

JORDAN

King Calls Muslims to Build on What Unites Them

London, Jan.24 (Petra)- His Majesty King Abdullah II called all Muslims, Sunni and Shia, to build on what unites them and put aside their differences and prevent external interference in their affairs.

In an interview with Al Sharq Al Awsat issued in London and published on January 24, 2007, the King hoped that effective regional powers would address issues out of concern for the security of the region's people and not out of narrow interests and a desire to expand their influence.

The King also called upon the Religious scholars, opinion makers and intellectual leaders to raise their voices to spread awareness and warn about the threat this poses to the security of the region and its people.

King Abdullah expressed hope to see a balanced and positive relationship between Iraq and Iran and between Arab states and Iran. "We also see that Iran should stop seeking to destabilize Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq or any other country of the region so that we can build constructive relations", he added.

In His Majesty's interview with Al Sharq al Awsat editor in chief Tariq Al Homayed which took place in Amman, the King said that the game has changed after the Lebanon war, and the players have changed, and everyone, foremost among them Israel, should realize that unless we resolve the conflict in Palestine this year, everyone will pay the price." Israel should realize that a just solution that ensures the restoration of legitimate Palestinian rights and that results in the establishment of a fully sovereign

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Welcome Note from the Ambassador

I am proud to have been appointed by His Majesty King Abdullah II to serve as Jordan's ambassador to Washington. Since its foundation, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has shared a long history of mutual respect and close friendship with the United States, and we are grateful for the support and cooperation afforded by Washington throughout this period.

We in Jordan share America's vision of prosperity and peace for the entire region, a vision that marks the quality of this relationship. We share a rich history of economic cooperation dating back to the 1950s and today underscored by the Free Trade area agreement that has played a major role in stimulating growth in Jordan and has boosted trade between our two countries.

Today, facing daunting regional economic and socio-political challenges and uncertainties, Jordan continues to embrace the importance of its ties with the United States, and the wider international community in an effort to avert potential turmoil and armed conflict in an increasingly fragile region. Jordan continues to uphold a policy that encourages dialogue, diplomacy and understanding in the pursuit of peaceful coexistence.

In Iraq, Jordan underlines the importance of including all factions into the political process. We are also working endlessly to advance the peace process forward and resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. As His Majesty King Abdullah II says "History shows that peace and progressive policies can create economic miracles in developing regions."

In Jordan, we have chosen the path of reform and we will continue to work towards sustainable development and political pluralism. His Majesty King Abdullah and his people, through their elected parliament, have diligently and successfully created a vibrant domestic political community that encompasses all elements of society. Jordan is indeed a beacon of stability and hope in the region.

I look forward to building upon my country's close ties with the United States and the American people, in the pursuit of peace and prosperity for all.

Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein
Ambassador of Jordan



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Jordan Signs Development Agreement with World Bank

Washington, DC, Jan. 19. —The Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the World Bank signed “The Regional and Local Development Project” agreement on January 18th at the World Bank headquarters in Washington, DC.

The agreement is an important development in the pursuit of strengthening the capacity of Jordan’s Ministry of Municipal Affairs in order to regulate the development of local and regional interests more effectively. The agreement goes

further in establishing a Municipal Sector database and restructuring the Cities and Villages Development Bank (CVDB). This move also aims to strengthen and further develop analytical tools, documentation systems, procedures, and credit analysis in the area of regional and local development.

The government of Jordan regards this agreement as integral to its development goals and proactive reform efforts and sees it as testimony to the strong ties Jordan enjoys with the World Bank. 

Kingdom’s Tourism Industry Braves Regional Instability

AMMAN, Dec. 29, 2006 (JT) — The Kingdom’s tourism industry appears to be surviving the ongoing regional turmoil with visitor numbers rising by 7.4 per cent in the first three quarters of this year, compared to the same period of 2005.

Preliminary figures released by the Ministry of Tourism show that a total 4.977 million tourists visited the country during the first nine months of this year, compared to 4.633 million visitors in the same period of last year.

