travel time between Izmir and Ankara to three hours, a new ferry dock in Inciralti, additional highways and the opening of Cigli airport to international arrivals.

Reports indicate that a number of investors are interested in projects and properties owned by İşbank, Kula Mensucat, Petrol Ofisi, Turyağ, Piyale and Taris to invest in. The first international group to announce its decision to invest in the region was renowned British investment group Comberceli. The British company has been doing preliminary work related to the construction of residences and shopping centers.

What is EXPO?

EXPO events, which may be basically described as a cultural, historical and educational Olympics of the world, call on countries to share their visions and experiences to make the world a better place. The goal of the EXPOs is not to promote the marketing of particular products of the countries but to encourage them to present their cultural, historical and national characteristics. This aims to promote expression of new ideas and development for a better world. The EXPOs, which have been held for 150 years, receive tens of millions of people in every event. The EXPO Universal Exhibition, which is held in a larger area than that of the Olympics and Soccer World Cups and lasts longer than these events, has been held in 63 different countries so far, attracting 800 million visitors.

Delegates from 140 countries will hold election

EXPO is the abbreviated form of "Exposition." EXPOs that focus on international exhibitions and universal exhibitions are called world fairs. There are two other organizations: small and large EXPOs. Izmir's candidacy is for the grand EXPO, held every five years. The Paris-based BIE includes 140 member countries. The delegates from these countries vote to pick a city to become an EXPO center. Izmir will have to finish the race ahead of its rival Milan in the voting session, scheduled to take place on March 31. That 22 million people visited the EXPO event held in Aichi, Japan, and 70 million visitors are expected in the upcoming 2010 Shanghai EXPO gives a clue about the magnitude and prominence of the event. Experts note that Turkey will be able to attract a greater number of visitors owing to its unique geography. The theme that Shanghai picked is "a better city, a better life." The theme that Izmir has picked is a continuation of that concept.

Izmir's competitor, Milan, held the Grand EXPO in 1906. Milan is expecting 25 million visitors for EXPO 2015. The number of visitors that Izmir plans to attract is far larger than Milan's estimates. In reliance on its unique geographical advantages, Izmir seeks to host 50 million visitors.

Belek: Europe's best golf destination

NURULLAH KAYA ANTALYA

A district in Turkey has been chosen as the best golf destination in Europe by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO), putting Turkey ahead of Spain, Scotland and England in the race to take a greater share from the billion dollar golf tourism market.

The specific location of Europe's best golf destination, the Belek district of Mediterranean resort city Antalya, held a celebration ceremony at the Cornelia Golf Club in Belek on Feb. 25. Ministry of Culture and Tourism Undersecretary İsmet Yılmaz, Antalya Governor Alaaddin



times as much as other tourists who simply come for sea and sand.

Belek's natural beauty and hotels played a big role in its selection as the best golf resort of Europe, IAGTO President Walton noted. "About 50 million people play golf across the world. European golf players travel to different countries to play. A \$3 billion euro market is at stake here. The countries better at investing and advertising have a

bigger slice of this cake," he said. Yüksel was quick to dismiss claims of excessive trees felling in the creation of the golf courses. "I have never been interested in the number of the trees that have been

cut down. That's the responsibility of the Environment and Forestry Ministry. I'm more interested in planting," Yüksel said, adding that millions of trees had been planted in Antalya over the last five years. He noted that cutting down old trees and planting new ones is an important part of forestry management. "According to the information provided to us, the number of the trees that have been cut down is around 115,000. However, the number of planted ones is much higher than that," he added.

The 2008 Best Golf Destination Award, which was presented to Sahin in December 2007 at a ceremony held in Mexico, was given to Yılmaz.

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'Let's make Antalya the new Cannes'

With more Russians seeking to spend their annual holidays abroad as their income levels increase due to growing oil and natural gas revenue, Turkish tourism operators are eager to get a bigger slice of the Russian tourism pie and predict a substantial jump in the number of Russian guests this year.

Talha Görgülü, chairman of the board of the Kayı Group, which brought 150,000 tourists from Russia last year, said it was necessary to develop more appealing strategies to reach Russians from higher income brackets. "Spending one's summer holiday in Antalya has almost become a matter of prestige in Russia. We need to put this to good use," he said. Speaking to Today's Tourism, Görgülü noted that there should be exclusive districts and facilities for Russian tourists. "Let's design the streets and roads of these districts in a way that would appeal to them more. Let's bring in famous luxury brands. And we should correct the image of a 'cheap country,' so as to draw Russians to Antalya in the winter, too, instead of Cannes, Egypt and Dubai. Then we can have a greater share from the Russian market," he said.

Görgülü stressed that Russia had great importance for Turkish tourism. "Because of our currently lacking publicity, many Russians see Turkey as a destination to be visited only during the summer. The situation with European tourists is no different. We carry out all our publicity work with a mindset oriented toward drawing them to Turkey only for the summer, which leaves us with almost empty facilities during the winter. We have been unable to spread the tourism season year round. What we should do now is spread it over at least 10 months at this stage. Turkey should be marketed like Dubai and Egypt. We should be able to spread the word that Antalya has warm weather in the winter and that Turkey's winter tourism facilities are not limited to the one on the Palandöken Mountain," he said.

According to Görgülü, who said it was a must to profit more from the area's new tourism facilities, worth \$30 billion, Russians and Turks have very similar holiday habits -- such as deciding on where to go at the last moment. But this is totally different in Europe. Europeans make their decisions a year in advance, which gives hotels the possibility of taking bolder steps in advance and making more detailed plans.

The experienced tourism mogul attributes the great tourist influx from Russia to these reasons:

"First and foremost is that Antalya has a hot climate. Apart from this, Russians are very similar to Turks in terms of temperament. They go to European countries only for the sake of visiting them, but come to Turkey to make themselves at home. While feeling like strangers in Europe, they are comfortable here as our cultures are very similar. Although Russians seem to be cold people at first glance, they are actually very warm -- even similar to the Anatolian people. Turks treat Russians better than they treat Europeans. Also, Russia is closer to Turkey than Europe. They have no visa problem, either. Moreover, Turkish cuisine is more appealing to them."

