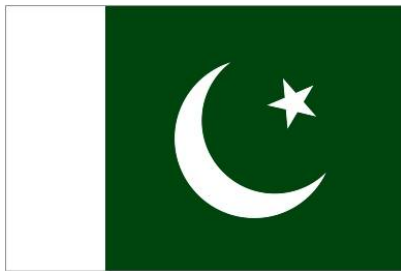


PAKISTANI TOURISM AIMS TO ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS



Pakistan, despite its troublesome security situation, wants to attract more tourists. The government has declared 2007 a "Year of Tourism". The country has huge potential for the tourism industry. Among the many sites worth seeing is K-2, the world's second-highest mountain peak after Everest as well as six of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. The increase of visitors to the country will boost the local economy and help the fight against poverty. The

government plans to bring in tourists first, through Destination Pakistan 2007, a year of promotional events including a ski tournament in the Himalayas and a jeep rally in the Cholistan desert.

The country needs to improve its image as a tourist destination in the media. "We have an image problem, yes, but doing nothing about it would not help," says Salim Gul Shaikh, Secretary of the Culture Ministry. Another official, Naeem Tahir, Director General of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts claims: "The key is knowledge. As we are misrepresented in the media, so, too, is the West."

The tourism industry is really a vital part of Pakistan's economy, as millions in investment and rising tourism revenues have expanded employment in the tourism industry from about 320,000 in 1998 to 600,000 today, mostly in rural areas where development is needed most, according to government figures. Some 798,000 tourists visited Pakistan in 2005 and they brought \$185 million to the country's economy, but it accounts for just 0.16 percent of the country's gross national product (GNP). Pakistan hopes to attract 1 million visitors this year.

The government needs to improve the quality of tourism-related facilities and infrastructure, notably hotels, roads and public services. For example, they are extending low-interest loans to small hotels to improve their facilities. There is also an educational program for those involved in the tourism industry to improve the quality of services they provide.

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