The strongest surge is in Arab tourists, who once again topped the list of overall tourist arrivals at 3.756 million visitors.

They are followed by 465,734 visitors from European countries, 155,766 visitors from the Americas and 130,222 visitors from Asia.

According to the figures, Jordan has witnessed an increase in tourist arrivals from all continents, with Arab visitors rising by 6.3 per cent, European countries by 7.9 per cent and arrivals from the Americas up by 30.8 per cent.

Tourists arriving from Asia and the Pacific also rose by 9 per cent from 119,472 visitors in the first nine months of last year to 130,222 visitors in the same period of this year.

According to the Central Bank of

Jordan (CBJ), the tourist traffic increased revenues by 8.2 per cent to JD869.6 million, from JD803.5 million during the first three quarters of last year.

Gulf visitors continue to top the list, despite a decline in tourists from Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman.

The largest flow came from Saudi Arabia, which rose 21.1 per cent to 954,082 visitors during the stated period.

They were followed by tourists from Kuwait, who despite having declined by 24.7 per cent, reached a total of 117,953 visitors. Visitors from Bahrain totaled 72,334 tourists despite a 16.5 per cent decline.

While these numbers reflect healthy growth in tourist traffic, the industry nevertheless faced some backlashes from regional instabilities.

The Ministry of Tourism figures, for example, show a drop in package tours and visitors to various tourist sites around the Kingdom in the first nine months of this year.

According to the figures, package tours declined by 12.1 per cent with 192,055 holiday-makers compared to 218,520 tourists last year. The number of tourist nights spent by these visitors also dropped 19.1 per cent.

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Foreign Tourists to Petra Drop by 8.6% in 2006

By Dalya Dajani

AMMAN, Jan. 12 (Jordan Times) — The Kingdom's leading tourist magnet Petra saw an 8.6 per cent drop in visitors last year compared to the previous year, official figures revealed Thursday.

Malek Amarat, head of Petra's Tourism Department, said a total of 359,366 Arab and foreign tourists visited the popular site in 2006, compared to 393,186 the previous year.

He said there were 12.7 per cent less foreign tourists last year than in the previous year.

Preliminary figures released by the Ministry of Tourism showed that the ancient city attracted 311,318 foreign visitors in 2005 compared to 271,833 in 2006.

The slowdown in tourist traffic brought last year's revenues down to JD5.769 million from JD6.595 million in 2005.

The drop in visitors was largely caused by the ongoing political tensions in the

region over the past year.

The Kingdom's tourism industry, however, took the hardest blow following Israel's attack on Lebanon in July, which sent already wavering traveler confidence in the region plummeting.

This occurred despite months of intensive promotional efforts and investments by the Kingdom to build a solid image of the region as a safe and secure travel destination.

Tourism Ministry figures showed a 30.2 per cent decline in foreign tourists to Petra in July last year, with 13,153 registered visitors compared to 18,850 in July, 2005.

Foreign tourist traffic continued to drop the following month (52 per cent), from 24,742 tourists in August 2005 to 11,878 tourists in the same month last year.

But Amarat said there was an increase in Jordanian tourists last year, their numbers reaching 87,533 in 2006 compared to 81,868 the previous year. ☞

Net Foreign Investment Amounts to JD180m

Amman, Jan. 11 (JT) - Net foreign investment amounted to JD180 million last year, compared to a JD413 million during 2005, according to Amman Stock Exchange figures. Stocks purchased by non-Jordanian investors last year totaled JD1,995.1 million, representing 14 per cent of the overall trading volume while stocks sold by the same bracket totaled JD1,814.5 million. Arab investors accounted for 82.9 per cent of the overall purchase volume valued at JD1,654.3 million while foreign (non-Arab) investors accounted for the remaining 17.1 per cent valued at JD340.8 million. Sales by Arab investors totaled JD1,552.7 million, representing 85.6 per cent of the overall non-Jordanian sales while foreign (non Arab) sales totaled JD261.8 million, accounting for the remaining 14.4 per cent of the overall sales, non-local sales volume, according to the bourse figures.

