

Dead Sea Makes Final Cut in 7 Wonders of Nature Competition

The Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth and one of Israel's most popular tourist sites, is one of 28 finalists in the 7 Wonders of Nature, an international online competition that grades the seven natural wonders of the world.

To reach the final shortlist, the Dead Sea beat out approximately 440 sites from 220 countries.

The competition will last through 2011, and organizers expect millions of people to cast their vote. Other natural wonders in the competition include, the Amazon River, Galapagos Islands, the Grand Canyon and Maldives.

Officials are hoping the competition will promote tourism in the Dead Sea region and raise public awareness around the world about the problems facing the sea, which has lost close to one meter of water annually for the past 30 years.

For the next two years, Israel's Ministry of Tourism will lead the campaign for the Dead Sea to be selected as one of the winners in the contest, via 14 offices around the world, websites in 11 languages, and marketing activities that will emphasize the unique attributes of the Dead Sea. (To vote, go to .)

Positioned 400 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is known as the largest natural health spa in the world. It is made up of black mud and thermo-mineral hot springs that ease muscular tension, improve blood circulation and alleviate rheumatic pain.

Other tourist attractions in the area include the Roman fortress at Masada, Ein Gedi and Einot Tzu Kim, nature

reserves and the Qumran caves, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.