Görgülü reiterated that the Russian share in Turkish tourism was growing by the day, adding: "Previously, Russians had difficulty obtaining a passport and sometimes had to wait up to six months. Now, they don't suffer such difficulties, and most problems, even visa ones, have been overcome. Their interest in spending holidays abroad is growing with their rising incomes. That's why they have gravitated toward Turkey." Görgülü also spoke about the Kayı Group's operations in the Russian market. They entered the Russian market in 2004, he said, adding: "On a certain level Russians have been distancing themselves from the Germans since World War II. That's why we were advised not to enter the market under the German Travel International [GTI] brand; hence, we opted to use another name to enter the Russian market, and despite our initial concerns, Russians adopted this brand in a very short time. They even said, 'We received so many complaints from our citizens who prefer other brands [than GTI]. We were celebrated and appreciated by Russian authorities.'"

Görgülü attributes the great Russian interest in his company to their quality service. "When entering the Russian market, our rivals said that we would drop our prices dramatically. But we did not change our prices, and we were greeted very positively in Russia. We have won the trust of Russians. Russians, who value power so much and who saw that the Kayı Group was a very powerful Turkish company with its hotels, operators and travel agencies. That's how we were adopted in a very short time," he said. The Kayı Group brought 150,000 Russians to Turkey last year, and its target this year is to surpass the 200,000 number. **Antalya Today's Tourism**

Ela Quality puts customer satisfaction at center

The Ela Quality Resort Hotel, which opened for business last year in the Turkish tourism center of Belek, is off to a remarkable start with its customer satisfaction already at 95 percent -- no surprise then that CEO Vadi Karatopraklı is hopeful about the future.

In an interview with Today's Tourism, Karatopraklı says his hotel has achieved the current level of success by distinguishing itself as different, something he defines as the necessary ingredient for success in the tourism industry. Turkey is superior not only in terms of facilities but also in terms of qualified personnel, he adds, even in comparison to nations like Spain, which attract 60 million tourists a year. He underscores the need for Turkey to expand to year-round tourism options, rather than just the summer, to increase and perpetuate this level of success.

Tourism in Turkey got off to a great start in 2008, Karatopraklı notes, with early reservations for summer hotel spaces reaching a new record by February. He predicts that the number of Russian tourists brought to Belek by tourism op-

erators this year may double 2007's figure of 600,000. Karatopraklı, analyzing the tourism sector in general in Turkey, asserts that his hotel's success is rooted in the belief that details make the difference, pointing to touches like the special training received by the hotel's childcare staff. The hotel, which combines Ottoman and modern architectural styles, has a unique approach to quality and service -- something supported fully by human resources at the hotel, he stresses. One example of this is "Academy Q," created by the hotel for training their personnel, a project which has cost \$500,000 thus far.

Offering everything from duplex suites to king villas for guests, the Ela Quality Resort Hotel has 550 rooms and a 1,400-bed capacity, and prides itself on making no price distinction between local and foreign guests.

Another important area of service offered by the hotel are the activities and services provided for younger guests. "With our Everland Q services we offer very special services to kids from 1 to 17. For example, we even have child psychologists and nurses trained to take care of children up to 3 years old in special rooms designated for this care. While

we attend to everything from meals to naps, their mothers and fathers can go swimming in the sea or take advantage of our spa without having to worry," he explains. Karatopraklı notes that up to 50 percent of their guests are from Russia, 30 percent are from various European countries and the rest are Turkish.

Unparalleled quality and luxury

"Though we hadn't even been established a year, in 2007 we saw [an average] 80 percent capacity in terms of room bookings, and hosted 17,000 guests. In 2008 we will raise the number of guests served to 30,000. We also aim to raise the 95 percent customer satisfaction rating of last year up higher still, and along with it we target increasing our \$22 million turnover of last year to \$40 million this year. With our remarkable attention to detail, our high quality and services, we are one of Turkey's most luxurious hotels. Our prices start at \$215 a night, though they go as high as \$7,500 for our king villas. Even our spa services are different from other hotels that use Far Eastern names, as we instead borrow from our own Turkish hamam

culture, something we call the 'Lale' or 'Tulip' spa concept."

Positive outlook for the sector

Karatopraklı notes that despite the recent military operation into northern Iraq, tourism numbers have not been negatively affected in Turkey, and that cancellations have remained at only 1-2 percent or so. He says: "The Russians have now even started to make their reservations for the summer in February, out of fear that 'there will be no spaces left.' This area of the sector is receiving lots of interest, and so far 2008 is going very well. While we have mostly hosted German tourists in previous years, this trend looks set to change, with more and more Russian tourists coming in."

In comparison to European countries, Turkey actually has superior facilities and more qualified personnel, he adds, and as such it should be hosting more and more tourists. He concludes: "As a sector, we need to ensure that tourism is something we offer 12 months of the year. We need to do this, and in order to do so, we need to define what it is that distinguishes us, and focus on these differences." He notes that this is precisely what the Ela Quality Resort Hotel has done in Belek. **Istanbul Today's Tourism**

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ŞAH INN PARADISE PLEDGES TO OFFER BEST OF TURKISH HOSPITALITY

The chairman of Kamer Holding, owner of the Şah Inn Paradise Hotel, has said that the hotel's most important vision and mission are to offer its guests the best example of Turkish hospitality.

"We are trying to offer an enjoyable and privileged holiday to our guests at our hotel with our experienced staff to make them feel and understand Turkish culture and hospitality at the highest level possible," Chairman Özer Sevencan stated. Speaking to Today's Tourism about the Şah Inn Paradise Hotel and the services it provides, Sevencan explained that every detail for guests' comfort is considered at Turkey's only first-class holiday village.

Located 90 kilometers from Antalya's city center and 105 kilometers from Antalya Airport, the Şah Inn Paradise provides services for its female and male customers separately, thus meeting the expectations of both. Located over an area of 167,000 square meters, the hotel has a 400-meter-long beach and both salt and fresh-water pools. The hotel also boasts an aqua-park, children's pool and a mother-child pool as well as a fitness center, massage parlor, beauty center, sauna and Turkish hamam. There is also a Jacuzzi, special secluded terrace for sunbathing, pool bar, snack bar and special game salon, all dedicated solely to female guests. There is also a special pool and children's club so mothers can truly relax.

Meanwhile male customers can enjoy their time in four different pools. There are 40,000 square meters of green area on the hotel grounds, while the hotel itself has a 1,400-bed capacity. For meetings there is a 1,022-person capacity hall as well as a 1,500-person capacity restaurant.

The Şah Inn Paradise also provides spe-



cial services to its customers on the occasion of religious festivals.

There are four royal suites, five special rooms for the handicapped and 100 family and 295 standard rooms at the Şah Inn Paradise, all of which have balconies, minibars, telephones, wireless Internet connection, TV, information channels, air conditioners, en suite bathroom and hair driers.

