

17th WFTGA Convention kicks off in Tehran

Tourism serves as 'a bridge between nations', Rouhani says

TOURISM TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has said tourism and tour guides serve as bridges between nations and links between different cultures and civilizations.

"The era of building walls between nations has come to an end, Rouhani said addressing the opening ceremony of the 17th World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) Convention in Tehran on Saturday.

"[They] have forgotten that the Berlin Wall fell some years ago. If a wall separates nations, it should be removed," Mehr news agency quoted Rouhani as saying.

"In today's world, all the countries are like neighbors to each other. Communications and globalization have cut distances. Disconnecting global trade ties would not be beneficial to the world economy."

Highlighting the principal role of tourism, the president referred to tour guides, saying: "You as the servants to the cultural heritage, tell the younger generation of ancient civilization of the human being and historical works."

He went on to say that BARJAM (the Persian acronym for the nuclear deal) has paved the way for more foreign tourists to visit Iran. "We do every effort to develop our tourism industry. To this end, we are renovating our aviation fleet, expanding railway system, and building highways in order to increase the tourist influx.

■ Tourism's vital economic role

Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Director Zahra Ahmadipour, for her part, reminded the attendees of 2017 being named as the "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development" by the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

She said such an initiative by the UNWTO demonstrates tourism is a key



President Hassan Rouhani (c) stands by CHTHO Director Zahra Ahmadipour at the opening ceremony of 17th World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations Convention in Tehran on January 29, 2017. Other Iranian and international officials and tourist guides are seen in the picture as well.

factor that contributes to both lives and subsistence of people across the globe.

Ahmadipour who doubles as vice president touched on economic achievements of tourism for hosting countries when it comes to the generation of revenues, creation of jobs, and redistribution of wealth, saying "Tourism industry is of high importance as it accounts for 10 percent of global GDP and one out of every 11 jobs in the world."

Some \$24 billion came into Iran over the past three and a half years because of foreign tourists, CHTHO Deputy Director

Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed announced in Sept. 2016.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 21 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, after it agreed to roll back its nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions in July 2015.

Foreign tourist arrivals in Iran has been more than double that of the global average since the implementation of the deal in January 2016, CHTHO announced in Oct. 2016.

The country has launched extensive

plans to bolster its tourism sector. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country is expecting to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Iran has also offered to grant years of tax exemption to both domestic and foreign businesses and individuals as an incentive for ramping up investments in its tourism sector.

For the time being, citizens of about 190 countries can obtain visa on arrival at the country's airports with one-month validation.