☞

World Bank Appoints Muasher to Key Post

AMMAN, Dec. 22, 2006 (JT) — The World Bank on December 20, 2006 appointed former Senator Marwan Muasher to the post of senior vice president, external affairs, communications and UN affairs.

"Marwan's extraordinary career, which has spanned development, diplomacy, civil society and communications, will be a unique asset in strengthening World Bank relations with donor countries, civil society groups and our multilateral partners," said a statement by the global finance institution.

The former senator and Cabinet minister was selected for the position through a competitive international search, said the World Bank, adding that his appointment

will be effective as of March 2007.

Muasher began his career as a columnist for The Jordan Times before taking up a position at the Ministry of Planning from 1985 to 1990 in charge of development strategies and later as press adviser to the prime minister.

He subsequently served as director for the Jordan Information Bureau in Washington, where he was involved in building understanding and support in Congress, the press, and civil society.

In 1995, he opened Jordan's first embassy in Israel following the signing of the 1994 Wadi Araba Peace Treaty and in 1996 became minister of information and government spokesperson.

From 1997 to 2002, he returned to

Washington to serve as Jordan's ambassador and was instrumental in negotiating the first Free Trade Agreement between the US and an Arab nation.

After returning to Jordan to serve as foreign minister, in 2004 he became deputy prime minister responsible for reform and government performance. In this capacity, he led efforts to produce the National Agenda, a ten-year development strategy which included, among other topics, major recommendations on economic, financial services and fiscal reforms, employment, education and training.

Muasher, who holds a PhD in computer engineering from Purdue University, will replace Kevin Kellems. ☞

Jordan to Host Film Festival

AMMAN, Dec. 22, 2006 (JT) — Jordan will host the “The Shorts” international short film festival in April which will serve as a showcase for the region’s filmmaking talent.

The announcement follows a recently signed agreement between SAE International, Al Quds Community College, and the Royal Film Commission (RFC).

“The Shorts” will offer a forum for competition among interested directors in short film productions in genres including animation, documentary, comedy, thriller, romance, music videos, public services announcements, commercials and even mobile phone clips.

The competition is open to all interested parties and will take submissions in both Arabic and English.

“The Shorts” is a nonprofit event that will invest all proceeds back into the domestic filmmaking industry and programs that foster youth education in the film arts in Jordan.

For more information see: www.theshorts.tv. ☞

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the three parties’ commitment, they will be more likely to fund the study,” Minister of Water and Irrigation Thafer Alem told The Jordan Times.

He said a steering committee will be formed comprised of four representatives from each country and the World Bank to follow up on the implementation.

“The feasibility study will be conducted transparently and a panel of international experts will be formed

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President of the New Seven Wonders of the World Campaign Visits Jordan

Amman, Jan. 16 (JT) — President of the New Seven Wonders of the World Campaign, Bernard Weber visited Jordan last January 2007 as part of efforts to create seven symbols of global unity.

Tia Viering, Head of Communications, New7wonders said the people of the world chose Petra and then the New7wonders Panel of Experts selected Petra as one of the 21 finalists.

Viering said in an interview with The Jordan Information Bureau in London, as part of the bureau’s efforts to promote Petra to become one of the new seven wonders, that Petra indeed has a chance to become one of the new wonders.

“Petra is not one of the top 7 in the last ranking and it would need votes from people all over to get there,” she said, adding it is currently in the middle seven and that it has to move up a bit and keep that momentum to be one of the new seven wonders.

“We have had an extremely positive experience preparing for our World Tour visit in Jordan and have found working with the Jordanian authorities one of the most pleasant and easy parts of the whole Tour,” Viering said.