The Şah Inn Paradise provides services for those who care about their health and beauty with its Turkish hamam, wellness and spa center, fitness center, water activities, volleyball and basketball pitches, beach volleyball and various water sports on offer. The experienced chefs of the hotel's kitchen prepare unique dishes with great care.

Reservation offices located in İstanbul and

Ankara and Suay Tour in Europe provide information about the hotel for customers. Sevencan, noting that the hotel management was planning to increase the number of reservation offices across Turkey, added: "We are aware of the confidence people feel about the Şah Inn brand. We invite all holiday-lovers to our hotel and would like to mention that we would be honored to welcome them here." **Antalya Today's Tourism**

IC Hotels Residence: the address for luxury tourism in Antalya

IC Hotels offers its distinctive Far Eastern architecture, specially designed landscape and exclusive services to guests, all in a boutique hotel category.

Located in Antalya's Kundu-Aksu region, IC Hotels Residence is only 15 kilometers from Antalya Airport and 25 kilometers from the city center. It offers guests luxury and comfort in a unique and distinctive setting. With 44 luxury villas located on 70 hectares of green, lush landscaping, IC Hotels Residence promises its guests not only extreme pleasure but ample romanticism.

There is the exclusive Presidential Villa, set on 1,000 square meters of land and including four bedrooms, a fitness salon, Turkish hamam, sauna, dining room, kitchen and a 105-square-meter swimming pool. The IC Hotels Residence also features four villas with interior design by Fendi Casa. Others include the Bali Deluxe, Bali, Gol Deluxe, and Gol Villas, all marked by their extreme luxury and attention to detail.

Guests at IC Hotels Residence are treated to some of the most delicious world cuisine at the Spybag a la carte restaurant on the hotel grounds. What's more, guests at the IC Hotels Residence can also facilities at the neighboring IC Hotels Green Palace free of charge.

Another site offering guests unlimited relaxation and serenity is the Liliun Spa Center, the concept of which was created by British company HOK. There are also Spa Suites situated right on the shores of a delightful lake. All of the furniture used in this special spa setting -- which offers guests a variety of massage and therapy choices -- was chosen by the luxury interior design firm Fendi Casa. **Antalya Today's Tourism**



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• **RUSSIAN FEDERATION / MOSKOW** - Leninsky Prospekt 52, Mega Mall, Festival Mall, Mega Mall Belayadacha / **KAZAN** - Mega Mall, / **NOVOSIBIRSK** - Mega Mall, / **NIJNINOVGOROD** - Mega Mall, / **EKATERINGBURG** - Mega Mall, • **UKRAINE / ODESSA** - Riselyevska Str. 39, / **KHARKOV** - Karavan Mall, • **ROMANIA / BUCHAREST** - Banaesa Mall • **KAZAKHSTAN / ASTANA** - Sary Arka Mall • **AZERBAIJAN / BAKU** - Husnu Hacıyev Str. 71 • **KYRGYZSTAN / BISHKEK** - Vefa Mall • **UZBEKISTAN / TASHKENT** - Chorsu Savdo Markazi • **İRAN / TEHRAN** - Aftab Mall (Vanak Square) / **SHIRAZ** - Sattarkhan Blvd., • **BULGARIA / SOFIA** - Grafignatiev Str. 41 A • **PLOVDIV** - Rayko Daskalov Str. 41 • **EGYPT / CAIRO** - Dandy Mall, City Stars Mall

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No reason to fear fast growth in tourism, says official

Few can deny that the Turkish tourism industry has been thriving since 2000, and the resulting number of investments has seen a significant rise in accommodations to house the growing number of foreign visitors. However, this unprecedented growth is nonetheless being interpreted by some as a negative situation since the growing number of investments has brought along greater competition, which naturally results in drastic discounts in prices -- and some say a drop in quality.

"I believe that fearing the fast growth of the sector is meaningless," President of the Association of the Anatolian Tourism Enterprises (ATİD) Seçim Aydın said. Asserting that the growth in the sector was natural and in line with the rules of supply and demand, he said: "However, what

we should pay attention to at this point is that the competition in quality is becoming more important than the competition over the lowest prices. The tourism sector will continue to be Turkey's locomotive sector as it has the possibility of competing both in quality and price."

In response to Today's Tourism's questions on recent developments in the tourism sector, Aydın noted that a total of 23.3 million tourists came to Turkey in 2007 and that the resulting revenue was \$18.5 billion, adding that Germans topped the list with 4.1 million visitors, followed by 2.5 million Russians. Russian tourists have started shaking the German domination in recent months, Aydın said, noting, "What matters at the current stage is not the

nationality of the tourists, but the number of the tourists and the growth of the tourism revenues."

Aydın further assessed the targets set at the well-attended Tourism Search Conference held in Antalya between Feb. 28 and March 2. Recalling that some of the targets set at the conference included reaching 50 million tourists, tourism revenue of \$50 billion, 1.25 million beds, 5 million employees including indirect employment and getting Turkey to rank among the first five countries in world tourism, he said, "These are quite realistic as long as the tourism sector in Turkey maintains its unity and consistency." He also stressed that all sorts of problems could be solved through dialogue with the government, "The impor-

ance of the tourism sector will continue growing as the locomotive sector of the Turkish economy."

One of the most persistent problems of the tourism sector is the lack of publicity and marketing, and the publicity campaigns and marketing should be treated as two different activities and be separated, he noted, stressing that publicity should be understood as a far more complex and far-reaching set of activities. "It is really difficult to say that publicity activities for Turkey tourism are sufficient. In order for it to reach the desired level, all public and private sectors, universities and civil society organizations should be mobilized toward a common target," he said, adding that a "Publicity Council" could be founded with the participation of all these sectors. **Antalya Today's Tourism**



Seçim Aydın

Tourism potential undermined by terrorism, sanitation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The top 10 countries in the tourism competitiveness index are Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Spain, Australia, Britain, the US, Sweden, Canada and France. The index shows that Turkey is more competitive than Egypt, India, China and Romania, whereas Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Mauritius and Bulgaria rank higher than Turkey. The report ranks Cameroon, Bangladesh, Burundi, Lesotho and Chad at the bottom of the list as the least competitive countries in the field of tourism.

The findings of the report on Turkey's tourism performance also include the following: The country ranks 56th for level of policies and regulations that facilitate the development of travel and tourism; 57th in terms of the travel and tourism business environment and infrastructure. Turkey stands 44th in the 130-country list in the index of cultural and natural resources.

