

Zilu, a labor-intensive artwork woven by skillful masters



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Iran is no stranger when it comes to traditional handicrafts. In fact, it boasts several cities registered by the World Crafts Council, an affiliate of UNESCO. Meybod, a desert city in Yazd Province, known for its *zilu*, is one of the latest of these to join the bunch. While most people are familiar with the highly-regarded Persian rug, fewer have heard of *zilu*.

What is zilu?

Zilu (also spelled ziloo or zilou) is a traditional floor covering that dates back thousands of years. Unlike Persian rugs with their elaborate patterns, *zilu* is quite simple. But don't let its simplicity deceive you. It is a labor-intensive work of art, woven by masters who rely on nothing more than their imagination to create the various motifs, iranvegantravel.com wrote.

Zilu is often mistaken for *kilim*, but one of the underlying differences is that *zilu* is woven from organic cotton, whereas wool is used for *kilim*. Traditionally, this cotton was obtained from surrounding fields in the region, though these days it may come from elsewhere. For warmer regions closer to the desert, cotton is ideal as it's cool in the summer and warm in winter.

Plants such as madder, pomegran-

ate skin, and walnut shell are used to create natural dyes for *zilu*, which typically comes in two color combinations – blue and white, blue and yellow, and green and orange are among the most common color combinations, though reds are also used. The winning combination of organic cotton and natural plant dyes makes this traditional Iranian handicraft a 100 percent vegan souvenir option.

What are the common patterns?

The most common and traditional motifs are those of cypress trees, geometric patterns, and a key-like pattern. However, skilled weavers can create some 60 different designs. Words or special messages can also be woven upon request. *Zilu* is woven so clean that the front and back are indistinguishable and, therefore, it is reversible.

Zilu museum and workshops

Located in the Shah Abbasi Caravanserai, the Zilu Museum of Meybod is dedicated to the history of this craft. It leads visitors through the first steps of picking and sorting the cotton to dyeing the threads to weaving the *zilu*. You'll witness some fine examples of *zilu* here, dating back to the 16th century.

While the museum provides valuable insight into the process and history, you are highly recommend to visit a *zilu* workshop, where you cannot only watch nimble master weavers hard at work but also experience just how much time and effort goes into creating each one. You'll watch in awe at how deftly the weaver's fingers move and how patterns are transferred onto the loom from the weaver's imagination. We guarantee you'll have a whole new respect for *zilu* and the love that goes into weaving each and every one.

Where can I buy zilu?

No doubt you'll want to take a piece of *zilu* back home. As Meybod has been named the World City for *Zilu*, you can ideally purchase one from the city itself. There are many stores around town and in the caravanserai, including one attached to the *zilu* museum. Workshops also offer *zilu* for purchase; however, keep in mind that some only create special orders and therefore only weave specific patterns upon request.

In addition to floor coverings, *zilu* have also been turned into other products such as car seat coverings, prayer rugs, cushions and other home furnishings, so you'll have a variety of options to choose from.



Natural marvels of Rageh Canyon in Kerman Province

Iranica Desk

Undoubtedly, the pristine beauty of untouched nature is a major draw for visitors to Iran. Kerman, a sprawling province, boasts a plethora of stunning natural landscapes, including the Lut Desert, Meymand cultural landscape, and the lesser-known yet breathtaking Rageh Canyon.

Situated approximately 28 kilometers outside Rafsanjan, Rageh Canyon has been sculpted by the forces of nature over millennia, with wind, water, and soil erosion contributing to its unique formation. Spanning 20km, a trek through this gorge allows you to unravel its ancient narrative, with each turn revealing a new spectacle – from imposing boulders to towering pillars and narrow passages, presenting a landscape unlike any other in Iran.

Beyond its natural wonders, Rageh Canyon is also a haven for wildlife enthusiasts. Birdwatchers will delight in spotting eagles soaring above, their nests perched high in secluded corners. Pheasants and partridges are among the many avian residents that call this awe-inspiring canyon home. With minimal light pollution, Rageh Canyon offers an ideal setting for stargazing, though nighttime visits are best



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undertaken with a knowledgeable local guide. The canyon's hiking trail, particularly the northern route, is relatively flat and suitable for most visitors in good health. In contrast, the southern

path features more exotic natural formations but presents challenges such as massive boulders obstructing the way, requiring skilled rock-climbing abilities in certain sections.

For safety reasons, inexperienced hikers should avoid these more treacherous areas. Optimal times for trekking through Rageh Canyon are during the spring and autumn, with the latter

season offering warmer temperatures within the canyon itself. A sturdy pair of hiking boots is essential, as some parts of the canyon may involve traversing through water.