“Many people in other countries have vaguely heard of Petra but do not know much about it, so they have to be moved and wowed and inspired to vote, and then ideally come and visit Petra,” Viering added.

Jordan, she said, needs to follow the example of Peru, which put out an international press release about its efforts to

get out the vote in Peru and abroad. “People might be interested to hear about Petra and why it is a very exciting candidate and a sort of cultural ambassador for the Arab world,” she said.

Viering pointed out that she was looking forward to seeing Petra and experiencing the Jordanian culture and people, noting Petra was widely recognized as a tremendously significant feat of engineering-and incredible

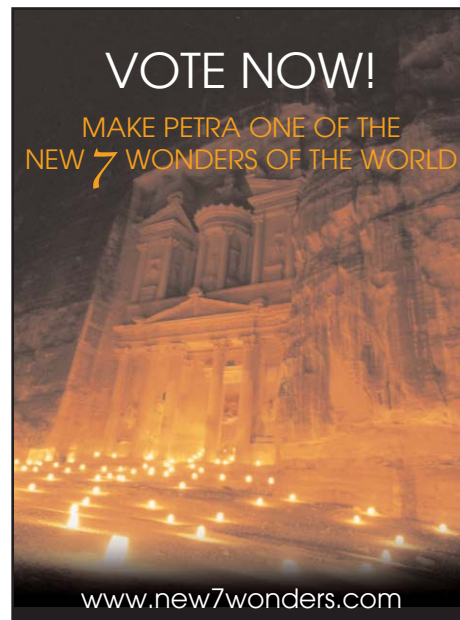
city carved into rock, in the middle of the desert, a city which flourished and prospered for centuries.

The whole campaign is the brainchild of a Swiss Canadian visionary, Bernard Weber, who had always been very interested in history, and fascinated by the Ancient 7 wonders. Of the Ancient Wonders, only the Pyramids in Egypt remain standing.

On the criteria used to select the candidates, Viering said the first step was to collect nominations from the people of the world, which resulted in some 200 nomination.

A New7Wonders Panel of experts short listed the current 21 finalists from the top 77 nominees. They used their vast experience and their personal judgment to select the 21 finalist monuments based on criteria that included beauty, complexity, historic values, cultural relevance and architectural significance.

The New 7 Wonders of the world will be celebrated, as elected by the people of the world in the first-ever global vote, in Lisbon, Portugal on July 7, 2007. ☞



Jordan, World Bank Discuss Implementation of Red-Dead Study

By Hana Namroqa



AMMAN, Dec. 13, 2006 (JT) — Jordan and the World Bank held a meeting in December 2006 to discuss how to proceed with the Red-Dead Canal feasibility study, a World Bank official said.

Jordan, the Palestinians and Israel agreed on Sunday to proceed with the study of a \$2-4 billion project to top up the Dead Sea with water from the Red Sea through a 180km pipeline.

During the meeting, organized by the Chamber of Commerce in Jordan, government officials, private sector stakeholders and representatives of donor countries thrashed out ideas about how to forge ahead with the plan.

“The bilateral meeting focused on ways to move forward... the Israeli and Palestinian sides will be contacted and similar meeting will be held to discuss further details concerning the study and the project,” Vahid Alavian, water adviser at the World Bank, told The Jordan Times.

Ministry of Water and Irrigation official Othman Kurdi briefed the meeting on the current condition of the Dead Sea and the importance of the project in restoring its water levels, which have dropped by

24 meters in the past century.

Kurdi noted that in addition to the water level drop, the sea’s surface area has shrunk by about 33 per cent over the last 55 years with an average annual inflow decrease from 1,200 million cubic metres to around 250 million cubic meters of water.

The launch of the Red-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study and Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, launched on Sunday, takes into consideration the technical, financial and institutional components of the plan.

The technical aspect, said the official, will examine the establishment of a hydro electric power and desalination facility to capitalize on the 450 meters drop from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea.