The report also notes that Turkey hosts nine prominent sites included in the World Heritage list. It notes: "Yet, the country's competitiveness is poor due to concerns over safety and security, health and hygiene and insufficient transport infrastructure. Furthermore, priority should be given to preservation of the country's natural resources."

The report also includes a ranking on the treatment of foreigners. Turkey ranks 39th on this list; the top 10 countries considered most hospitable to their visitors are Montenegro, New Zealand, Austria, Singapore, Malta, United Arab Emirates, Burkina Faso, Iceland, Ireland and Thailand. The countries with the worst hospitality ratings are China, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Russian Federation, Poland, Venezuela and Oman.

Advantages versus disadvantages

The advantages and disadvantages of Turkey that the report makes reference to in the ranking of 130 countries in relation to competitiveness in tourism include the following:

Political rules and regulations

Turkey ranks 52nd for real estate ownership by foreigners (disadvantage).

Ranks 55th in the influence of regulations in regards to foreign direct investment (FDI) in business (disadvantage).

Ranks 59th in transparency in the creation of administrative policies (disadvantage).

Environmental protection

Ranks 57th in the strict implementation of environmental regulations (disadvantage).

Ranks 67th in level of deterrence of environmental regulations (disadvantage).

Ranks 56th in the sustainability of development in travel and tourism industry (disadvantage).

Safety and security

Ranks 100th in the cost of terrorism for business (disadvantage).

Ranks 52nd in the reliability of police services (disadvantage).

Ranks 58th in the cost of criminal acts and violence for business (disadvantage).

Health and hygiene

Ranks 77th in the number of doctors (disadvantage).

Ranks 60th in access to health services (disadvantage).

Ranks 51st in access to potable water (disadvantage).

Priority given to travel and tourism

Ranks 58th in the planning for travel and tourism industry in the government (disadvantage).

Ranks 63rd in the efficiency of marketing (disadvantage).

Air transportation infrastructure

Ranks 49th in the quality of air transportation infrastructure (advantage).

Ranks 43rd in the international air transportation network (advantage).

Land transportation infrastructure

Ranks 50th in the quality of roads (advantage).

Ranks 66th in the quality of railways (disadvantage).

Ranks 83rd in port infrastructure (disadvantage).

Ranks 46th in domestic transportation network (advantage).

Human resources

Ranks 70th in the quality of the education system (disadvantage).

Ranks 43rd in the local access to research and education services (advantage).

Ranks 87th in employment and layoff regulations (disadvantage).

Ranks 77th in the employment of foreign labor (disadvantage).

Ranks 16th in the impact of HIV/AIDS (advantage).

Natural resources

Ranks 21st in terms of the number of natural sites included in the World Heritage list (advantage).

Ranks 106th in the quality of natural environment (disadvantage).

Cultural resources

Ranks 17th in the number of cultural sites included in the World Heritage list (advantage).

Ranks 80th in the number of athletic stadiums (disadvantage).

Ranks 31st in the number of fairs and exhibitions (advantage).

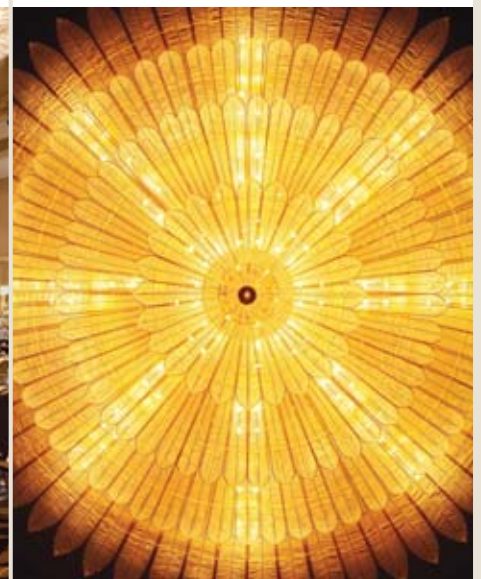
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Turkish pop singer Tarkan

Tarkan to put mark on Turkish year in Russia

Pop singers Tarkan, Sertab Erener and Sebnem Ferah and classical pianist İdil Biret will put their mark on cultural activities that will be held in connection with the Year of Turkish Culture in Russia.

Under a schedule prepared by the Turkish Ministry for Culture and Tourism in an attempt to promote Turkey in Russia, which declared 2008 the Year of Turkish Culture, a number of activities will be held in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and Sochi. According to the report by the Anatolia news agency, the Year of Turkish Culture will officially start with a concert by the Presidential Symphony Orchestra at Moscow's International Music Hall on April 8. Tarkan, a popular singer well known in Russia, will also take part in the activities for Turkish culture year.

Officials from the Russian Federation's Culture and Cinema Federal Agency (Roskultura), the institution responsible for organizing the events, reportedly indicated that Tarkan's participation in the project will make a substantial contribution to Turkey's promotion in Russia. The exact schedule for Tarkan's concert will be finalized soon.

Erener will also take part in the events. Erener will perform Turkish folk songs with a jazz rendition in her concert. Ferah will take the stage with a rock group to entertain rock-lovers in Russia. Other Turkish artists who will contribute to the project include jazz singer Ayşe Tümtüncü. Chef Emre Aracı will give a concert to be accompanied by the renowned Russian artist Yuri Bashmet. The "Taxim Trio," formed with the participation of clarinetist Hüsnü Senlendirici, İsmail Tunçbilek and Aytac Doğan, will give a concert of traditional Turkish tunes for the Russians in Moscow. The activities also include a dance performance and a photo exhibition on Russia and Istanbul, featuring renowned Turkish photographer Ara Güler.

Conferences and panel discussions will also be held in Moscow, which will host an exhibition that will feature contemporary examples from Turkish art in the second half of the year. Turkish culture year activities will also feature at a Moscow book fair in September. The fair will host a number of renowned Turkish writers and artists who will promote their works at the venue.

Russians will also have the opportunity to sample Turkish food with special dishes to be prepared by renowned Turkish chefs, served at a special event in Moscow.

The Moscow Film Festival is expected to focus more on Turkish productions this year. "Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım" (The Girl with the Red Scarf), a 1970s classic Turkish movie adapted from the novel by Chinghiz Aitmatov, will be screened at the festival, to which the film's leading actors, Kadir İnanır and Türkan Şoray, will also be invited.

The activities in St. Petersburg will include concerts by famous pop star Tarkan and renowned pianist Biret, and live performance by clarinet master Selim Sesler.

