

IRAN HOPES TO WELCOME BACK BRITISH TOURISTS



Hopes are high that Hassan Rouhani's election to the Iran presidency will spell good news for the tourism industry. Rouhani's more moderate beliefs are hoped to be enough to encourage Britain's Foreign Office to lift its ban against travel to the middle-Eastern country, and that Brits will take the opportunity to visit again.

Rouhani's desire to build bridges with the West is encouraging to tour companies and two operators in particular (Wild Frontiers and World Expeditions) have expressed hopes that his election will see renewed confidence in Iran as a tourist destination for Britain.

Wild Frontiers' managing director Jonny Bealby has indicated that he believes that there is overwhelming support for reform in Iran but as it is early days it will remain to be seen how Rouhani will perform as president. He went on to say that it would do well to remember that Rouhani's hopes for his country would still need to be endorsed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. Bealby also expressed **hope that the election of a new president will foster the perception of Iran as more tourist-friendly.**

As one of the World's oldest civilizations, Iran boasts such tourist attractions as the 6th century capital of the ancient Empire of Persia, Persepolis, Shiraz, the city of poets, and Isfahan, home to fine Islamic architecture. At one point during the 1960's Tehran was considered one of the most beautiful and exotic destinations, albeit for a very brief period. Historically British backpackers enjoyed adventuring their way through Iran on their way to India, along what was referred to as the "Hippy Trail".

The 1979 Islamic Revolution caused British tourists to avoid Iran, and political tension since then has been responsible for a continued lack of interest, particularly during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mr. Rouhani's hardline predecessor.

The Foreign Office has issued strong warnings against any form of travel to Iran, citing instances of random detainment of British nationals during 2010 and 2011. The closing of the British Embassy in Tehran following the arson attack on it during the November 29th, 2011 demonstrations was considered reason enough to believe that there was still high risk of danger to British visitors.

In an attempt to be reassuring Bealby advised that the environment in Iran is much calmer today, and that he felt the entire country should not be under a ban as a result of the events occurring in Tehran. His company is pushing for at least a partial lifting of the ban by the Foreign Office.

World Expeditions UK branch manager Gordon Steer said that tours to Iran had been suspended by his company pending Foreign Office endorsement of travel to Iran, but had hopes that it would be soon.

He went on to express a desire for Iran's situation to improve on the heels of the recent election, and said that his company would resume tours once the Foreign Office lifted the current ban. He was

quick to add that those traveling to Iran with World Expeditions had found the people to be very welcoming, and were struck by the stunning beauty and fascinating culture Iran offers.

Date: 2013-06-24

Article link:

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