

The diversity, adventure story and false media news of Pakistan

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman, Pakistan Minister of Tourism
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Seven years ago and on my way by train to Berlin from Frankfurt, I met with people from Pakistan going to ITB. During the 6 hours on the train, I had a good chance to hear from them what Pakistan has to offer tourists in many aspects, but mostly the talk was about adventure tourism in Pakistan, where the famous K2, the second highest mountain in the world is ready to impress visitors. From that time, I was hoping to meet with the Pakistan Minister of Tourism, to learn from him about his country. Later on, we became friends, and we met for many years during ITB. My friends are Mr. Amjad Ayub, president of the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators and Mr. Nazir Sabir.

At this year's ITB, I met Mr. Amjad in the same hotel, and he informed me that Mr. Maulana Atta ur-Rehman, Minister of Tourism in Pakistan, is attending ITB. I asked for a good time to talk with him, and we met with him at the Pakistan stand.

ITM: Your Excellency, you are here with over 10 exhibitors from Pakistan to promote tourism to your country. Can you tell us what tourists are going to see?

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman: Pakistan is a rich country in its diversity, culture, and adventure tourism, as

we have four main provinces and seven destinations - the Gilgit-Blatistan, NWFP, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Azad, and Kashmir and Islamabad - each has its own attractions and different cultures. When visiting these regions, you feel that you are in another country. Also we have, at the same time, different weather, and you can enjoy the four seasons traveling in one trip. For example, you can [go from] the extreme cold [to the] extreme hot - we have summer in the north, and winter in the south. Pakistan is a unique destination [and] offers unique products for

tourists. People visiting us enjoyed their stay [because of] our hospitality and what we offer them, and trust me, that no other destination in the region has the diversity that [is] available in Pakistan. The features from region to region [are] different; the language, the culture is also different; the appearance of the people is also different; so here you can enjoy and return home with strong experiences and [an] unforgettable trip.

ITM: Pakistan faces the sea level on one side and the mountains on the other side; what can tourists see in both regions?

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman: Well,

you know that we have the K2, which is the second-highest mountain in the world. The unique thing [is] that when you drive [by] bus, you can see from your window the K2, which is over 8,000 meters [in] height. This view is not available [at] any other place. Here also we have very beautiful enhancing valleys, rivers, and small villages; also deserts, forts, and hustling, bustling cities. On the seaside, resorts and hotels are offering wonderful accommodation and sea views with sea sports facilities. However, our main attraction is the adventure tourism in the K2.

ITM: How do you think the



security situation is for the tourists? Should tourists be relaxed coming to Pakistan? What about the security, and where do you advise tourists to go? If I'm a tour operator and want to invite my clients to visit Pakistan, where do I advise them to go and where not to go, so tourists have great experience to take back home?

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman: I can count on my fingers, the places that I don't advise, but I cannot count the places that is safe and wonderful. The foreign media is so against Pakistan; they publish so negative and fake news and exaggerate about Pakistan, which is not true, and they affect our tourism industry, so it's the media which presents the wrong pictures of Pakistan. Before this campaign in the foreign media, tourists were coming in good numbers, Yes, we have areas where some problems are happening and some issues in a very few parts of the country where tourists should not go; yes, we have problems in such places like [the] Suat Area, but [the] media do not say in detail which places are not safe - they say Pakistan in general, which is not true. Southern

parts are totally secure, Punjab and the K2 area are secure, and there was no report in history about unsecured things happening. [The] mountain area [is] so beautiful, so clean. Most of our country [is] safe, and you can ask the people who came here and visited us - they will report to you how much they enjoyed [it], and they can give their remarks and ideas. Maybe because I'm the Minister of Tourism, readers may think I'm promoting my country, but if you ask those who came here, they will give you the correct story and not from the media. I can confirm to you that Pakistan is a safe country.

We are here in ITB Berlin, the biggest travel show, representing our country and inviting tourists to come. If we feel it's dangerous for them, for sure we will not come and have our stand. You can see major tour operators are coming, and they spend money to come, but because they are confident that Pakistan is safe. That's why they are here; we cannot in any way falsely [influence] tourists.

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman added: You know, we are receiving thousands of tourists from China

and India coming here to Pakistan, simply because they don't trust and they don't listen to the media that shows Pakistan as a burning or dangerous country. They are coming and enjoying their stay and return with [a] very positive experience. Also, adventure tourists are coming because they know that Pakistan is a safe place, and because they are trusting us when we told them [they] are welcome, they come from all parts of the world.

ITM: What about adventure tourism in particular?

Maulana Atta ur-Rehman: I personally believe that adventure tourism in Pakistan is like Makah

for religious tourism. Although in the region we have Nepal and other parts, but here we have huge mountains like the Eastern Himalaya and others. Over 8,000 meters [in] height, [the] longest chain of mountains, we have created incentives; they took the charges and reduced the fees to visit the mountains – 50 percent, this is one incentive - not a single bad event happened. Here you can do tracking, exploration, rafting, whatever, hiking. Just you are here in the most wonderful area, and you are free to enjoy it at your most.

ITM: Thank you; wishing you good luck in this show.

