

Improper off-roading could harm flora and fauna in Lut Desert



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The Lut Desert, widely referred to as Dasht-e Lut, is among unique tourist attractions of Kerman Province. It lures a large number of foreign and domestic visitors every year. Travelers enjoy spending the night under the dark and starry skies of the desert surrounded by its deep silence. Lut is also home to shifting sands, salt plains, meteorite fields, and rocky terrain, which offers tourists breathtaking vistas and unparalleled serenity of the intact nature and wilderness.

Lut Desert is divided into the northern, central and southern sections. There

are several kaluts in the central part that extend to its western side. Kaluts are high sand dunes created by wind erosion, the height of some of which is more than 155 meters.

Gandum Beryan region, which means roasted grain, is located in the north of Shahdad Desert, west of Lut Desert. It is the hottest place not only in Iran, but on Earth. Temperatures there can exceed 70°C in the shade, which make it even hotter than 'Death Valley' in California.

Off-roading in Lut Desert

Despite high temperatures, driving off-road vehicles provides an enjoyable and

memorable experience in Lut Dessert.

One of the off-roaders told IRNA that those who want to drive a vehicle in the desert must have equipment such as GPS. The off-roader also urged drivers to have enough gas and spare parts before starting their journey to the desert.

Although off-roading provides an exhilarating experience, it can damage the desert in the form of noise pollution, erosion, liquid chemical pollution, brush fires and particulate matter emissions. All of this damage can be mitigated or eliminated with proper care.

The head of the Public Relations Office of Kerman's Department of Environment

said the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization issues permits for driving off-road vehicles in the desert.

Hojatollah Moradi added that experts of the ministry should monitor the issuance of such permits.

He said in many areas of Lut Dessert there are no vegetation and animals due to high salinity and high temperatures. The official, however, said that animals live and plants grow in some other regions of the desert.

"Tamarisk trees grow in the desert, which is important in terms of vegetation. There are animal species in some parts of the desert, such as sand foxes, all kinds of in-

sects, tarantulas and white birds. Therefore, off-roading should be banned in areas that flora and fauna are available," he said.

Moein Afzali, the director of the UNESCO-registered Lut Desert, also weighed in on the significance of monitoring permits for driving off-road vehicles.

"Only tourist groups with GPS-equipped cars are allowed to travel deep into the desert. Tourists must also pass geotourism training courses," he said.

"We have defined routes for off-road vehicles in the depths of Lut. Off-roaders can drive in these routes and return from the same routes. In this way minimal damage is inflicted on the

desert," the official added. He said some off-roaders who drive deep inside the desert damage the vegetation and put the lives of the flora and fauna at grave risk.

Afzali suggested that all off-road vehicles be controlled at the entry points of the cities that lead to Lut Desert. He noted that the first phase of the proposal has been implemented.

He also called on tourists to take their garbage back to their cities.

The presence of tourists has led to an increase in the amount of garbage in Lut Desert as some travelers leave waste assuming that it will be absorbed by nature. Leaving garbage distorts

the view of the desert and leads to dire consequences that appear over time.

Lut Desert is located between the provinces of Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan and South Khorasan.

It has numerous entrances, thus one can enter this magnificent area from all three neighboring provinces. However, most of the unique natural phenomena of the desert are within the geographical boundaries of Kerman Province.

A number of historic and prehistoric sites as well as cemeteries dating back to the Copper Age, ancient castles and old qanats are in the area, showing that the desert is thousands of years old.

Gilan and Mazandaran

The region along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea differs radically, in nature and climate, from all the other regions of Iran.

Gilan and Mazandaran provinces, which occupy the narrow belt between the mountains and the sea, suffer not from lack, but from excess of moisture. A multitude of rivers flow from the mountains; most form at their estuaries the so-called *mordabs*, lagoons with stagnant water that emit exhalations of decomposition and are separated by shoals from the sea. There is not a single navigable river on this whole littoral, a feature remarked upon even by the tenth-century geographers.

South of this marshy coastal belt extends a zone of thick shrubland; mountains rise further south, their lower lopes covered with dense forests; still higher up are alpine pastures. Amid the overgrowth of shrubs

and forests are scattered patches of land cleared of shrubs and trees in order to permit agriculture and human settlement.

In antiquity, the population of Gilan consisted of the Cadusians, who were independent of the Achaemenid government; this same people, or a part of it, was also called Geloi, an appellation then transferred to the region itself. Further east lived the Anariachs, Mardoï or Amardoï (a name that was then applied to the river Safid Rud as Amardos), and the Tapurs, whose name the Persians then applied, as Tapuristan, to present-day Mazandaran; this name, later modified by the Arabs as Tabaristan, still appears on the coins of the Sassanid period and of the early Islamic period, just after the Islamic conquest. The eastern part of Mazandaran Province was reckoned as part of Hyrcania. All these peoples, with the exception of the Hyrcanians, were of

non-Aryan stock. The Tapurs, who originally lived in the southeastern part of the area, were subjugated early by the Achaemenids; the Mardoï were defeated by Alexander the Great and later by the Parthians, who in the second century BCE resettled them in the environs of Ray. The former territory of the Mardoï was occupied by the Tapurs; Ptolemy mentions in the area east of Daylam on the coast of the Caspian only the Tapurs.

Daylam was the mountainous part of Gilan. A separate principality was formed in Tabaristan, according to some reports, toward the end of the Arsacid period, and maintained itself under the Sasanids; after the fall of the latter dynasty, the rulers of Tabaristan assumed the title of Ispahbads of Khurasan.

One modern scholar, Marquart, points out the fact that alongside the Ispahbad dynasty there was in Tabaristan also the dynas-



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ty of Paduspanids (civilian governors), and postulates that at a certain moment, probably at the time when Firuz, grand-

son of Yazdigird III, tried to restore the Iranian state, an entire system of government after the pattern of the Sassanid state

was formed in Tabaristan. The Arabs never conquered Gilan. Tabaristan fully submitted to them only under the Abbasid

caliph Mansur, although even after that, coins with Pahlavi inscriptions continued to be struck in Tabaristan.