The Red-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study will take two years to complete at a cost of \$15 million. So far, about \$8.8 million has been raised from France, Japan, the Netherlands and the US. Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland have also expressed interest.

“Once donors see the international community’s interest in this project and

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Kingdom Makes Further Progress on Human Development Scale

Human Development Index places Jordan above the regional average for Arab states

AMMAN, Dec. 6, 2006 (JT) — Jordan made further progress on the UN’s scale of human development this year, moving four notches to 86 from 90 last year, according to the UNDP’s 2006 Human Development Report (HDR) launched on December 2006.

The HDR 2006, which measures the progress of 177 countries in terms of life expectancy, adult literacy and per capita income, showed that Jordan’s Human Development Index (HDI) progressed slightly this year from 0.753 to 0.760.

It showed life expectancy as rising slightly to 71.6 years compared to 71.3 years last year while adult literacy stayed at 89.9 per cent, and real GDP per capita rose from \$4,320 in 2005 to \$4,688 in 2006.

According to the report, Jordan’s new HDI, based on 2004 figures (the most recent data available), placed the country above the regional average for Arab states (0.680), better than the median for developing countries and the median for average human development states, among which Jordan is counted. ☞



King Calls
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Palestinian state on Palestinian land, living in peace and security alongside Israel, is the only guarantee of peace and security in the region”, the king added.

I strongly believe that the Arabs should have one voice and one position and that there should be Arab understanding of events around us. We should have a common position on the challenges that we face at this moment and we should ensure that words should be translated into deeds.

The King stressed that while we foster our historic relations with Iraqis, whether in Iraq or those living among us (their number exceeds 700,000), we will never allow Jordan to become a staging ground for initiating problems within Iraq.

Answering a question on the axes and alliances, the King said:” I strongly believe that the Arabs should have one voice and one position and that there should be Arab understanding of events around us. We should have a common position on the challenges that we face at this moment and we should ensure that words should be translated into deeds.”

Regarding the relation with the Islamic movement in Jordan, the King said that the role of the Islamist movement is welcomed and appreciated as long as it respects the Constitution, regulations and laws and as long as its agenda is nationalist, first and always adding that “We will not be lenient with any party with external or non-Jordanian agendas.”

Lubna Mahadeen Appointed Member of Seattle Human Rights Commission

The City of Seattle Council has unanimously approved the appointment of Lubna Mahadeen as a member of the city’s Human Rights Commission. During the televised confirmation hearing, Mahadeen presented her vision of her role as a citizen of Seattle/Washington, shedding light of the recent gaps developing between the Arabs and some US citizens. In her speech, she said these gaps can be narrowed through open dialogue. Mahadeen, who is the first Arab woman to assume such a post, has a bach-

elors degree in business administration from the University of Jordan, and a masters degree in public relations from the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington. In addition to her new post, Mahadeen is the programme coordinator for the Seattle Centre Community College and an active certified mediator, mediating for King County in Seattle Washington.

- Jordan Times

Voluntourism – A Whole New Dimension to the Travel Experience in Jordan

AMMAN, Dec. 20, 2006 (JT) — Spending a few hours at an orphanage, painting a classroom or chatting with the elderly: Not the usual activities vacationers in Jordan would find on their itinerary. That is, until now.

With volunteerism gaining popularity around the world, Jordan recently began looking at the concept of gearing travelers towards a more hands-on cultural experience of the country.

The Jordan Tourism Board North America (JTBNA) branch promoted the concept of “voluntourism,” as a whole new dimension to the travel experience in Jordan at its third annual Smithsonian - JTB luncheon at the US Tour Operators Association this month.

JTBNA Director Malia Asfour, who is spearheading efforts for its introduction, told The Jordan Times that the venture presents a new edge for tourism in Jordan.

“It is a concept that we’re working on promoting as a means of enriching the travel experience in Jordan, as visitors go beyond the adventures of sightseeing to more meaningful experiences of engaging with the communities themselves,” said Asfour.

