

AFGHAN INTERNATIONAL CARPET FAIR

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The US Trade Mission to the first Afghan International Carpet Fair, held in Kabul, created a unique business opportunity for both Afghan rug producers and American wholesalers.

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to represent Hadji Jalili Revivals LLC (HJR) as a delegate of an impromptu US Trade Mission to Afghanistan for the first Afghan International Carpet Fair, from 26-28 August 2007, at the Serena Hotel in Kabul. Sponsored by the US Department of Commerce and organised and supported by various international aid agencies, this first-time event created an opportunity for Afghan producers to have direct contact with American wholesalers, and establish long-term relationships. HJR's decision to participate was based on its belief in the ability of Afghan weavers to produce world-class carpets, and its desire to work with and draw inspiration from the people. The main aims of the Trade Mission were to combine the market knowledge of the wholesalers and skill of the Afghan manufacturers to maximise the marketability of Afghan-made rugs, and offer the US delegation the opportunity to purchase inventory at exhibitions. Discussions included the exportation of rugs directly from Afghanistan (rather than having to re-route through other countries), logistical issues, export resources and optimal marketing approaches.

The trip also offered me an opportunity to gain a personal understanding of the land and culture. Kabul hints towards a spirit of rebirth for Afghans: a hilltop, once used as a military vantage point, is now a scenic spot visited by young lovers, and homes previously levelled by wars are re-emerging. Our hosts demonstrated the Afghan hospitality that Behrooz Hakimian and Kambiz Jalili (partners in ownership of HJR), had told me about. We were treated with utter warmth and generosity. Our deep gratitude for this treatment was met with an Afghan saying: *Mehman Doosteh Khodah Hast* which means 'A guest is a friend of God' – and we were certainly received as such.

Special thanks to our '*mehmaan nawaz*' hosts – Azim, Rahim, Wakil, David, Majid and Humayun.

Below L-R: Mr Alem, Head of Afghanistan's Carpet Guild; Dr M. Amin Farhang, Afghan Minister of Commerce and Industries; Mr Carlos M. Gutierrez, US Minister of Commerce; Mr Ahmad Zia Massod, Afghan First Vice-President; Dr Ingolf Verino, GTZ Country Director for Afghanistan; Mr Nabi, Head of Kabul Carpet Association; Mr Suleman Fatimie, CEO of Afghanistan's Export Promotion Agency

