

## Development of tourism ties with Saudi Arabia on agenda



ILNA – Iran's deputy tourism minister highlighted the development of tourism relations with Saudi Arabia. Emphasizing the significance of tourism from Saudi Arabia, particularly among Shia Muslims who consider Imam Reza (PBUH) Shrine as their main destination, the deputy minister stated that arrangements are being made to provide pilgrimage packages for these visitors.

Ali Darabi made these remarks during a ceremony held on Friday at a museum in Kerman, where two historical bowls were unveiled.

Darabi further added that the Tourism Ministry is actively working on a well-organized distribution of travel destinations for both domestic and international tourists, aiming to diversify and increase tourist attractions.

## Iran's veteran artist Harati dies at 81



IRNA – Renowned Iranian artist Mohammad-Mehdi Harati, a respected member of the Iranian Academy of Arts, passed away on Friday at the age of 81, leaving behind a legacy of artistic excellence.

Born in Quchan, Khorasan Razavi Province, in 1942, Harati embarked on his artistic journey in Tehran after completing his early education. He honed his skills in painting and traditional arts, pursuing his studies at the University of Tehran up to the doctoral level. Over the course of nearly five decades, he passionately explored various domains within the realm of visual arts, encompassing design, black ink painting, oil painting, watercolor, miniature painting, traditional coloring, wood and metal painting, glass painting, ceramics, leatherwork, and ancient calligraphy.

In addition to his artistic endeavors, Harati's intellectual contributions were equally remarkable. He penned more than 50 books on diverse subjects related to art, offering invaluable research and educational resources for the artistic community. On Sunday, the artist will be laid to rest in the Artist's Section of Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery in southern Tehran.

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# Two Iranian geoparks added to UNESCO list

### Arts & Culture Desk

The United Nations' esteemed Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), officially approved the inclusion of 18 captivating new sites from various corners of the globe into its esteemed network of extraordinary Geoparks,

which showcase some of the most awe-inspiring natural wonders worldwide. Among the recently added geoparks are two remarkable Iranian destinations: Aras Geopark and Tabas Geopark. These sites have been deemed of immense geological importance on an international scale. As

detailed in a report by .org, Geoparks fulfill a vital role in their local communities, seamlessly combining conservation efforts with public engagement and sustainable development strategies. With these recent designations, the number of Geoparks now stands at

195, covering a staggering surface area of 486,709 square kilometers—equivalent to twice the size of the United Kingdom. Notably, this expansion also marks the first-ever participation of two UNESCO Member States, namely New Zealand and the Philippines, in this prestigious network.

Aras Geopark, nestled in northwestern Iran and marked by the Aras River, represents the northernmost boundary of this geological treasure. Positioned at the southern extremity of the Lesser Caucasus Mountain range, this awe-inspiring landscape acts as a natural barrier, fostering an assortment of climates while boasting rich geodiversity and biodiversity. Furthermore, it serves as a vital link between diverse cultures residing on either side of the mountain chain. Often referred to as "the geological paradise of Iran" by renowned intellectuals, Tabas Geopark is located within the sprawling 22,771 square kilometers of desert in northwest South Khorasan Province.

Here, visitors can embark on a captivating journey through time, tracing the evolution of our planet from its earliest geological era, the Precambrian, which dates back a staggering 4.6 billion years, all the way to the Early Cretaceous period, approximately 145 million years ago. This uninterrupted chronicle of Earth's history has earned the geopark its well-deserved reputation. Notably, the geopark is also home to the Naybandan Wildlife Refuge, the largest sanctuary of its kind in Iran, covering a vast expanse of 1.5 million hectares and serving as a critical habitat for the Asian cheetah.

The inclusion of Aras Geopark and Tabas Geopark in UNESCO's renowned network underscores their exceptional value and contributes to the global recognition of Iran's geological heritage. These geoparks will undoubtedly continue to inspire awe and captivate visitors from around the world with their extraordinary natural wonders and



## Tourism Ministry plans to further introduce Fars Province potentials

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami highlighted the untapped potential in Fars Province's cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts sectors, which will be incorporated into future plans to promote and utilize these assets during visits to the province. Zarghami made these remarks during the reopening ceremony of the Apadana Hotel in Marvdasht, emphasizing the county's sig-

nificant potential in terms of cultural heritage and tourism, IRNA reported. Recognizing the historical significance and cultural roots of Marvdasht, the minister stressed the need to designate a day in the national tourism calendar dedicated to celebrating this ancient city. He remarked, "Marvdasht holds an ancient history that safeguards valuable cultural roots, not only for the Iranian nation, but for all of humanity." During his speech, Zarghami also underscored the

role of music in promoting happiness and preserving identity and culture. He stated that authentic and national music serves as a legitimate and effective means to achieve these goals. According to him, the harmonious blend of tourism and music has the potential to bring joy to society, offering valuable opportunities. The minister expressed his appreciation for Salar Aqili, a renowned traditional music vocalist, who has been appointed as the ambassador of cultural heri-



tage. Zarghami expressed hope that Aqili would organize a series of concerts within the Apadana Hotel complex, located alongside the magnificent Persepolis, for the people to enjoy. As his visit to Fars Province drew to a close, Zarghami highlighted the province's distinction in terms of cultural heritage.

However, he also acknowledged the disparity between the growth in funding for the preservation of historical monuments and the investment in infrastructure expenses. Efforts must be made to bridge this gap and further support the preservation and development of cultural heritage in the province.