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News reports on suspension of Petra promotion baseless

By Dalya Dajani

AMMAN - Tourism authorities on Monday refuted recent news reports alleging that promotions for the ancient city of Petra were put on hold pending an outstanding issue with the New7Wonders (N7W) Foundation.

Earlier this week, local media reports quoted an unnamed source as saying that the Kingdom halted its promotion of Petra in light of demands by the foundation regarding revenue sharing.

The source said the foundation requested competition winners pay a percentage of revenue earned during the promotion of their sites, adding that promotional efforts were suspended to avoid possible legal ramifications.

An official at the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB), the Kingdom's main entity for promoting Jordan's tourism sites abroad, described the allegations as baseless.

"The information is not true and we are moving ahead with our promotion of Petra as normal and even stronger than before," JTB Managing Director Nayef Al Fayiz told The Jordan Times.

"Petra is a national treasure and we will continue to utilise this treasure to promote the Kingdom and this unique site to the best of our abilities," he added.

The JTB official said he was unaware of any outstanding issue between the N7W Foundation and Jordan pertaining to revenue sharing, noting the issue in question could be the copyright conditions set by the foundation regarding the use of its logo.

Fayiz explained that as with any entity or company with copyrights, the N7W Foundation allows free use of its logo for promotional purposes but charges a royalty when it is used for commercial purposes.

He said the JTB, which uses the logo for its promotional materials on Petra, received the N7W Foundation's approval several months ago.

From Brussels, the head of communications of the N7W Foundation, Tia Viering, told The Jordan Times she was unaware of any issue regarding the reported statement, noting that it may have been related to, or confused with, their conditions regarding the use of the logo.

"As a nonprofit organisation, the N7W Foundation does protect its copyright from misuse, as do all organisations," Viering said.

"We have certain rules to protect our copyrights where the use of our logo is concerned, but we do not have any issue or problem with Jordan," she added.

The media official said the foundation is continuing to promote the New 7 Wonders and that plans are under way to officially inaugurate Petra as a new wonder this year.

According to Viering, the inauguration was postponed due to both time restraints and logistical issues, noting that the date fell near the November elections.

"We had hoped to inaugurate Petra as the first of the New 7 Wonders of the World - and had initially discussed doing so in December with the former minister of tourism, Osama Dabbas," she said.

"However, due to logistics, this did not prove possible," Viering added.

As a nonprofit entity relying on revenues to sustain itself, the N7W Foundation had asked competition winners to secure funding for their own inaugurations.

"Of course, like all organisations, from the UN to Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Nike and FIFA, we must ensure that our work can go on - and this means that we cannot continue to do all the work for the New 7 Wonders partners and participants and pay for it out of our own pockets, which is what we did for most of the past campaign," said Viering.

"For Petra and any other of the New 7 Wonders of the World to be inaugurated, the N7W Foundation needs local or regional sponsors," she added.

She said the foundation welcomed inquiries from companies and other organisations who would like to partner with them.

Officials at the Ministry of Tourism were unavailable for comment after repeated calls, but a source there said they expected the inauguration to be held in February.

According to Viering, the official inauguration is considered important to highlight the site as a national treasure and also to thank voters for their support during the campaign.

She said due to the goodwill and visibility garnered by participants, the attraction of the new wonders continues to be global, noting that an increasing number of companies and organisations are interested in associating themselves with Petra and the other wonders.

New 7 Wonders of Nature

Meanwhile, Jordan may once again be at the centre of global attention as Wadi Rum has been nominated in a second competition organised by the N7W Foundation, this time highlighting natural treasures in the world. The New 7 Wonders of Nature campaign has drawn nominations of some 200 natural sites since July 7 last year, including Mount Sinai and the White Nile in both Egypt and Sudan.

Nominees from Africa include Lake Issue in Tunisia, Erg Chebbi Dunes in Morocco, Victoria Falls between Zambia and Zimbabwe, Kruger Park in South Africa and Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. The only other site nominated from the Arab region so far is Yemen's Socotra Archipelago.

The N7W panel of experts, under the leadership of former UNESCO director general Federico Mayor, will announce the shortlist of 21 selected candidates from the top-ranked 77 official supported nominees in January 2009. The 21 finalists will then be put to a popular vote and the New 7 Wonders of Nature announced in the summer of 2010.

Campaign organisers say only nominees with official supporting committees can become a finalist. According to Viering, although Jordan has expressed interest, no committee has been formed as yet.

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