Jazz pianist and composer Kerem Görsel will take to the stage for a concert accompanied by the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Mercan Dede will also give a concert in the city. Meanwhile, an exhibition to promote classical Turkish paper marbling art ebru will be held in St. Petersburg, where another exhibition will feature historical artifacts currently preserved at the Topkapı Palace to promote Turkish culture in Russia. **Istanbul Today's Zaman**

RUSSIAN TOURISTS OUTNUMBER GERMANS IN TURKEY

Manny Fontenla-Novoa, the president of Thomas Cook, one of Europe's leading tourism companies, has said Russian tourists outnumbered Germans in Turkey last year.

Fontenla-Novoa was speaking to Focus magazine's travel page and suggested that Russian tourists are a good investment for the future. "Russians like to travel. Last year they outnumbered Germans as the biggest tourist group in Turkey," he said.

When asked about which

countries the company would invest in if the European market becomes saturated, Fontenla-Novoa said: "India, Russia and China, in this order. However, markets vary. Russians prefer Egypt and Turkey as they like sun. Indians opt for culture travel: Rome, Paris and London. This market is quickly growing."

Another story published by the magazine introducing leading tourism companies in Germany argues that the year 2008 could be a successful

tourism year for Öger Tours.

According to the story Öger Tours, owned by European Parliament member Vural Öger, served 1.4 million customers and saw an increase in its turnover of 16 percent last year. With a headline reading "New tourists conquer the world," the story noted that Istanbul is one of the most preferred cities for city tours in Europe, prompting many airlines to offer affordable flights there. **Istanbul Today's Tourism**



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Turkey becomes MITT's first ever Partner Country in 2008

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Underlining that Turkey is an important tourist destination for the Russian Federation, Nermin Batmaz, culture and tourism advisor to the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, notes that around 2 million Russian tourists visit Turkey every year. Batmaz emphasizes that visitors from Russia are particularly attracted by Turkey's natural and historical grandeur and wealth. "We hope that MITT will continue to boost the tourism sector, which is a driving force behind peaceful relations between nations," she emphasized.

She added that tourist satisfaction has lent momentum to socio-cultural relations between the two countries. Indeed, Turkey celebrated 2007 as the Russian Year of Culture and 2008 will, in turn, mark the Turkish Year of Culture in Russia. Batmaz is confident tourism relations between Russia and Turkey, with their strong historical and cultural common background, will continue to thrive. For her, MITT is an important event and demonstrates the amount of activity in the Russian tourism market. "Tourism professionals from all over the world show great interest in this exhibition, which has yielded effective results in the Russian and CIS tourism market," she noted.

MITT: A door to Russia's emerging tourism and travel market

With more than 25 million Russians crossing the borders of their country to see the outside world in 2006, the Russian travel and tourism market is seen as the rising star of the global tourism business. Fueled by a tremendous rise in oil and gas prices, the Russian economy is booming and has given rise to a super-wealthy upper class while also expanding the middle classes. Leading tourist destinations from around the world are seeking a slice of the considerable pie the Russian market represents, and MITT offers a significant opportunity to this end. The number of overseas tourists from Russia's middle class is growing at an annual rate of 7 percent, the latest UNWTO figures suggest.

Tourism operators also note that they want Russian visitors for two other reasons. Russian tourists are keen to seek out more places to visit and have good spending power. Indeed, UNWTO figures show Russians are ranked in the top 10 spenders of the world. For example, in 2006 Russian tourists spent roughly \$20 billion in total, representing a 6 percent rise on total expenditure in 2005. Some 81,880 people visited MITT in 2007, an independent audit revealed. The same audit revealed that 50,130 of them were there for professional purposes, that is, to seek business. And MITT has attracted more and more visitors with each passing year.

The size of the total fair area is 44,000 square meters, and there will be a total of 2,700 exhibitors, including stand shapers, this year. The government of Moscow, the mayor of Moscow, the Duma Committee for Tourism (which comprises the Committee for



A Russian woman looking through a booklet as she stands by posters advertising trips to Egypt at the Moscow International Travel And Tourism fair. More than 80,000 visitors flocked to the exhibition last year.

Economic Policy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism and the Committee for Culture), the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and the Moscow Chamber of Commerce are providing official support for the event. Along with the UNWTO, the International Tourism Trade Fairs Association (ITTF), the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), the Central European Countries Travel Association (CECTA) and the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) are listed among the affiliates and sponsors for the fair. The show has 72 media partners.

Some of the exhibition's Turkish participants

Adam & Eve, Alba Travel, Attaleia Holiday Village, Avita Medical Tourism, Barut Hotels, Betuyab, Callista Luxury Resort 5* Deluxe, Club Ali Bey, Cornelia De Luxe Resort 5* Deluxe, Ela Quality Resort 5*, Gloria Hotels & Resorts, Ic Hotels, Kamelya World Hotel, Kemer, Marti

Hotels & Marinas, Otium Hotels, Paloma Hotels, Papillon Hotels Resort & Spa, Pirate's Beach Club, Riva Resorts & Spa Hotels, Rixos Hotels, Sungate Port Royal De Luxe Resort Hotel, Susesi Deluxe Resort & Spa, United Organization of Hotel Industry, Xanadu Resort 5* Deluxe

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TOURISM SUPPORTING STRONGER ECONOMY

ILHAN BASMACI ISTANBUL

Turkish Federation of Hotel Enterprises (TUROFED) Chairman Ahmet Barut has said the tourism sector has become a giant industry with a total contribution to the economy of \$20 billion, but added that tourism revenues have declined in 2007, despite an increase in the number of tourists, due to an overvalued Turkish lira.

Barut underlined that hotel occupancy rates in the July-August term in 2007 were very high but the overvalued Turkish lira and a low foreign currency rate had negatively affected the tourism sector. "Our revenue has declined despite the increased number

of tourists. ... Our profits have declined in comparison to last year," he said.

Noting that domestic tourism plays the greatest role in the overall success of a country's tourism industry, Barut also recalled that a revival in domestic tourism is relevant to the economic progress of the country. "Per capita income in Turkey is about \$5,000-\$6,000. When this rises to \$10,000, domestic tourism will revive. The share of domestic tourism at resorts is 10 percent at present; it is 30 percent in Istanbul and 50 percent in city hotels. As long as the economic situation of the country continues to improve, the idea of going on vacation will also develop and

spread. This will trigger domestic tourism. Today, a family trying to survive under minimum wage cannot go on vacation in Kusadası. People will tend to spend money for vacations only if they secure their future. Domestic tourism has revived more recently; private airlines contributed to this. I think domestic tourism will develop further and in parallel with increased welfare levels," Barut explained.

