

Semnan Province, a center of handicraft production in Iran

Iranica Desk

Handicrafts are a tool reflecting the identity and history of every nation. The artworks give their creators a sense of pride and cause them to feel a strong attachment to their motherland.

The status of handicrafts is so high that the International Craft Day (also known as World Craft Day) has been marked on 15th October every year to acknowledge world crafts and the tireless work of millions of craftspeople and artisans across the globe, ISNA wrote.

The central Iranian province of Markazi, with a rich history, is among the regions in which a variety of handicrafts are being produced.

Today, a large number of craftspeople create valuable artworks in the province, individually or in a workshop group.

Haj Vakil Castle, in the capital city of Arak, dating back to the Qajar era, is not only a historically significant monument, but also serves as a dynamic museum which contains several handicraft workshops.

The castle was sold to Hassan Vakil after the Second World War II, which is why it is called Vakil Castle.

The castle has various sections, including an entrance porch, outer and inner courtyards, a basement and a building known as Kolah Farangi. The monument, decorated with beautiful brick and tile work, was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 1996.

Zeinab Karami, a museum guide working in the castle, told ISNA that a collection

of outstanding traditional handicrafts, including handwoven carpets, kilims, calligraphy and *qalam-zani* (engraving) are on display in the castle.

She said that the museum, extending in an area of 300 sq. m, has nine rooms showcasing various types of artworks.

Five workshops, active in the fields of manufacturing wood and leather products, glass painting, *mina-kari* (painting and coloring the surfaces of metals and ceramic tiles), pottery and ceramics, are in the basement of the building.

Deputy Head of Markazi Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Qassem Kazemi, said that about 9,000 craftspeople are active in the province in 110 fields of handicrafts. He noted that the largest number of artists are involved in pottery production, *qalam-zani*, weaving traditional textiles, and making wood products.

Kazemi noted that a number of forgotten handicrafts have been revived in the province in recent years, adding that Arak and Tafresh have a long history in the field of metalworking.

He said that in addition to artists who work independently, over 60 handicraft workshops are operating in the province, in each of which two to five people are active.

Kazemi noted that nine handicraft markets are active across the province, pointing out that the 15th handicrafts exhibition will be held in the province in October.



Haj Vakil Castle
ISNA

Chahar Bagh Avenue in Isfahan dates back to Safavid era

One of the world's first boulevards, Chahar Bagh Avenue, was among the earliest creations of Safavid Shah Abbas I in Isfahan. Its construction started as soon as Isfahan was chosen as the capital city (1501 CE), and completed in 1598.

It started at the magnificent palace of the Jahan Nama, which occupied the site of the city's present municipality until 1890, and stretched to the

foot of the Soffeh Mountain. The splendid Allahverdi Khan Bridge connected the street at the point where it was interrupted by the Zayandehrud (River). The name of the street (in Persian meaning "Four Gardens") is derived from the four vineyards that originally bordered the street. Also, four rows of plane trees were planted along both of the avenue's sides, vipemo.com wrote.

During the reign of Shah Abbas

I and his Safavid successors, Chahar Bagh Avenue (particularly at its lower section) was a promenade for the royal family and court. It was enclosed by wooden fretted walls of medium height, broken at even intervals by gates.

Most of the gates led to shady orchards that stretched along the street. At the center of the avenue was a canal, and water dropped in little cascades from them. Now and again, this

water was collected in large basins, some of which also had fountains. In the summer months, these tanks were often filled with cut roses, which floated on the water, filling the air with their fragrance.

On both sides of the canal wide sidewalks for pedestrians and horsemen were laid out, and flowerbeds enhanced the beauty of the street. As attested to by all visitors to Safavid Isfahan, in its heyday Chahar

Bagh was one of the world's most magnificent streets.

During the Safavid period, Chahar Bagh Avenue was reserved on Wednesdays for women. They strolled, picnicked, and went shopping, while eunuchs prevented men from entering the street. All the shopkeepers and servants on those days were also women.

After the Safavid rule, another Chahar Bagh Street was laid out by the Qajar governors,

while the trees of the original Chahar Bagh were cut down and sold for wood.

Although trees were soon replanted, the street never regained its original splendor. Today, it is an ordinary street, defaced by low buildings that are characteristic of modern shopping streets in Iranian cities.

However, one set of buildings from the Safavid period has survived.

