

In Case You Missed

World Tourism Body Sees Recovery Next Year

The global tourism sector will post a "moderate recovery" in 2010 after slumping this year due to the recession, with Asia set for the strongest rebound, the UN World Tourism Organization said.

"International tourist arrivals are likely to witness a moderate recovery next year, with growth at one to three percent," the Madrid-based body said in its latest bulletin, AFP reported.

"Asia will show the strongest rebound, while Europe and the Americas will probably take longer to recover."

It based its outlook for next year on the improvement in international tourism figures recorded in recent months and the better-than-expected economic indicators in some key source markets.

For 2009, the inter-governmental body predicted a 5-percent decline in international tourism arrivals.

During the first eight months of the year, it estimates international tourism arrivals worldwide dropped by around 7 percent over the previous year to a total of 600 million arrivals.



But arrivals in the two high-season months of July and August declined by 3 percent compared with a decrease of 8 percent in the first half of the year, and the available data for September point to a continuation of this upward trend.

The UN tourism body's secretary general, Taleb Rifai, said "scarcely in recorded tourism history has the industry had to contend with so many different issues at the same time."

"Throughout this year, the world's tourism industry was faced with a large number of challenges, led by the global economic crisis, the credit crunch and rising unemployment, not to mention the influenza pandemic," he said in a statement.

"However, the negative trend that emerged during the second half of 2008 and intensified in 2009 is starting to show signs of receding," he added.

International tourism arrivals rose 1.9 percent in 2008 over the previous year to 922 million, according to the UN body.

Doubts Cast on Chessmen Origins

New research has cast doubt on traditional theories about the historic Lewis Chessmen.

The 93 pieces—currently split between museums in Edinburgh and London—were discovered on Lewis in 1831.

But the research suggests they may have been used in both chess and Hnefatafl—a similar game that was popular in medieval Scandinavia.

It also casts doubt on the traditional theory that the ivory pieces were lost or buried by a merchant.

The research was led by David Caldwell of the National Museum of Scotland, who believes the Lewis chessmen were more likely to have belonged to a high-ranking person who lived on Lewis.

Caldwell told the BBC that many of the pieces could have doubled for Hnefatafl, another conflict game that also pitted a king against pawns or warriors on the other side.

The ancient game has not survived into modern times.

For the first time, they also tried to work out which pieces were made by the same groups of craftsmen by measuring the chessmen's faces, looking at their clothing, and studying details of the workmanship.

Caldwell added: "We certainly still believe the pieces are Scandinavian in origin, perhaps made in a workshop by several masters in a city like Trondheim."

"But one of the main things I think we are saying in our research is that it is much more likely that the horde is in Lewis because it belonged to somebody who lived there rather than being abandoned by a merchant who was passing through."

Caldwell said the chessmen suggested that there was a reasonable amount of wealth in the western Isles in the 13th century, perhaps because the medieval economy placed greater value on fairly barren land that could be used to raise cattle.

He added: "It was certainly leading men there; people who could make a lot of money either by raising cattle or frankly by going raiding—there was still in some ways a Viking way of life surviving into the 13th century."

Despite the extensive research, Caldwell said he still believed there was plenty of mystery surrounding the chessmen.

Of the 93 pieces found, 82 are kept at the British Museum, with 11 held by the National Museum of Scotland.

Calls have been made for all of the pieces, which were made from walrus ivory and whales' teeth, to be returned to Lewis.

Jiroft Linked to Aratta Kingdom



Jiroft civilization, which flourished in Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC) in a region that includes present-day Sistan-Baluchestan and Kerman provinces in Iran, has been linked to the lost Aratta Kingdom.

The hypothesis is based on a collection of artifacts confiscated in Iran from smugglers and accepted by many to have originated from the Jiroft area in south-central Iran, online Iranian news services reported.

The proposed site is Konar Sandal near Jiroft in the Hamoun River area. Other significant sites associated with the civilization include Shah-e Soukht-e (Burnt City), Tappeh Bampur, Espidej, Shahdad, Iblis and Tappeh Yahya.

The proposition of grouping these sites as an "independent Bronze Age civilization with its own architecture and language", intermediate between Ilam to the west and the Indus Valley Civilization to the east, is made by Yousef Majidzadeh, the head of the archaeological excavation team in Jiroft.

Majidzadeh speculates they may be the remains of the lost Aratta Kingdom. His conclusions have met with skepticism from some reviewers.

of remains from a city dating back to at least the late 3rd millennium BC.

