



Cloud Forest
safarzon.com

Shahrud, a heaven for nature lovers

Iran is a four-season country, however since the country's lack of water is often discussed, the general perception is that Iranians live in the middle of a desert and are constantly facing drought and its subsequent problems. But in every corner of Iran you can find an amazing landscape and a pristine nature. The city of Shahrud, in Semnan Province, is the only place in Iran from various directions of which you can reach a mountain, a forest and a desert in 30 minutes, and a sea in less than three hours, IRNA wrote.

Shahrud, which is the second largest city of Semnan Province, lies on the route link-

ing Tehran to the holy city of Mashhad.

From the north, it is surrounded by the Alborz Mountains, and from the south, by the arid salty deserts. The river of Tash, after crossing this town, reaches the south deserts. The weather on its mountainous areas is cold, while it is somewhat temperate in other parts of the city.

If you travel south for 30 minutes from Shahrud, you will reach a vast desert called *Torud*, having beautiful palm groves, the residents of which make a living from camel breeding.

And if you travel north for 30 minutes, you will encounter a forest like those spread across

the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran.

There is a cold and snowy region at a distance of one hour from the east side of the city, the climate of which is similar to that of Kurdistan and Lorestan provinces.

In the city of Mojen and the Tash-e Olya village, located at a short distance from western Shahrud, you will encounter people wearing jackets and warm clothes in late July and early August. They have to turn on heating devices at night.

Cloud Forest (Abr Forest) is among the well-known natural attractions and one of the most extraordinary sights of Shahrud; it is a place where

the sky seems to have approached the earth.

The forest is one of the oldest in the world, dating back forty million years, belonging to the Jurassic period. It is a continuation of the lush forests of the north, and has an area of 35,000 hectares. One of the main features of this forest is its high altitude; as it has low temperatures in hot seasons. The average maximum temperature in this forest is 20°C, while the nights and early mornings are very cold.

Shahrud, with numerous green and old plane trees, has several beautiful parks which are among its well-known attractions.

The oldest plane tree of the

city, called *chenar-e sookhteh*, (*chenar* means plane tree) is located in the middle of a square with the same name. The tree has been registered on Iran's National Heritage List.

A variety of animal and plant species live in the forest which is covered with clouds for most days of the year.

All the valleys leading to the villages are full of fruit orchards.

If you go there in the summer, various types of seasonal fruits such as apricots, peaches and cherries will delight your eyes.

Khaar Turan National Park,

located in the region, consists of three major parts: a protected area, a national park, and a wildlife refuge. It is the second-largest protected area in Iran, having rare animal and plant species.

The biosphere reserve of Khaar Turan National Park, known as the Africa of Iran, is the largest in Iran.

No matter where you are in the country, you have access to at least one direct road to Shahrud. Moreover, the Shahrud railway is one of the busiest in the country.



A view of Shahrud
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Chogha Mish pre-Sassanid settlement in Khuzestan Province



Mound of Chogha Mish from the south

Chogha Mish in lowland Susiana (in modern-day Khuzestan Province), is the largest pre-Sassanid settlement in northeastern Susiana, and is strategically located between the outlets of the large perennial rivers of Dez and Karun in the plain.

Closer to the site are two important tributaries of the Dez River, the Siah Mansur, some 10km to the west, just west of Jundi Shapur, and the Shur, slightly less than 1km to the east.

The mound of Chogha Mish consists of a truncated cone-shaped high mound to the north overlooking a large terrace to the south. The summit of the high mound is at elevation 100.54m above sea level. It is about 27m above the surrounding plain and over 30m above the riverbed of the Shur, to the east.

Its western edge is fairly regu-

lar, but on its northeast, east and southeast sides it has four irregularly shaped lobes separated by deeply eroded gullies.

Eleven seasons of excavations at the site provided a long, uninterrupted prehistoric sequence of cultural development in southwestern Asia.

Chogha Mish is therefore uniquely qualified to demonstrate at a single locus a series of major developments that took place during the entire Neolithic period in southwestern Asia.

These developments include the gradual appearance of central places, increasing specialisation and improvement in the production of material culture, changes in subsistence economy, and the emergence of chiefdom and proto-state societies.

The earliest cultural phase discovered at Chogha Mish, the Archaic

Susiana, dates to 6,800 BCE.

Cultural phases much earlier than the basal levels of Chogha Mish were accidentally discovered in the nearby mound of Chogha Bonut. The continuation of the Archaic period thus will have to be sought at Chogha Mish.

The initial occupation of Chogha Mish is marked by the presence of the earlier painted-burnished variant and its developed version, the standard painted-burnished ware. Sometime during the Archaic Susiana phase 1, the painted-burnished variant completely disappeared.

The standard painted burnished ware

Ware was associated with other artefacts, for example, the tiny T-shaped figurines, which occur both in Susiana and Dehluran to the north.

Striking parallels can be found in the pottery and figurines from the distant sites in the Iranian central plateau. The T-shaped figurines are frequently interpreted as belonging to a Zagros complex but they have a wider distribution since we have closely similar material far to the northeast of Iran.

Architectural remains of this phase at Chogha Mish were inconclusive.

They consist of poorly preserved pisé and mud brick wall fragments, beaten earth surfaces and several cooking installations. The use of long bricks continued into this phase. As in the earlier and later phases, the floors of the cooking installations were covered with fire-cracked rocks. No change in the subsistence economy was noted from the previous phase.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, 'Chogha Mish', from a book entitled, 'Persian Antiques Splendor', edited by T. Stollner, R. Slotta, and A. Vatandoust, published by German Mining Museum. The photos were taken from the book.