



In Case You Missed

Russia Against Caucasus Tourism

Russia's envoy to its volatile North Caucasus region called on Monday for tourism to be halted in the country's most popular ski resort, where three Moscow tourists were gunned down.

Security has been heightened since the Friday night shootout and a spate of other attacks, including blowing up a cable car and killing a policeman and an official in Kabardino-Balkaria in the mainly Muslim North Caucasus, where Moscow is failing to quell an insurgency, Reuters reported.

"We must stop receiving tourists," state-run Itar-TASS cited Alexander Khloponin as telling officials in the town of Tyrmayuz on the main road leading to Mount Elbrus, Europe's highest peak, which was open for holidaymakers on Monday.

The violence has shocked ordinary Russians and officials alike who see Elbrus as an oasis of calm in the North Caucasus.

Russia's Tourism Union said the attack on a minibus of Moscow skiers by masked assailants was the first terrorist attack on tourists in Russia. It added that around 5,000 tourists visit Elbrus annually.

Khloponin called on travel companies to "not bring new groups ... explain to them this is in the name of security."

Appointed by President Dmitry Medvedev a year ago, the former Siberian business executive has since been accused by the Kremlin of doing too little to tame the North Caucasus, a region Moscow has labeled as its biggest political problem.

The Russian Tourism Union warned of a worsening situation if security measures are not significantly beefed up.

More Tourists Visiting Lebanon

Preliminary figures issued by the United Nations World Tourism Organization indicate that Lebanon posted the 22nd highest growth rate in tourist arrivals in the world during 2010 with a 17.6-percent increase from the previous year.

Lebanon ranks in 12th place worldwide in terms of tourist arrivals, as reported by Lebanon This Week, the economic publication of the Byblos Bank Group, The Daily Star reported.

In comparison, tourist arrivals grew by 6.7 percent globally, by 5.3 percent in advanced economies and by 8.2 percent in emerging markets. Regionally, tourist arrivals increased by 14 percent in the Middle East and rose by 5.8 percent in North Africa.

They increased by 6.4 percent in Africa, by 3.2 percent in Europe, by 7.7 percent in the Americas, and by 12.6 percent in Asia and the Pacific.

Globally, Lebanon tied with Bosnia and Herzegovina. It ranked ahead of Papua New Guinea and Kiribati, which posted growth rates of 17.5 percent each, and came behind Egypt, which posted a 17.9-percent increase in tourist arrivals.

Regionally, Lebanon was the fifth-fastest growing tourism market, coming ahead of Saudi Arabia, which posted a rise of 13.3 percent in tourist arrivals, Morocco (11.5 percent), the UAE (9 percent), Turkey (5.8 percent), Cyprus (1.8 percent), and Tunisia (-0.3 percent).

Lebanon came behind Egypt (17.9 percent), Jordan (23 percent), Palestine (35.3 percent), and Syria (42.5 percent).

World Tourism Organization projected tourist arrivals to grow between 4 and 5 percent globally and by 7 to 10 percent in the Middle East in 2011.

Mystery of Sea Monster Deepens

Nothing puts a damper on a serene afternoon's kayaking like the sight of a primeval sea monster.

That was the rude lesson for Tom Pickles and Sarah Harrington, who had taken their watercraft out on the foggy waters of Lake Windermere, only to encounter what appeared to be "an enormous snake" swimming by.

"It was petrifying and we paddled back to the shore straight away. At first I thought it was a dog and then saw it was much bigger and moving really quickly at about 10 mph," the 24-year-old Pickles told The Telegraph. "Each hump was moving in a rippling motion and it was swimming fast. Its skin was like a seal's but its shape was completely abnormal—it's not like any animal I've ever seen before."

But what did Pickles and Harrington expect? Didn't they know that Lake Windermere is reputedly the home of the British version of the Loch Ness monster?

In the past five years, sojourners on the lake have reported eight sightings of a Nessie-like serpent. But the kayaking couple rallied from their shock and snapped the clearest photo of the Windermere "monster" since the sightings began.