Despite some difficulties it is possible to extend sea and sun tourism throughout the year, Barut noted, adding: "Our country sees an influx of 22 million tourists [annually]. This is something very significant. People would not

come if they thought they would be unable to find what they expected. We need to convince them that Turkey is spectacular in the winter as well. For this reason, additional facilities like golf resorts and [sports] fields, convention centers and thermal spas should be built in regions known for their attractive sun and seashores. Most Europeans are not aware that skiing is possible in Turkey during the winter. We need work more to effectively promote these possibilities. We have so far failed to explain the quality of resort hotels and spa centers to visitors. We must pay more attention to the promotion of winter tourism and make all necessary arrangements."



Murat Dedeman

Turkey expects more tourists despite Europe's woes

Turkey expects a strong tourist season in 2008 despite an economic slowdown in Europe, its main market, and security concerns linked to separatist terrorists, tourism officials said on Monday.

The tourism sector is a key source of foreign currency earnings for Turkey, a European Union candidate country, and helps to temper its bulging current account deficit.

The Turkish Tourism Investors Association (TYD) expects the number of foreign tourists visiting Turkey to rise 12 percent in 2008, resulting in revenues of up to \$21 billion, said Murat Dedeman, the association's head.

"It seems the trend is very good and that Turkey will have a good season. People are talking about a recession but this does not have too much effect on tourism," he told Reuters.

A credit crunch originating in the US housing market is starting to affect economies around the world. The International Monetary Fund has cut its forecast of 2008 economic growth in the euro zone, home of many visitors to Turkey, by 0.5 percentage point to 1.6 percent and says the global economy may deliver its weakest performance in five years this year.

Dedeman's optimism was echoed by the Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TURSAB), which predicts a 15 percent increase in tourist numbers in 2008 to 27 million.

"Our contacts in market countries and the information gathered show that Turkey reservations remained in a positive direction as of March," TURSAB Chairman Basaran Ulusoy said, without giving any figures. Reservations, including from Germany, the biggest source of tourists to Turkey, are rising, he added.

Holidays a 'necessity'

Dedeman said holidaying abroad had become an established habit among Europeans, however tough the economic environment.

"Tourism is the sector which will be affected last by a recession. Holidays have become a necessity for people. If they spent four days on holiday in the past, then they trim this to three days but they will still take holidays," he said. Increased flights, new golf courses and thriving convention centers are helping to lure more foreign travelers. The number of tourists visiting Turkey in January alone rose 9.6 percent year-on-year.

Turkey's recent large-scale army offensive into northern Iraq against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has had no discernible effect on reservations, both Dedeman and Ulusoy said.

The Turkish military withdrew its troops from Iraq last week saying it had achieved its objectives. Groups linked to the PKK have attacked targets in coastal resorts, although generally the violence has been limited to mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey, many hundreds of kilometers from the main tourist centers. Turkey had a bumper tourism year in 2007, with the number of tourists rising 18 percent year-on-year, and total spending reached \$18.5 billion. This compares with total global growth in the tourism sector in 2007 of 6.5 percent.

The government should provide incentives to boost tourism in relatively undeveloped eastern parts of Turkey's Mediterranean coast, far from traditional spots such as Antalya, Dedeman said.

If this were done, Turkey could boost its annual tourist numbers to 40 million and revenues to \$40 billion by 2013, he added. Turkey has the longest coast in the Mediterranean. "We could attract tourists from Iran, Iraq and Syria to that part of the coast because it is near to them," Dedeman said.



Adrenaline high: paragliding above the turquoise coast



TERRY RICHARDSON FETHİYE

You can feel your heart racing, pulsing against the strap drawn tight across your chest. Hands a little moist with sweat, you peer down the slope ahead of you. Nervous, you fail to take in either the distant, glittering blue of the Mediterranean way below, or the swathes of pine forest encircling the bare mountaintop where you are standing. Is this a good idea, you begin to wonder. It's eerily quiet, the gentle hum of the breeze aside. Then, suddenly, there's a whoosh and flap as air fills

the vivid yellow ripstop nylon of your parasail. "OK, let's walk," comes a soft but commanding voice from behind you. So you walk, down the rock-strewn slope, slowly at first -- then a little quicker. The warm thermal up-draught is lifting you bodily off the mountain and effortlessly up into the sky. Your pilot, strapped in his harness behind you, fiddles with the steering cord, swinging you left to soar silently above the ridges, forest-clad spurs, tumbling cliffs and deep ravines. Around 3,500 years ago the island was ruled by King Minos, cursed with a child born half-man, half-bull. As if this wasn't bad enough, it feasted on

human flesh. Afraid of the creature (known as the Minotaur), yet unable to bring himself to kill it, Minos called for the most famous inventor in the world to build a prison to house the Minotaur -- the Athenian Daedalus. He built an underground labyrinth beneath Minos' palace that was so cleverly designed, escape was impossible.

Unfortunately for Daedalus (and his son Icarus, who had accompanied his father to the island), Minos learned that Daedalus had helped the Athenian prince Theseus to kill the Minotaur and escape from Crete with his daughter, the beautiful

Ariadne. Incensed, he locked father and son in their cliff-top workshop, and left them to die. What Minos didn't know was that Daedalus had been obsessed by flight for years. Every day father and son watched from the window as eagles soared free over the ocean. Daedalus soon hatched an escape plan. Using wax from a beehive in the cliff as a kind of glue, Daedalus and Icarus stuck the feathers shed by passing birds to their arms. Before launching themselves off into space on their new-found wings, Daedalus said to his beloved son, "Promise me you won't fly too near the sun."

The moral of the Icarus myth: Just enjoy the ride

Icarus promised, but once airborne the sheer elation of flying took over. The impetuous youth soared upwards. As he neared the sun, the wax melted, the feathers came unstuck and the rash Icarus plummeted to his death.

The moral of the above myth? When tandem paragliding (i.e., with a pilot controlling the paraglider as opposed to you) don't be tempted to think that you know better than him! Just enjoy the ride, hanging there safely suspended in your harness, the rectangular arc of the parasail above you cutting through the clear mountain air. Unlike Icarus, you won't be plunging down, but lazily circling the thermal currents (the best in Europe and second best in the world) down this beautiful mountain. You probably won't see them, but walkers on the Lycian Way long-distance trail snaking its way along the cliff-tops above the sea will notice you -- and be mightily impressed. Your pilot will point out the salient features of the landscape unfurling beneath your feet. Butterfly Beach, its golden sands backed by sheer cliffs and pretty woodland, the aptly named Paradise Beach and then, possibly Turkey's most famous strip of sand -- Ölü Deniz. The long spit of glowing near white beach, backed by the turquoise waters of its lagoon, looks glorious from above. With your bird's eye view, you feel almost sorry for the holidaymakers sunbathing below you -- how dull compared to flying!

