

Raisi: Tourism 'accelerator' of economic development

Over 50% of global population have visa-free access to Iran: *Minister*

President Ebrahim Raisi emphasized the crucial role of tourism in boosting the economy of all countries.

He asserted that tourism is a sector with the potential to drive economic growth, emphasizing Iran's capacity to develop this aspect of its economy.

He made the remarks during the opening ceremony of the 17th International Exhibition of Tourism and Related Industries, which was attended by Secretary-General of UN World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili; Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami; and Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian.

Addressing the opening ceremony, Zarghami declared that the cancellation of visas for 33 countries now allows over 50% of the world's population to travel to Iran with just a single ticket. Zarghami praised the government's successful efforts in the tourism sector over the past two years.

Shalbafian announced a 52% growth in foreign tourist arrivals to the country during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2023, to January 20, 2024).

Shalbafian reported that 5.4 million foreign tourists visited Iran in the first 10 months of the current year.

The UN tourism chief announced that world tourism is gradually recovering from the impacts of COVID-19.

Pololikashvili said that in Iran, the number of tourists has in-

creased by 5% compared to the same period before the pandemic.

The UN official highlighted that global tourism has reached 84% of its pre-pandemic levels and is on a path to restoration.

The president underscored the importance of leveraging Iran's ancient civilization, cultural heritage, and diverse natural attractions to attract global visitors.

In his address, Raisi referred to verses from the Qur'an, stating that Islam encourages travel with study and reflection to enhance people's awareness of their predecessors' conditions.

President Raisi applauded the recent abolition of visas for citizens of 33 countries as a significant step toward attracting more tourists.

He discredited claims that reconsidering principles and foundations is necessary for activating tourism, asserting that Iran's attractions are compelling without compromising its values.

To further enhance tourism, Raisi highlighted the need for improved transportation, accommodation, and culinary offerings. Raisi urged officials to facilitate tourists' movement within the country, considering it a vital advertisement for attracting more visitors.

The president emphasized streamlining administrative processes and improving interactions with tourists as crucial factors in enhancing the country's tourism appeal.

Raisi stressed that tourism can play a pivotal role in conveying the correct image of the Islamic

Republic of Iran and countering negative media portrayals.

Referring to a reported 50% increase in tourist arrivals, the president urged an increase in incentives for tourism industry stakeholders.

He identified cultural heritage and handicrafts as integral components for tourism development, emphasizing the need to preserve and showcase them.

Raisi highlighted the potential of cultural, natural, and health tourism, citing Iran's prominence in medicine and medical products. He called for active promotion of technological tourism through science and technology parks.

Pilgrimage, according to Raisi, is another significant tourism capacity, urging officials to safeguard investors' capital and profits in the tourism sector.

The president concluded by advocating comprehensive planning to enhance the quality of each tourist's experience from origin to destination.

Visa waiver boosts tourism

The tourism minister highlighted the resumption of tourist visa issuance in November 2021, which had been halted for about 21 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite conservative approaches, the government's effective decision allowed for the resumption of visa issuance.

Zarghami emphasized the historic decision to unilaterally cancel visas, undertaken with the president's insight and executed in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With current statistics, over 50% of the global



President Ebrahim Raisi (R) and Secretary-General of UN World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili meet on February 12, 2024 on the sidelines of the 17th International Exhibition of Tourism and Related Industries being held at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds from February 12 to 15. president.ir

population can now travel to Iran without obtaining visas, experiencing the country's tourist attractions with just the purchase of a ticket.

He stated, "We have opened Iran's doors to the world, despite negative propaganda from enemies. However, to further open Iran's doors, proper tourism infrastructure must be prepared."

New programs

Shalbafian added that the exhibition featured 50 specialized programs, and concurrently with the 17th edition of the exhibition, 20 influencers entered the country to produce content in the tourism sector.

Shalbafian highlighted the signif-

icance of health tourism, mentioning that 1,300 square meters of space in the exhibition were dedicated to the tourism sector, and 70 hospitals actively participated in the event.

He pointed out the presence of foreign countries at the exhibition, with 12 countries owning booths, and 13 foreign delegations visiting. Additionally, 68 booths from various countries actively participated in the exhibition.

Restoration of world tourism

In both December and October, the number of Iranian tourists exceeded the figures from the corresponding period before the

virus outbreak, Pololikashvili said.

Pololikashvili also praised Iran's visa waiver for 33 countries, emphasizing that this move will facilitate travel and contribute to the growth of Iran's tourism sector.

Iran, with its rich cultural heritage and numerous attractions, welcomes visitors from around the world, he said.

He said that tourism plays a crucial role in Iran's economy, providing employment opportunities and fostering solidarity among people.

The international event that kicked off at Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds on February 12 will run until February 15.

Curtains down on 42nd Fajr International Film Festival

The 42nd Fajr International Film Festival concluded with a gala closing ceremony at the Milad tower in Tehran,

honoring films and artists. The wartime drama 'Majnoon,' directed by Mehdi Shamohammadi and pro-

duced by Owj Arts and Media Organization, received the Crystal Simorgh for the best film. The film depicts

Martyr Major General Mahdi Zeinoddin's courageous actions during the Iran-Iraq war, particularly on Majnoon Island, fajriff.com wrote.

During the festival's closing ceremony at Milad Tower on Sunday evening, Majid Entezami received the Crystal Simorgh for best composer for his work on 'Majnoon.' Behzad Khalaj and Shabnam Qorbani were awarded best supporting actor and actress for their roles in the same film.

Behrouz Afkhami secured the best director award for 'The Morning of the Execution,' which delves into the final moments of Tayyeb Haj Rezai and Esmail Rezai after the 1963 uprising. Arastou Khoshrazm won the best actor award for the film, and Maral Bani-Adam received the best actress award for her role in 'Parvin,' directed by Mohammadreza Varzi, depict-

ing the life of the renowned Persian poet Parvin E'tesami.


Kouhyar Kalari was honored as the best cinematographer for 'Summer of the Same Year' by Mahmoud Kalari, while Kamyab Amin Ashayeri and Mehrnoush Bayani won best set design and best costume design awards for their collaboration on the film.

Hassan Hassandoust received the best editor award for 'Parviz Khan,' directed by Ali Saqafi, who also received an honorable mention for best screenplay. In the New Outlook Section, 'Parviz Khan' was named the best first film, and Javad Ezzati received the Crystal Simorgh for the best director for his debut directorial 'Blood Alligator.' In the Cinema Salvation international section, the best film award went to 'Blaga's Lessons,' directed by Stephan Komandarev from



Bulgaria, narrating the story of a widow facing moral dilemmas after falling victim to telephone scammers. Alejandro Rojas and Juan Sebastián Vasquez from Spain were honored with the best director award for 'Upon Entry,' portraying the challenges faced by Diego, a Venezuelan urbanist, and Elena, a contemporary dancer, at Newark Airport while starting a new life in the United States. 'The Best Century of My

Life' from Italy earned director and writer Alessandro Bardani the Crystal Simorgh for the best script, and Angelo Rallis received the award for outstanding artistic contribution for 'Mighty Afarin: In Time of Flood,' a co-production from Greece and Bangladesh. In this section, Mahmoud Kalari from Iran received the special jury award for his film 'Summer of the Same Year.'

 **Mohammad Ali Rajabi**
 Cartoonist

