

Iran Pavilion Best At Italy's BIT

Iran's stall was nominated the best designed pavilion among the pavilions of countries which took part at the Borza Internationale del Turismo (BIT) in Milan, Italy, ILNA reported.

Director of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization's Taskforce for Promotional and Organizing Exhibitions, Hossein Hatemi, said 125 countries participated in the exhibit which opened on Feb. 22 covering an area of 60,000 square meters.

He said the design of Iran's 120 sq.m. pavilion was inspired by Islamic and Achaemenid architectures.

The pavilion displayed historic symbols such as the battle of cow and lion as featured in the Gate of All Nations in

Iran's most important Achaemenid site, Persepolis.

The official recalled that over 100,000 viewers visited BIT's 5,000 stalls, 13 of which belonged to Iran.

Eleven Iranian travel agencies plus national airline Iran Air took part in the exhibit, Hatemi noted.

Terming the presence of Iran's travel agencies as successful, the official stated that the agencies signed several agreements with foreign parties.

More than 10,000 posters, CDs, postcards, DVDs and other promotional items were distributed among the visitors to provide them with an insight into Iran's fascinations.

BIT is regarded as Italy's biggest tourism fair and one of the most important in Europe.

Tehran Hotels Offer Norouz Discounts

Domestic travelers arriving in Tehran province during Norouz holidays (March 21-April 2) will be

Farrokhmehr stated that the Tehran hotels' catering and housekeeping services have substantially improved.

Farrokhmehr gave assurances that the union inspectors would monitor the services of accommodation units during New Year holidays.

"Based on agreements with Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, Tehran museums shall remain open during the holidays," he added.

"The late-march Norouz holidays is the best time for traveling to Tehran because it is much less crowded and has clean fresh air."

He regretted that sightseers are not acquainted with provincial tourism fascinations due to inadequate information dissemination.



Tehran lodges can accommodate over 10,000 tourists.

offered 30-percent discount on hotel charges, head of provincial Hotel Owners Union said.

In talks with IRNA, Mohammad

He added that 76 hotels, 16 hotel-apartments and five pensions in Tehran province have the capacity to accommodate 10,500 guests.

Khorasan Razavi Welcomes Vacationers

Over 1,000 accommodation units are fully prepared to host pilgrims and vacationers visiting Khorasan Razavi province, home to the holy shrine of the eight Shiite Imam Reza (AS) during Norouz holidays (March 21-April 2).

Deputy head of provincial Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department was quoted by IRNA as saying that holidaymakers will be accommodated in 106 hotels, 200 hotel-apartments, 493 hostels and 200 lodges.

Montajabi added that a joint team comprising representatives of Islamic Republic of Iran Police, as well as ministries of health and commerce will monitor roadside restaurants on high-traffic roads.

Highlighting that a great number of vacationers flock to the northeastern province, especially its capital Mashhad, during Norouz, the official stated that lodging units run by department fall short of demand.

"Preparations are being made to accommodate a number of travelers in

Mashhad Municipality as well as campsites, schools and even private houses," he noted.

Montajabi said that a Souvenirs and Handicrafts Festival will be held during March 21-27 at Mashhad's Permanent International Fairground.

A festival of Iranian cuisine is scheduled for March 21-April 2 with the cooperation of Sepad Company in Mashhad's Almas-e Sharq Trade Complex, he added.

The official underlined that hotel prices will not increase during the holiday season.

Grants for Agencies Promoting Rural, Tribal Regions

Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization will pay 50-million-rial grants to travel agencies active in rural and tribal tourism.

Speaking at a press conference of the First Rural and Tribal Tourism Development Conference in Tehran, deputy ICHHTO chief for tourism affairs vowed that the organization would undertake all expenses of agencies trying to promote rural sightseeing.

Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh stated that 370 village chiefs had been assigned by the organization to promote welfare facilities for visitors to rural districts, Fars

news agency. Highlighting that rural areas have untapped tourism-wowing potentials, the official explained that living in tents like tribal households can be a pleasant experience for sightseers.

Malekzadeh believes that development of rural and tribal tourism will not only breathe a fresh life into rural and tribal economy, but will also help preserve their environmental resources.

