



## In Case You Missed

## 'Muslim-Friendly' Tourist

## Destinations Gain Currency

In yet another sign of polarization in travel and tourism along geopolitical fault-lines, a Malaysian minister has warned that growing Islamophobia is resulting in countries being categorized on the basis of their perceived "friendliness" towards Muslim travelers.

Harsh restrictive measures through more stringent visa and immigration checks have harassed and inconvenienced bonafide outbound travelers and tourists, particularly from the Muslim countries, said Senator Maj-Gen (R) Jamil Khir Bin Baharom, a minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Bangkokpost reported.

"As a result of this surge of Islamophobia in some Western nations, it has led to a distinct trend towards an increased outbound inter-regional travel to 'Islam- or halal-friendly' countries from the Middle East region apart from the increased intra-regional travel," he said at the Islamic Tourism Conference and Travel Mart in Kuala Lumpur last week.

"There is certainly a need to coordinate and facilitate those Muslim tourists to destinations they prefer and consider as 'Islam- or halal-friendly'."

Although racial profiling and discrimination have been an issue for many years, the travel and tourism industry has been inclined, as always, to sweep it under the carpet as it borders



on sensitive geopolitical issues.

The minister cited studies as showing a number of countries that are considered "Muslim-friendly" destinations (Thailand included) seeking to capture this huge market of 1.5 billion people with extensive purchasing power. They will face image and perception problems if their "security" concerns begin to get out of hand.

## &gt; Halal Congress

Thai tourism professionals seeking to get a better understanding of this market will have a chance to do so at the World Halal Congress 2010 at the Royal Paragon Hall in Bangkok from Dec 2-4.

In a speech read out on his behalf, Senator Jamil Khir noted that tourism could, on the other hand, become a means of addressing and alleviating Islamophobia and building "greater cultural understanding leading to closer ties among Muslim and non-Muslim nations globally."

He said "International tourism is not only an economic sector that yields jobs, dividends, and foreign currencies. It is one of the most important 'living and breathing' forms of inter-cultural dialogue. With the surge of more and more non-Muslims facilitating for Islam- or halal-friendly tourism, the rhetoric of 'fear of Muslim travelers' by some non-Muslim nations will be a thing of the past, resulting in a more secure and better world."

Malaysia, where 60 percent of the population is Muslim, is pursuing this market in a big way.

## Ancient Egyptian Manual

## On Afterlife Going on Show

Manuscripts containing the ancient Egyptians' manual to the afterlife have been taken out of storage at the British Museum to go on display for the first time.

The Book of the Dead is a compilation of around 200 separate spells and prayers, some of which have never been shown in public before, which would help the dead on their perilous journey towards eternal life. The Independent reported.

The "Book" was not a single text but usually written on rolls of papyrus and painted with scenes -- the most famous being the weighing of the heart--of the hereafter.

The British Museum contains one of the most comprehensive collections of Book of the Dead manuscripts, but because of their light sensitivity it is rare for the objects to be displayed.

The exhibition, Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, includes an ancient Egyptian manuscript, measuring 37 meters, which will be seen in public in its entirety for the first time.

The Book of the Dead of Nesitanebsheru, a high priest's daughter, is the longest Book of the Dead known to exist.

The spells, also seen on statues, coffins, shrouds and jewelry, were used for 1,500 years, from around 1600 to 100 BC.

Most of the "Books" have been discovered during the last two centuries and more continue to be found.

Curator John Taylor said that experts have gleaned much of their knowledge about ancient Egypt through Books of the Dead.

"They tell us a huge amount about ancient Egypt, information about their hopes and fears, information about what they're concerned about," he said.

# Deyr-e Gachin Restoration Short of Funds



The historical caravansary of Deyr-e Gachin, dating back to Sassanid Dynasty, is located 80 km northeast of Qom.

Also known as "Mother of All Iranian Caravansaries" it has undergone several phases of restoration. However, experts have voiced concern over its present condition.

Ammar Kavousi, deputy head of Qom Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, told Mehr News Agency that the caravansary was registered on the National Heritage List seven years ago.

"Before it was registered on the National Heritage List, it was converted into a place for livestock by tribesmen," he said, noting that years of disrepair and negligence had largely damaged the ancient site.

"The building was evacuated soon after the national registration and restoration projects were launched.

"An estimated 700 million rials (\$70,000) was allocated for the renovation of the site three years after it was registered," he added. The building dates back 1,750 years and was probably built during the administration of Ardeshir Sassanid, the official said.

