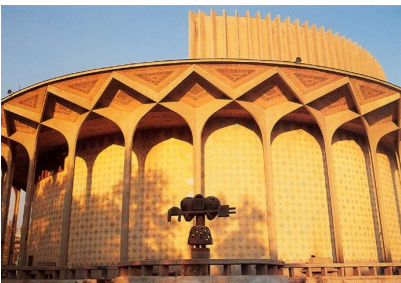


Growing Demand for Trips to Iran?

There is a strong demand for German tourists to visit Iran, according to a German tour operator. Talking to IRNA in Berlin on the sidelines of the 43rd ITB Berlin Tourism Fair, the director of the Orient Express Travel Agency, Hartmut Niemann said, "There is a much stronger demand for Germans to travel to Iran than last year. We hope this trend will continue this fall," he added.

Other German tour operators had also reported a major increase in the number of tourists visiting Iran last year, according to press reports. The Munich-based Studiosus Reisen Travel Agency which is the largest tour operator of culture and nature special interest group tours in Germany, said Iran had become one of the top destinations for German tourists in the Middle East in 2008. Studiosus which is in charge of the travel arrangements of 101,800 tourists every year, reported earlier a stunning 91 percent surge in the number of tourists traveling to Iran.



Meanwhile, Niemann said Iranian tourism was less affected by the global financial and economic crisis since it was not a destination for mass tourism like Turkey or Dubai. "One could say Iran may actually benefit from the economic crisis in the long-run," the travel expert said. He pointed to major progress in Iran's tourist sector since 2001.

Niemann urged Iran's tourist industry to boost advertising abroad and to open tourism bureaus in major German cities. He said the biggest problem of Iranian tourism is its weak marketing at the international level. "This weakness negatively influences promotion of Iran tourism and the number of tourists visiting Iran," he said.



He welcomed Iran's move to issue 14-day visas at airports, border crossings and sea ports. The travel agent hailed also Iran's decision to remove the need for foreign tourists to pay with US dollars for their hotel rooms which had been viewed as discriminatory by many tourists.

Favorable Destination

Iran has always been a target tourism destination for countries ranging from Arab states and Southeast Asia to Europe. Announcing this, the head of the Headquarters for Publicity and Exhibitions of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) said the division of countries into major groups is in line with the development of tourism sector and the objectives of 2025 Vision, according to which Iran should attract 1.5 percent of world tourists by 2025.

Mohammad Hossein Barzin added that Bahrain, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq, due to their cultural and religious commonalities and also due to Iran's potential in the field of religious tourism, top the list. "Iran has always been at the center of attention of tourists from southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, including Japan, China, Malaysia and Thailand as a tourism attraction," he said.



Barzin pointed out that countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Finland in Western Europe and Scandinavia also top the list of countries with the highest number of tourists, particularly in the field of ecotourism. "We are planning to take part in exhibitions planned in the American and Oceania continents with the aim of familiarizing tourists with Iran tourism attractions," he said.

The official pointed out that Iran attended 21 international tourism exhibitions in different parts of the world in 2007–8. "We managed to portray a clear picture of Iran's historical, natural, cultural and tourism attractions to the people of the world," he said. Barzin said programs for 2009 include participation in 28 international tourism exhibitions across the world.

Foreign Tourists' Visit Iran

The available statistical facts suggest that in 1969 some 241,198 tourists visited Iran. In 1975, the figure almost doubled and increased to 588,768 persons. However, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the emergence of the Iran–Iraq imposed war, the influx of tourists reached its lowest level. The disincentives resulting from the war, the anti–Western stance of the revolutionary regime, and the restrictions on visas all discouraged tourism after 1979. Visitors to the famous sites of Persepolis, Pasargard, and Esfahan dwindled; the number of tourists fell from a high of 695,500 in 1977 to 62,373 in

1982.

In wake of the new tourism policies, in 1997, Iran managed to attract some 764,092 tourists, a figure close to the booming days of the tourism industry in the pre-Islamic Revolution era. From then on, the number of visitors to the country increased significantly. In 2000 there were 1,341,762 tourists, in 2004 the number grew to 1,659,000 visitors and in mid 2008 around 2.5 m travelers toured the country.

Chnpress.com, Lcweb2.loc.gov

Quick facts

Population: 69,515,000

Capital: Tehran (7,352,000)

Total size: 1,648,000 km²

Land size: 1,636,000 km²

Water: 12,000 km²

Intl. calling code: +98

Currency: Iranian Rial (IRR)

Itto.org

Photo: Irpedia, Wikipedia

<http://www5.irna.ir>

<http://ae.zawya.com>

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