“Whether it is spending time with

orphans, helping to paint an old house or visiting a nursing home, it generates a feel-good experience within people and brings communities and visitors together in a special way,” she added.

The concept, which is gaining ground in other countries, is derived from the original idea of what is usually a three- to six-week volunteer vacation to shorter breaks incorporated within tourist itineraries, according to Asfour.

These programmes could include visits to orphanages, nursing homes or impoverished communities that need help, depending on the interests of the tour group.

These visits, which can be half a day or custom made, give tourists a real experience of the communities in the areas where they are spending their holiday.

More than 600 tour operators from Europe and the US as well as Jordan attended the JTBNA meeting. A video presentation of how such trips can add value for tourists was screened with a special segment featuring the faces and drawings of children from the Al Hussein Society for the Habilitation/Rehabilitation of the Physically Challenged.

Thousands 'Gathered at the River' for the Epiphany Celebrations

Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan – Biblical birthplace of Christianity – was set for ceremonies honoring Jesus' baptism; Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics to celebrate together.

BETHANY-BEYOND-THE-JORDAN (Jan. 11, 2007) – On the banks of the Jordan River in this peaceful settlement – one of the most significant archaeological discoveries of the last century, identified as the biblical location where John the Baptist lived, preached and baptized – several thousand Christian faithful gathered on Jan. 12 to commemorate the baptism of Jesus.

Ceremonies have only been possible within the last decade, when land mines were cleared and excavations began following the peace treaty with neighboring Israel in 1994. Now, local followers join with pilgrims from around the world to continue the tradition of old to gather at the holy spot where Jesus was revealed as the Light of the World.

Participating Church Officials in the Jan. 12 ceremony included His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem; Latin Bishop of Amman Salim Sayegh; Roman Catholic Bishop George Murr; and Armenian Orthodox Bishop Vahan Toblian. The celebration brought together members of the Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Anglican, Evangelical, Lutheran, Chaldean, Maronite, and Copt Churches.

Epiphany – from the Greek “epiphaneia” for “to make known” or “manifestation” – is a season of light on the Christian calendar. Most Orthodox use the Julian rather than the Gregorian version of the Western calendar, so dates for Christmas and Epiphany, which falls 12 days after the nativity and is the climax of the Christmas season, vary according to traditions. In western Christian tradition, Jan. 6 is celebrated as Epiphany. Also known as Three Kings' Day in Hispanic and Latin culture, as well as some places in Europe, it is an occasion of feasting, which sometimes includes the baking of a

special King's Cake.

While some Greek Orthodox churches still observe the Epiphany celebration as the Nativity of Jesus, the majority of Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches focus on the visit of the Magi and Jesus' baptism. The Feast of the Epiphany was established as a solemn feast in the Eastern Church in the middle of the fourth century, as proclaimed in the Apostolic Constitutions: “Let the Epiphany, in which the Lord manifested to us His own divinity, be to you the most honored festival and let it be celebrated on the sixth day of January.” (cf Apostolic Constitutions V, 13). Traditionally, celebrations have included a vigil; a Solemn Blessing of the Water; and baptism of catechumens – or converts being instructed in the faith – on the eve of the Epiphany. Early fathers of the Church referred to this as the Mystery of the Illumination or Enlightenment, thus the Epiphany also became known as the Feast of the Lights, or the Day of Illumination. The Feast is also known in the East as Theophany, Greek for “God's appearance,” and the early church marked this feast by baptizing catechumens in great numbers.