## &gt; Key Trade Route

"The caravansary is situated along one of the most

important ancient trade routes of Iran which connect the southeast to the west," he said.

On why it was named the "Mother of All Iranian Caravansaries", Kavousi said Deyr-e Gachin is Iran's biggest and the most ancient caravansary.

"As an ancient place of rest it had many accommodation facilities including a mosque, a big yard, a barn, a mill, bath, public toilets..." he added.

He said special plans to rehabilitate the site must be undertaken soon because Deyr-e Gachin Caravansary is potential to become a destination for desert lovers.

"Supplying it with proper facilities and infrastructure such as electricity, water and gas will help put the site on Iran's tourist map".

If and when the necessary programs are implemented efficiently, the site can and will also be used as a major attraction for traditional ceremonies and festivals.

"Ancient and historical sites lose their allure and attraction if surrounded by modern buildings," he said, adding that Deyr-e Gachin should stand alone in the heart of the desert because modern structures near it will undermine its appeal and attraction.

The caravansary is occasionally used as a place to observe stars.

Kazem Fadaeian, a tourism expert, described the building as one of the most attractive ancient sites in the country.

## &gt; Once a VIP Guesthouse

"The building covers 12,000 meters," he said, adding that the site was reportedly used in ancient times as a VIP guesthouse and lodge for government officials.

Other ancient sites including a cemetery, a kiln for baking bricks and a cistern have been unearthed in the vicinity of the caravansary.

The octagonal building is equipped with accommodation services, said the expert, noting that hardly 20 percent of the monument had been restored in the past seven years.

"Last year 1000 billion rials (\$100,000) was allocated for the renovation of the site," Fadaeian said, adding that the amount was insignificant for completing the renovation and another 400 billion rials (\$40,000) is needed.

Deyr-e Gachin is the first historical site in Qom province (125 km south of Tehran) that had undergone 3D laser scanning.



# Traditional Ornaments

## New Victim of Cheap Chinese Imports

At a time when indigenous and folkloric ornaments of Iran are on the decline due to cheaper stuff imported from China plus the general public interest in western and old Russian-designed ornaments, those in

charge of the local handicraft industry have not done enough to rescue this ancient and precious industry.

Relevant officials say the only way to save traditional ornamental handicraft is to launch a meaningful campaign to spread awareness among the people and promote the culture of bestowing value and worth on Iranian handicraft, CHTN reported.

The historic precedence of use of ornaments in Iran is not clear. In 5000-year-old graves found in the Burnt City (Shahr-e Sukhta) and Jiroft (near Kerman) various ornaments and objects d'art have been found. However, today the country is suf-

fering largely due to cheaper imports. The pattern has been such that local craftsmen with all their skills and hard work can compete the new market incursions.

A veteran expert of traditional ornaments, Hojjat Mohammadvali says "If we really want to see that this art, or rather industry, does not vanish in the near future, the necessary culture should be promoted" among the masses in the country.

"The people generally are averse to producing indigenous goods that are made by hand. Diversity and low prices of foreign imports have led to the situation wherein quality and genuineness of goods do not demand priority any more.

## &gt; Main Problems

"Among the problems of those active

in making ornaments are absence of social insurance and lack of support from officialdom. Add to this the difficulty of training a young workforce... If measures are taken to supply raw materials to producers at reasonable cost and soft-loans are made available to masters and young apprentices in this industry, a major part of the problem will have been resolved," he added.

In recent times traditional decorations are made by help from Western paradigms and advanced machinery. In the past all traditional ornaments were made by hand. Not to mention that the major part of the market is saturated with imported decorations that also comply with Iranian design and patterns. The point is that traditional Iranian designs have been modeled by foreigners, including Chinese craftsmen and shipped to Iran.

Another expert of making traditional ornaments, Behrouz Ebrahimi said the models used in making decorations are compatible with local market demand.

"Currently, due to competitiveness of the market, Western brands and especially old Russian designs are very popular. Production takes place on the basis of supervision and standards of gold and silver guild association. Error in terms of purity of the metal used in the artifact is dealt according to the law. However, the design and pattern that a customer demands

is available," he said. Making and buying traditional ornaments has had a special status among the public for a long time. Many, especially women, spend large amounts on expensive and high carat hand-made ornaments in which precious stones and inlaid work are used.