On conflicts between tourist and rural cultures, the official said, "Awareness raising and education are needed to minimize such cultural confrontations."

Camelback Tours in Naein

Travelers visiting historic city of Naein in Isfahan province during the upcoming Norouz holidays (March 21-April 2) will have the option of going camel riding.

Head of Naein Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department Mahmoud Madanian told IRNA that vacationers can tour the old texture of the

city on camelback. He added that those interested in riding camels at the city's historic venues should register with the department on a daily basis.

According to the official, a tour on foot of the city's 40 historic sites is also arranged during the holidays.

A handicrafts exhibition will also be launched in

Naein's old bazaar to market the city's native artworks including kelims and pottery, the official said.

Local music performances and reciting Shahnameh (epic poems composed by noted Iranian poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi) are organized at Naein Anthropology Museum, Madanian concluded.

Foreign Muslim Women Tour Zanzan

Nearly 100 Muslim women from 70 countries studying in Iranian universities were taken on a tour of Zanzan's attractions, deputy head of provincial Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department said.

Massoud Ahmadiania told IRNA that the group traveled to Zanzan to visit the First Handicrafts Exhibition of Muslim Women held at the city's Caspian

International Fairground. The event highlighted around anthropology, handicrafts, and achievements of the organizations involved in women's affairs.

Handicrafts created by women artisans from around the country were showcased at the exhibit.

The guests also visited Imamzadeh Seyyed Ebrahim Shrine and the city's Grand Hosseinih (mourning place).

More Chinese Find Tibet a Hot Destination

For Wang Xi, the choice between staying at home for his family's annual Chinese Lunar New Year reunion or breaking tradition with a trip to the snow-capped mountains of Tibet was a no-brainer.

Chinese dumplings, visits with relatives and setting off fireworks just did not compare with Tibet, the tourist destination of choice for thousands of urban white-collar workers like the 25-year-old architect.

The journey is costing him about 6,000 yuan (\$800).

The Tibetan capital Lhasa has never seen so many travelers during a week-long Lunar New Year break, partly because this year's holiday fell on the same day as the Tibetan New Year.

At the Potala Palace, the ancient home of the Dalai Lama, and the Jokhang

Temple, Tibetan Buddhism's holiest shrine, crowds of Chinese tourists mix with pilgrims who prostrate themselves before the temple's many prayer wheels.

Zhou Hui, director of marketing for Shanghai-based Yaji travel agency that specializes in Tibet trips, said most visits to the politically-sensitive region ruled by China for the last 50 years are still organized tours.

"We sold out all of our New Year specials" to Tibet and had to turn clients away," Zhou said.

A travel package to Tibet costs from 3,600 yuan to 10,000 yuan for between six and 12 days, she said.

This means that in a nation where the average per capita urban income is about 11,800 yuan, only the upper class can afford travel to "the roof of the world."

But the good news is that the new Beijing-Lhasa railway, opened in July last year, has cut travel costs, she said.

"Since the railway was launched, Tibet has become a hot destination," said Tian Ling, a Beijing-based director of the China Youth Travel Service, one of three agencies offering package tours to Tibet during the New Year holiday.

Although most tours offer round-trip air or train travel, most tourists are opting for packages that offer arrival to Lhasa by train and departure by plane, she said.

While many Western tourists come to Tibet to glimpse the unique monuments and mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese tourists prefer the pristine environment of the Himalayas, Tian said.



SIGHTSEEING

Shahzadeh Garden

Sitting six km off Kerman, Shahzadeh Garden was built upon the order of Kerman ruler Abdolhamid Mirza Farmanfarma during the late Qajarid Era (1502-1736). The garden is located in Mahan on the slopes of Tigran mountains. It has an imposing entrance gate, a royal mansion and bathhouse. The most important part of the garden is its irrigation network situated at the center. There is a large pond with five fountains in front of the garden's main mansion. The pond is fed by the famous Tigran Qanat (aqueduct). The garden got a facelift in 2001. At present, the royal mansion has been converted into a restaurant. The garden boasts beautiful ornamental bushes as well as grape, peach and walnut trees. Crowds of domestic and foreign tourists visit the site each year.

Ex-War Zones To Become Tourist Sites

A comprehensive plan for touring former Iran-Iraq war zones would be drawn up in the near future, chief of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said.

Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaei, who was speaking at the first meeting of War Tourism Taskforce, stated that the 'Comprehensive War Tourism Plan' will be prepared to



Under the initiative, visitors could go on tours of ex-battlegrounds.

give an insight of Iran's eight-year defense against the invasion by Baathist Saddam regime, Mehr news agency reported.

"Sacred defense is part of our spiritual heritage which needs to be introduced to the public by utilizing its tourism capacities," the official, also a vice-president, observed.

He elaborated that ICHHTO has two plans which are registering the major event on UNESCO World Heritage List and tapping its tourism potentials.

The official also stressed that the organization is preparing the former battlegrounds for visitors.

Rahim-Mashaei referred to 'Rahian-e Nour' (Passengers of Light) Taskforce as a plan for arranging tours of ex-war zones.

Representatives of Rahian-e Nour Taskforce, Islamic Republic of Iran Police, Basij (volunteer) Forces, Martyrs Organization and other related bodies attended the meeting.

Britain Tourism Recovers

Visitor numbers were up at major British tourist attractions in 2006, following a troubled 2005 when London was attacked by suicide bombers, tourism chiefs announced.

The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA), which comprises the majority of Britain's biggest and best known attractions, said visitor numbers plunged following the July 7, 2005 bombings, which killed 56 people, reported AFP.

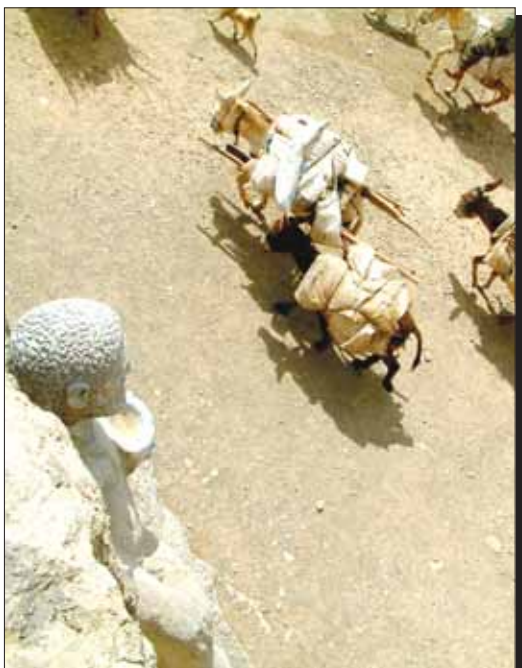
But most London attractions saw visitor numbers increase significantly in 2006, the ALVA figures showed.

Blackpool Pleasure Beach, an amusement park on the northwest English coast, remained Britain's most popular attraction, with 5.7 million visitors in 2006, even though numbers fell by 4 percent.

The rest of the top 10 were in London, such as the second-placed Tate Modern, the national gallery of international modern art, and the third-placed British Museum.

ALVA director Robin Broke said, "Despite security alerts and dense fog producing severe airport delays during the summer and December respectively, and the weak US dollar affecting the travel plans of many North American visitors, the industry is vibrant and continues to be a significant contributor to the British economy."

"Support for Britain's attractions industry is still required if this country is to compete globally, not least enhanced funding being urgently needed for VisitBritain (the national tourist board) to market the industry both internally and abroad."



An aerial view of Hercules dating back to 153 BC. The historical statue sits on a cliff in Bisotoun Mountain, Kermanshah province.

Trips to CIA's Poland Prisons

A Polish travel firm said it is giving tourists a chance to follow in the footsteps of CIA agents and terror suspects near an alleged US detention center in Poland's lakeland--which the authorities deny exists, wrote AFP.

Visitors will be able to cycle and canoe near the Polish intelligence service's training center at Stare Kiejkiuty in the northern Mazuria region, and the nearby Szymany Airport, Joanna Sobieska of

Szarpie Travel was quoted as saying by the PAP news agency.

Stare Kiejkiuty and Szymany have been in the spotlight since allegations surfaced that the United States had flown terror suspects to Poland for interrogation.

Washington acknowledged last September that it had held suspects in secret outside US territory, but refused to say where.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (American writer, born in 1922):

Peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons from God.