Jesus' baptism in the waters of the Jordan marked the first recorded manifestation of the Trinity – the central tenet of the Christian faith – hence Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan has been called the birthplace of Christianity. Located less than an hours drive from Amman and minutes from the Dead Sea, the baptism site has become a must-see for visitors to the Holy Land. The Baptism Site Commission has worked closely with Church officials to ensure the protection and integrity of this sacred place, while opening it up to pilgrims from around the world. ☪

Social Development Ministry Signs Cultural Exchange Agreement with US Institution

Jan. 9 (JT) – The Ministry of Social Development on Monday signed an agreement with World Learning, an international educational organisation. Social Development Minister Suleiman Tarawneh and World Learning CEO and President Carol Bellamy signed the protocol, designed to boost cultural dialogue. US-based World Learning focuses particularly on social development programmes through student exchange, which can promote Jordanian sites worthy of global recognition like the Dead Sea and Petra. Under the agreement, on an average of twice a year, 15 to 20 students from the US and Jordan will visit each other's countries and be introduced to the language, culture and history of both Jordan and America, through field trips and intensive courses. ☪



UPCOMING EVENTS in JORDAN 2007

May 7 - 10

4th Int'l Rebuild Iraq Exhibition
www.rebuild-iraq-expo.com

May 18 - 20

World Economic Forum
on Middle East
www.weforum.org

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to review the study's procedures and results," the minister said.

The Expressions of Interest will be announced by the World Bank in mid-January 2007, while the signing of the contract with the winning bidder study is expected in June 2007.

Meanwhile, Alem said the ministry will receive the technical and financial proposals of companies short-listed to implement the Disi water project.

Several international companies have shown interest in the project, which is aimed at supplying some 100 million cubic metres of potable water to Amman and its suburbs through a 325 kilometre pipeline connected to the Disi aquifer in the south of the country. ☞

Kingdom's Tourism
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The drop was felt most in European package tours, which declined by 25.8 %.

The amount of time spent by European tourists in the Kingdom also dropped by 26.8% compared to the same period of last year.

Package tours from the Americas dropped by 74 per cent from 28,432 tourists in the first three quarters of this year, compared to 16,343 tourists in the equivalent period of 2005.

Visitors to tourist sites also dropped, with Jordanians and foreign tourist numbers dropping by 20.7 per cent from 1.595 million between January and September last year to 1.265 million this year. The number of foreign tourists dropped by 20.3 per cent during the same period.

Preliminary CBJ figures show that tourists spent JD333.9 million between January and September this year, compared to JD324.8 million in the same period of last year.

The largest tourism receipts were generated from Arab tourists which reached JD456.3 million, a 6.1 per cent increase from JD430 million in January and September last year.

Foreign tourists spent a total of JD245 million, a rise of 12.1 per cent from last year. ☞

Aqaba

Jordan's Window on the Sea

Aqaba is Jordan's "Window on the Sea", lying at the southern tip of the country on the Gulf that shares its name. Sandwiched

between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the waters of the Gulf are clear and calm, allowing for spectacular underwater scenery ideal for diving and photography. For those who prefer to stay



dry, glass-bottom boats provide equally breathtaking views of the underwater scenery, which includes over 140 different varieties of coral. A number of spas line the coast, which includes an expanse of twelve kilometers recently acquired from Saudi Arabia, including the incredible Yamanieh coral reef. High-end resorts and spas dot the beaches with world-class treatments from the nearby Dead Sea for a relaxing break from the beach.

Aqaba is not only sandy beaches and pristine waters, however. The city is built upon multiple layers of history

dating back to Biblical times, some 4,000 years ago. The modern-day city of Aqaba is believed to be built atop the ruins of the ancient port of city of

Ezion-Geber through which the Queen of Sheba supposedly traveled on her way from modern-day Yemen to the Holy Land. In addition, archeologists believe that they have uncovered what might be the oldest church in existence,

dating all the way back to the 3rd century C.E. making it older, by as much as 100 years, than the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Other sites include the Aqaba fort, which was rebuilt during the times of the Crusades and the Aqaba Museum, in which the grandfather of Sherif Hussein, leader of the Arab Revolt, once lived. With its combination of rich cultural heritage, world class diving and relaxing spas, Aqaba provides the perfect microcosm of all that Jordan has to offer. ☞

by Steve Snyder (JIB)



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