

Walk with the nomads: Destinations showcases Middle Eastern adventures

By: Karen Dabrowska

Twice a year Moroccan Berber nomads take their goats and sheep between the High Atlas to the lower Dades Valley. UK-based Nomadic has made it possible for visitors to spend 11 days on the migration and gain a unique insight into a traditional way of life.



Nomadic was one of the companies offering exciting tours in the Middle East at this year's Destinations holiday and travel show held at the

beginning of February at the Earls Court Exhibition Centre in West London.

“The beauty of travelling with the nomads is that we do not follow a rigid itinerary,” Tom Hawes a tour guide for Nomadic explained. “Our journey starts in the majestic High Atlas Mountains, which is the highest mountain range in North Africa with several peaks over 4000 metres and breathtaking scenery. We trek through rugged terrain, crossing steep passes with spectacular panoramic views, camping each night. We have time to relax and enjoy our amazing

surroundings while a cook prepares tasty traditional Moroccan food”.

After leaving the Berber family the journey back to Marrakech includes a visit to Ait Benhaddou a fortified city situated along the former caravan route between the Sahara and Marrakech. Ait Benhaddou is one of the best preserved ancient Kasbahs in the Atlas region which has been granted UNESCO world Heritage

Kasbah ruins at Ait Benhaddou



Siwa oasis



Saddiyat cultural district



Kyrenia



listing. The site has been used for many films, including *Gladiator*.

The local Bedouins also welcome visitors in the open deserts of Wadi Rum. The Jordan Tourist Board promoted Wadi Rum also known as 'The Valley of the Moon,' the place where Prince Faisal Bin Hussein and T.E. Lawrence based their headquarters during the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in World War I.

The visitors' centre can arrange a stay under the stars in a Bedouin tent, and a traditional campfire

meal accompanied by Arabic music.

Wadi Rum is a stupendous, timeless place, virtually untouched by humanity and its destructive forces. Here, it is the weather and winds that have carved the imposing, towering skyscrapers, so elegantly described by T.E. Lawrence as "vast, echoing and God-like..."

Another desert experience is provided by West London-based On the Go Tours. The Siwa Oasis

off the beat and track is described as the real Egypt. It has been isolated for centuries by miles of rolling dunes and only became accessible to visitors in the 1980s. Far away from the tumultuous events of the Arab Spring the area retains fascinating centuries old traditions and customs. Around 80km in length and some 20km wide, Siwa supports a population of around 23,000 people, most of whom are Berbers.

A visit to the incredible melted ruins of Old Shali in an unforgettable experience. The fortress built of rock, salt, mud-brick, and palm leaves is slowly melting away.

While Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Turkey were very well represented at Destinations, the Gulf states maintained a low profile with only the UAE and Oman exhibiting. Abu Dhabi promoted Saadiyat, a natural island which offers a world

Mashad



Nomadic girl in the High
Atlas mountains



of experiences with ecologically sensitive mangrove reserves, signature sports facilities and unrivalled cultural attractions.

Nasrin Harris of Persian Voyages is organising a variety of trips to Iran: mountains and monuments, Alamut castles, skiing tours, horse riding and natural history. The 15-day Ommar Khayam tour focuses on ancient and Islamic architecture and includes Persepolis and Mashad, Iran's holiest city.

Harris is undeterred by the closure

of the Iranian embassy in London. She gets visas for her clients from Dublin.

Ramadan Ozdemir Managing Director of Direct Traveller is doing an excellent job promoting North Cyprus which he describes as 'a secret'. Loved for its slow pace of life and welcoming hospitality, it combines beautiful bays and enchanting sights with a sunny climate all year round.

North Cyprus is bursting with intriguing antiquity and a rich

cultural history. The coastline is astonishingly beautiful with its ancient harbour. Sandy beaches stretch for miles, whilst the depths of the crystal-clear azure seas offer many of the region's best dive sites. A labyrinth of craft shops, ancient sites and family-owned restaurants await exploration in North Cyprus' vibrant towns, whilst idyllic scenery and ancient rustic villages gently dot the countryside.

There are key distinct areas offering unique experiences for all

types of travellers. Kyrenia is unique in its setting with the focal point surrounding the old Venetian harbour. The long northern coastline is backed by the Five Finger Mountains with their dramatic wooded slopes and craggy summits. Castles, historic ruins and religious relics adorn the mountains, whilst the lower hills and lowlands are still vastly empty with some magnificent hotels.

Far west, is the most fertile region with citrus groves and olive trees in abundance. To the East, the



Old Shali

Persepolis Iran



finger of the Karpaz Peninsula points to Syria. This region is more remote yet home to the most beautiful landscapes in North Cyprus with deserted beaches and ancient villages with once-grand basilicas, tombs and ruins which bear testament to the regions glorious past.

Visitors to Destinations got an insight into culture from around

the world with the interesting and interactive features showcasing food, drink, dance, music, and arts & crafts. The ever-popular Meet the Experts Theatres were an added bonus where travel personalities, celebrities and travel experts shared their fascinating stories and expert advice to give visitors the inspiration they need to plan the perfect holiday.