A journalism professor and his wife inaugurated the recent spate of Nessie-esque encounters on the lake back in 2005 reporting they had seen a "giant eel" somewhere between 15-20 feet long.

Ever since then, researchers have set out upon the lake with sonar equipment, in pursuit of 'Bow-Nessie', as the creature's British compatriots like to call it. But so far, their efforts have not borne fruit.

Of course, people in Scotland have reported sightings of the Loch Ness Monster since 1933, and even with dramatic advance sonar and video technology, Loch Ness research teams have likewise been unable to turn up any credible scientific evidence of its existence.

Even its most noted hunter, Robert Rines, recently gave up his quest to find the beast after trying for nearly 40 years. "Unfortunately, I'm running out of age," the 85-year-old Rines said last year when he announced he was calling it quits.

Dr. Ian Winfield, a lake ecologist at the University of Lancaster, told The Sun he thinks the mysterious apparition people are seeing in Lake Windermere is merely a really big catfish.

Biggest Indoor Restaurant Opens On Kish Island



Concurrent with the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the biggest indoor restaurant of the world was inaugurated on Kish Island. The restaurant has been established by Padideh Shandiz Company, which is active in expansion of tourism industry, Mehr News Agency reported.

Khorasan Razavi Governor Mahmoud Salahi, police commander of the province, Brigadier General Hamid Fahimirad, along with Managing Director of Kish Free Trade Zone Organization (KFTZO) Ali Mohebbi and Managing Director of Qeshm Free Trade Zone Organization (QFTZO) Reza Mousavi as well as a group of MPs and officials attended the inauguration of Padideh Shandiz Tourism Complex.

> Tourism Development

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Salahi said the incumbent government considers development of tourism industry as one of the priorities for materializing the targets of 2025 Vision.

"Most tourists believe many tourism target countries are boring while Iran, which possesses a variety of tourism attractions, has high potentials for investment," he said.

In addition to yielding profit, tourism industry paves the way for promulgating the culture and civilization of the country and region.

"As long as we do not invest in the field, we cannot claim to have progressed. The capacities of Kish Free Trade Zone are currently presented as investment packages," he said.

Salahi noted that the Padideh Shandiz tourism project is an important achievement of the private sector in expanding tourism industry.

"The company has managed to correctly utilize the tourism potentials of Shandiz in Mashhad and generate income for the regional people," he said.

Salahi said the most important feature of Padideh Shandiz project on Kish Island is generation of new jobs.

"So far, some 400 jobs have been generated in this project. The company is the biggest entity in the private sector for creating jobs," he said.

> Achievements

Mohebbi said his organization has always supported

investors engaged in tourism projects on Kish Island.

"The fact that Padideh Shandiz Company managed to make this project operational within a short period of 110 days is a great achievement for managers of this company and KFTZO. We hope that with the launch of



the next phases of this project, such as hotel and Shaded shopping centers, more domestic and foreign tourists would visit the island," he said.

Fahimirad said the culture and attitude of Mashhad, the religious capital of Iran, now also prevails in other parts of the country with the inauguration of the one of the successful cultural and tourism subsidiaries of Padideh Shandiz.

"I personally believe that launching such a large center is an ideal and efficient course of action for two-way relationship between people and cultural accomplishments. In order to expand and promulgate the Iranian-Islamic culture and identify the unmatched capabilities of Iranians, Padideh Shandiz is an endurable work that can be considered as a paradigm (for other cases)," he said.

Addressing this ceremony, Managing Director of Padideh Shandiz Company Mohsen Pahlavan Moqaddam said that in the first phase of this project about 70 billion rials were spent for purchasing the restaurant's land and preparing the needed facilities.

> Project Details

The first phase of this complex, which includes the

Padideh Restaurant, was constructed in a built-in area of 11,000 square meters.