The looted artifacts and some vessels recovered by the excavators were of the so-called "intercultural style" type of pottery known from Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau, and since the 1960s from nearby Tappeh Yahya. The "Jiroft civilization" hypothesis proposes that this "intercultural style" is in fact the distinctive style of a previously unknown, long-lived civilization.

This is not universally accepted. Archeologist Oscar Muscarella of the Metropolitan Museum of Art criticizes that excavators resorted to sensationalist announcements while being slow in publishing scholarly reports, and their claims that the site's stratigraphy shows continuity into the 4th millennium is overly optimistic. However, Muscarella

French experts in the region indicate the existence of at least 10 historical periods in the region belonging to different civilizations who lived in this area during different periods of time.

According to French experts who studied this area, the evidence remaining from these civilizations may be traced up to 11 meters under the ground.

"What is obvious is that the evidence of Talle-Iblis culture in Bardsir can be traced in all parts of the region. Talle-Iblis culture, known as Aliabad period (fourth millennium BC) was revealed by Joseph R. Caldwell, American archeologist," said Majidzadeh.

The primary Jiroft site, consists of two mounds a few kilometers apart, called Konar Sandal A and B with a height of 13 and 21 meters respectively. At Konar Sandal B, a two-story, windowed citadel with a base of close to 13.5 hectares was found.



does acknowledge the importance of the site.

> Excavations

Earlier excavations in Kerman were conducted by Sir Aurel Stein around 1930.

One of the most notable archaeological excavations done in Kerman province was conducted by a group led by Professor Joseph Caldwell from Illinois

> Conflicting Opinions

Majidzadeh claims to have discovered inscriptions in a previously unknown script, allegedly comparable to linear Ilamite, dated to ca. the 22nd century BC. The announcement of this discovery was received with skepticism.

Lawler (2007) quotes Jacob Dahl, specialist in ancient texts at Berlin's Free University, as saying, "No specialist in the world would consider these to be anything but absolute fakes."

According to a theory by Iranian historian Jahanshah Derakhshani, an ancient Aryan people known as the Aratti, or Artaioi, inhabited a region in the eastern Iranian Plateau called Aratta by Sumerian sources in the 3rd millennium BC. Around 1000 BC, the Aratti moved southwest to Persia and became direct ancestors of the Persians.

According to Derakhshani, the Aratti may also have been ancestors of the Parthians, Bactrians and Arachosians, based on his observations of ancient sources. Derakhshani says that according to Herodotus, the Parthians were also called Artaioi and that Hellanicus of Lesbos described them as inhabitants of a Persian region called Artaia.

The Greeks called the inhabitants of the region Barygaza Arattii, Arachosi and Gandaraei.



Other conjectures have connected Konar Sandal with the obscure city-state of Marhashi, which apparently lay to the east of Ilam proper.

> Discovery

Many artifacts associated with Jiroft were recovered from looters described as "desstitute villagers" who had scavenged the area south of Jiroft before 2001, when a team led by Yousef Majidzadeh began excavations.

The team uncovered more than two square kilometers

State Museum in 1966 (Talle-Iblis) and Lamberg Karvolski from Harvard University in 1967 (Tappeh Yahya Sogan Valley, Dolatabad).

Archeological excavations in Jiroft led to the discovery of several objects belonging to the fourth millennium BC.

According to Majidzadeh, geophysical operations by



Lost Persian Army Found in Sahara

Herodotus wrote of a 50,000-man strong army that set out on foot into the Egyptian desert in 525 BC and was never heard from again... until today.

A pair of Italian archeologists have uncovered bronze weapons, a silver bracelet, an earring and hundreds of human bones in the vast desolate wilderness of the Sahara Desert. Twin brothers Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni are hopeful that they've finally found the lost army of Persian King Cambyses II. Foxnews.com reported.

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Cambyses II and his army were buried by a cataclysmic sandstorm in 525 BC. He wrote, "a wind arose from the south, strong and deadly, bringing with it vast columns of whirling sand, which entirely covered up the troops

and caused them wholly to disappear".

Now the discovery of these artifacts points toward an answer to this millennia-old mystery: The Castiglioni brothers studied ancient maps and came to the conclusion that Cambyses' army did not take the caravan route most archeologists believe they used.

"Since the 19th century, many archeologists and explorers have searched for the lost army along that route. They found nothing. We hypothesized a different itinerary, coming from south," Castiglioni said.

"In the desolate wilderness of the desert, we have found the most precise location where the tragedy occurred," said Dario Del Bufalo, a member of the expedition from the University of Lecce.