Getting airborne has not always been so simple. In A.D. 1010 an English monk named Oliver of Malmesbury jumped from a tower with wing-like contraptions strapped to his arms. Apparently he glided some 230 meters before landing clumsily and breaking both legs. He was lucky, many other early pioneers plunged to their deaths. Leonardo Da Vinci, working in Florence in the late 15th century, famously made notes and sketches of prototype flying machines based on the careful study of birds wings, but kept his drawings and scribbling secret (they weren't discovered until the 1800s). Other flight pioneers followed a different approach. In 1783 the Montgolfier brothers made history -- man's first genuine "flight" -- 16 kilometers suspended in a basket beneath a hot-air balloon. Closer to the flight of birds, and a step towards the machine we all take for granted today -- the airplane -- was the glider. George Cayley is credited with being responsible for the first manned glider flight in the early 19th century -- although the "pilot" was actually a boy chosen for his lightness. The Wright brothers improved on Cayley's pioneering efforts and made the transition from wind dependent gliders to machines propelled by engines, making the world's first powered flight in 1903.

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TARGETS IN TOURISM HIGH, BUT ATTAINABLE

RUMEYSA ÖZEL İSTANBUL

Turkey has an outstanding potential in the tourism industry and reaching the targets set out in the latest Tourism Search Conference in Antalya, hosting 50 million tourists and earning \$50 billion in revenues by 2023, is not a fantasy, Turkish Association of Travel Agents (TÜRSAB) Chairman Başaran Ulusoy has said.

Speaking at a special tourism sector meeting at the Zaman complex in Istanbul on Tuesday, Ulusoy provided a bright forecast for the tourism industry in Turkey. Apparently referring to Tourism and Culture Ministry Undersecretary İsmet Yılmaz's recent statements in the "Tourism Search Conference" regarding Turkey's high goals in tourism by the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic, Ulusoy said such aims were clearly within reach given the country's resources.

Ulusoy stressed that the role of domestic tourism should not be ignored in seeking to meet the goals of the tourism sector. "When you look at the world, in the countries that have per capita incomes of around \$10,000, one-third of the population participates in domestic tourism. In countries where the per capita income is between \$10,000 and \$20,000, half of the population [participates in domestic tourism]. ... We are at about \$10,000. This means that we should have 21 million citizens contributing to our domestic tourism. This is my aim. Foreigners should not be the only ones experiencing Turkey. Turkish citizens, too, should see their country."

This vision, however, would not mean too much without a sufficient, trained and skilled workforce, a key to which is education, the chairman said. To this aim, TÜRSAB has already established a school to train young people by teaching them the very essentials of this service industry. TÜRSAB Istanbul Anadolu Hotel Management and Tourism Vocational High School students walk out equipped with a good competence in a foreign language, which increases their chances of landing a high-paying job.

Another issue Ulusoy focused on was the importance of improving airline traffic, which he



PHOTO: TODAY'S ZAMAN

All the representatives of Turkey's tourism business convened last month in Antalya to set long-term targets for the country. The conference ended with a goal to attract 50 million tourists by 2023 and earn \$50 billion in revenue. Başaran Ulusoy of TÜRSAB believes that the targets are reasonable if everyone cooperates

sees as a prerequisite to increase the demand for domestic tourism. The Turkish airline industry is a valuable asset for capitalizing on Turkey's domestic tourism potential, Ulusoy pointed out and went on to say: "Turkish Airlines (THY) is successful and our private airlines are trustworthy. Their operations are being conducted in accordance with international standards. There is a wide web of transportation

within our country. You can fly from Kayseri to Izmir, from Bursa to Trabzon and from Van to Istanbul." In the latest Tourism Search Conference in Antalya last weekend, this subject was also brought to the attentions of the participants, he noted, adding that the number of aircraft has to increase twofold while the airline companies are given better conditions to operate. Spending money for the purchases of cruises

and ships to carry passengers across Turkey, which is a peninsula with a huge potential for naval transportation, must also be given the utmost importance, Ulusoy asserted.

Government is close to the sector

Ulusoy said the Turkish government has done much to advance the tourism sector, adding that there is more to be done. He said the government

has changed a 35-year old law, no. 1618, through a special initiative by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister of Finance Kemal Unakıtan to render it possible for travel agencies to insure their customers. Regulations in the new version of this law also enable legal agencies to secure themselves against illegal ones. Furthermore, the government has also decreased the value added tax rates from 18 percent to 8 percent for travel agencies, as it had previously done for direct tourism investments, as an incentive.

Ulusoy stated that they also wanted the government to temporarily undertake the payment of social security premiums for new investments in poor parts of Anatolia as a tool to encourage tourism investments and decrease unemployment in these regions. "We also want social security premium payments to be exempted from value added taxes. Let us give these people jobs by arranging different timetables after changing regulations concerning simultaneous school vacations in geographically different cities like Kars and Istanbul, changing clerks' vacations from July and August to other months of the year," he explained, noting that the state should make new investments in cities which have high tourism potential within the scope of the incentives.

Recalling that Istanbul will be a European Capital of Culture in 2010, he emphasized once again that Istanbul should open new museums to showcase its rich cultural heritage. "The government has proposed a bill about this to show its support. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is going to build a large congress center in Sütlüce and another building will be converted into an international convention center." Having said this, Ulusoy also underlined that whatever people's political views may be or their views concerning different religious sects or even football teams, they can unite in the tourism sector. "Tourism has the power to unite everyone within it. We are one of the few countries that can host Germans and Russians or Israelis and Egyptians in the same hotel without any problems because we are tolerant and full of human love."

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850,000 will visit Manavgat Waterfall in 2008

ABDURRAHMAN BÜYÜKESKIN ANTALYA

Some 850,000 foreign and domestic tourists are expected to visit the Manavgat Waterfall in the summer of 2008. Local authorities in Sarılar district, home to the waterfall, have recently launched a campaign to attract greater number of tourists to the area. Activities to promote the waterfall are tabled for Berlin, Moscow, Bucharest, Oslo and London tourism fairs. Noting that 547,000 tourists visited Manavgat in 2007, Sarılar Mayor Mustafa Erkan Ersoy said they were expecting 850,000 guests from 42 countries this year following intensified promotional activities. The city will start the new summer season on April 1.