Some 830 billion rials were spent for buying the surrounding land by KFTZO, which reached 200,000 square meters. In addition to the money spent for purchasing lands, 180 billion rials were spent for constructing this complex.

The built-in area of this restaurant is 6,000 square meters. Some 400 new jobs were generated and this figure will hit 500 people in the next couple of months," he said.

Pahlavan said it is the biggest indoor restaurant of the world and a ship anchor weighing 100 tons lies adjacent to the restaurant.

The anchor was designed by one of the youths of the country and built by Iranian engineers within 35 days.

"This is the biggest anchor in the world, which will be registered in the Guinness Book of World Records in the near future," he said.

Referring to the future tourism projects of his company, he said, "Future plans include the construction of the tourism project of Padideh Shandiz in Shiraz and Mashhad. For the latter, 500,000 square meters of land have been purchased."

Two years were spent on designs and soon Phase One of the undertaking will start. The tourism cultural complex will have a library, mosque, auditorium with a capacity of 1,200 seats, plant and flower international exhibition, five-star hotel, residential complex, construction of the biggest amusement park of the world, an aquatic park and a shopping center.

On the sidelines of the inaugural ceremony, the deputy head of Majlis Economic Commission, Kazem Delkosh, said the parliament, government and all related bodies are fully supporting these projects.

Padideh Shandiz Complex is one of the big projects that show the might and pride of Iranians.

The lawmaker noted that the record set regarding the project's timetable shows the peak of capabilities of Iranians to the rest of the world.

"That a huge project is completed in such a short time and receives the attention of experts and people requires a special outlook which, I believe, must be backed by related organizations," he said.

Delkosh emphasized that Padideh Shandiz Complex can mark a new start for a great revolution in attracting tourists.

Ramsar Hosts Tourist Guides

The Fourth Conference of Iranian Tourist Guides is underway in Ramsar, Mazandaran province, with the participation of more than 400 tourist guides.

The event began on Monday concurrent with the International Day of Tourist Guides (Feb. 21) and will run till Wednesday.

Announcing the above, Arash Nouraei, the secretary of Iran's Tourist Guides Society, told IRNA that the event is aimed at promoting the status of tourist guides in Iran and their role in attracting tourists.

"Previous gatherings were held in Tehran, Yazd and Tabriz," he said, adding that last year's event focused on cultural issues but this year ecotourism and natural attractions have been given more importance.

It was decided to hold this year's event in Ramsar, as one of the most attractive sites of Iran, with the slogan "Biodiversity and Responsibility".

Nouraei said that the event is sponsored by the private sector and state-run organizations played no role in it.

University instructors, tour agencies and environmentalists attended the event. A section of the event was allocated to review the environmental impacts of tourism.

Nouraei said a ceremony will be held in Ramsar in the near future to review the condition of wetlands in Iran.



1,000 Handicraft Markets Planned

About 1,000 handicraft markets will be launched across the country during Norouz holidays (March 21-April 3) to attract more tourists.

Announcing the above, Tahmineh Daniali, the deputy head of Handicrafts and Traditional Arts Department, said all provinces have been obliged to allocate places for holding these temporary markets, the Persian daily Iran reported.

"Each province, with regard to its potentials, will hold exhibitions," she said, adding that last year about 400 temporary exhibitions were organized across the countries, which were warmly received by holidaymakers.

Daniali also said 100 billion rials have been allocated by the president to set up the handicraft markets.

"The fund will be used to establish infrastructures and develop handicraft markets in the country," she said, adding that following the agreement reached between her department and Presidential Office, a portion of the fund will be used to establish five to six permanent exhibitions in different provinces in the next Iranian year (starting March 21).

She noted that the rest of the fund will be used to set up about 60 permanent exhibitions across the country by the end of the fifth national development plan (2010-15).

"Each province has been allocated about 700 million rials for the establishment of handicraft townships," she said.

Daniali hoped that problems currently facing Iran's handicraft market will be removed with the implementation of such programs.