Speaking to Today's Tourism, Ersoy noted that the majority of the tourists arriving in Turkey in January and February were from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, Italy, France, Switzerland and Scandinavia. Noting that there had been a steady decline in the number of visitors since 2004, Ersoy said they were seeking to reverse this trend through active promotion and renovation. "Now people recall a city of tourism when they hear the name Manavgat Waterfall. Snapshots taken at Manavgat adorn many houses in Europe. Manavgat Waterfall is the symbol of our city at local and international tourism fairs," he noted. The mayor added that the tender process for the construction of new facilities at the waterfall has now been completed and that they would now proceed with determining rates applicable for the facilities. Tekin Başoğlu, head of operations at the waterfall, said Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays were the busiest

days in terms of visits, and added that they host 5,000 visitors every day on average throughout June, July and August.

German rock musician Michael Scholtz, who arrived in Turkey on holiday along with his vocalist friend Diana Nelkecd, said they would come again to see the waterfall and give a concert on June 17.

Meanwhile, tourism operators in Manavgat are preparing to attract a greater number of tourists from Europe. The Side-Manavgat Tourism Businesses Association (Side-TUDER), which has already ramped up its promotional activities, seeks to attract 3 million tourists to Manavgat in 2008.

Noting that they have launched a promotional campaign in Europe, Scandinavia, the Baltic countries, the Russian Federation, the Turkic republics and the Balkans, Side-TUDER President Cengiz Haydar Barut said their association would hold additional activities in Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Slovakia and Hungary in March.

"Manavgat attracts a great deal of attention at international fairs. We have seen this growing interest and attention most recently in Prague. Tourists who have visited the city once make the best promotion of a tourism city. Tourists particularly admire the natural and historic beauty in the nearby ancient city of Side. I believe that the 2008 tourism season will be great. We will continue to hold promotional activities in Tirana, Sofia, Prague, Ljubljana, Budapest and Bucharest to attract greater number of tourists from the Balkan region," he noted.

Barut added that they have also set the goal of establishing a 12-month-long tourism season in the region, keeping its hotels open throughout the winter.



Noting that 547,000 tourists visited Manavgat in 2007, Sarılar Mayor Mustafa Erkan Ersoy says they were expecting 850,000 guests from 42 countries in 2008, following intensified promotional activities.



PHOTO ABDURRAHMAN BÜYÜKESKIN

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TODAY'S TOURISTS

Cappadocian caves await visitors

'Fairy chimneys' -- natural rock formations -- attract millions of visitors from around the world every year to Cappadocia, the world-famous central Anatolian tourist spot also known for its spacious caves and ancient, rock-hewn churches

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'I CANNOT DESCRIBE IT, YOU MUST SEE CAPPADOCIA FOR YOURSELF'

Cappadocia offers visitors the warmth of the Anatolian people, the remains of the great civilizations that once lived there, magnificent pieces of art and so much more. In addition to offering breathtaking scenery with each step you take, Cappadocia also refreshes you with its air and water. It is not easy to describe Cappadocia, one has to live it. In order to really understand it, one has to breathe its air and drink its water. Each story concerning Cappadocia changes according to the storyteller, because it has so many striking features that make it hard to even write about."

These are the words of a businessman who is in love with Cappadocia, Peri Tower Hotel General Manager and Cappadocia Association of Tourism Operators (KAPTİD) Chairman Nazif Demir.

In an exclusive interview with Today's Tourism, Demir comments on the current situation in Cappadocia and the investment opportunities that can be found there. When he speaks about Cappadocia Demir's words are like those of a poet. He identifies the region as an entirely different world, saying that only those who have been there can lift the veil from the face of Cappadocia. He invites everybody to experience the region's mystery.

Demir stresses the importance of creating diversity in tourism services in order to attract more visitors. He admits that they have not covered much ground in this regard. The average duration of a visitor's stay in Cappadocia is just 1.8 days, indicating that, although Cappadocia is one of the most attractive tourism spots in Turkey, it fails to keep its visitors long, according to Demir.

He suggests some solutions, however: For instance, Cappadocia is also known as the "country of beautiful horses." He complains that the tourist sector does not pay enough attention to horse riding in the region, despite its status as a sport equally as expensive as golf. He notes that governmental incentives could promote development in equestrian tourism in the region.

Another of Demir's suggestions is trekking. Many people travel across the world for just this purpose, Demir notes, and it is a billion-dollar business. "We do not know why the beautiful valleys across Cappadocia are not publicized or why there are no trekking organizations in these valleys or any incentives on this matter," he added.

The hot-air balloon tours most visitors to the region enjoy should be promoted more, Demir says, adding that it would make an ideal venue for a balloon. He also stresses that Cappadocia's viticulture and handicrafts could provide another element to its tourism. As another suggestion, he adds, "Renting out one's home as a guesthouse should also be supported and carried to certain standards." According to Demir, the regions of Kırşehir, Kayseri, Aksaray, Konya and Niğde must also be promoted along with Cappadocia. Skiing at the Erciyes winter resort and Cappadocia's beautiful winter scenery must be better publicized in order to increase tourism and attract visitors all year round.

With its lack of humidity and ample hotel accommodation, Cappadocia should become an alternative spot for summer sports tourism, similar to Antalya. He adds that the area's international airport should be opened as soon as possible to allow Cappadocia to become a unique destination in its own right and a portal through which tourism can spread to the rest of Anatolia.

'Unplanned growth may curb tourism'

Demir also had these words to say on the ongoing problem of unplanned growth in the tourism sector and infrastructure: "Fast and in the [tourism] sector will pose a problem for infrastructure. It will also result in a lack of qualified personnel and a significant decrease in service quality. Focusing on becoming a brand as a country will help in solving such matters; otherwise it will cause serious losses in the tourism sector in the long run.

"The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and nongovernmental representatives from the tourism sector should carefully plan new investments ... and stick to the plan. Each new hotel created without good planning will bring losses instead of profit, and increasing the number of beds in hotels as though the demands will increase simultaneously would be a serious mistake. The demand is high today, but what will you do when it falls the next day? Will you remove the additional bed? No. This will result in competition over prices and both the nation's economy and the sector will likely suffer from it. "Regions must be evaluated carefully and different investment opportunities must be looked into and, finally, we must make a permanent decision that will benefit us all in the long run -- not for today only -- and put those decisions into effect." Cappadocia Today's Tourism

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