

# Nature's beauty and rural life in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province

## Roneh River, nature's hidden gem near Basht



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The Roneh River, originating from the 3,000-meter high Khamin Mountain, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, offers a tranquil and dreamy setting for a multi-day journey in the heart of nature. Situated 10 kilometers from the city of Basht, and near the road connecting the southern provinces of the country to Fars Province, this beautiful land resembles a paradise adorned with lush greenery, fragrant wild thyme, colorful flowers, and the pleasant air of spring.

The cool shade provided by walnut, fig, and mulberry trees, coupled with the picturesque views of oak forests, creates a delightful atmosphere that can serve as a

memorable and unforgettable destination for nature enthusiasts. The presence of two famous large caves further highlights the artistic beauty of nature in this area.

Tourists selecting Roneh River as their travel destination for the first time often find themselves captivated by the natural beauty of this pristine location, turning it into their permanent haven for future travels.

Ismail Tavakoli, who is involved in tourism in Basht, highlighted the significance of the ecotourism lodge nestled in the heights of Khamin Mountain, offering a blend of tourism, mountaineering, and traditional cuisine in the region. Enthusiasts of mountain climbing can easily access this lodge with the guidance of tourism experts after a delight-

ful one-hour trek through the mountains. The ecotourism lodge not only provides a charming and authentic ambiance but also serves guests with local delicacies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Tavakoli further explained that the lodge offers a variety of daily meals featuring local butter, eggs, honey, and soup to ensure a memorable culinary experience for visitors. Saeed Talebipour, the director general of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, underscored the significance of nearby attractions for overnight accommodations in the city. He highlighted, "Roneh River, in close proximity to Basht and the Gachsaran-Shiraz Highway,

stands out as a distinctive destination for nature enthusiasts." He elaborated, "The presence of an ecotourism lodge and amenities like platforms, bathrooms, and other facilities, coupled with the scenic beauty of Roneh River, have established this area as one of the most sought-after leisure spots in southern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, particularly during the late winter, spring, and summer seasons." In reference to the diverse programs for Nowruz (Iranian New Year, March 20-April 1) holidays in Basht, he noted, "Organizing exhibitions showcasing handicrafts and local souvenirs, along with Nowruz festivities, are the primary scheduled events for this year's Nowruz celebrations in the county."

The recreational area of Roneh River, situated in the southeast of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, 110 kilometers from Yasuj, the provincial capital, stands out as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the southern region, attracting numerous visitors each year, particularly during the spring season. Travelers opting for the banks of Roneh River and the rugged mountains not only get to indulge in sightseeing and exploration amidst the stunning landscape but also get a glimpse of the idyllic rural life in southern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. The sight of mud-brick houses and thatched roofs adorned with tree branches in the villages of Basht evokes nostalgia and appeals to many tourists more than the opulence

of luxury hotels.

Thatched roofs, locally known as *parchin* or *chapar*, represent the traditional craftsmanship of the villagers in this province, providing a cool refuge. Additionally, traditional village life in this region showcases the use of tools like small mills for grinding wheat and other food items, along with the utilization of musk bags to keep water or yogurt cool.

The allure of village life extends beyond these elements, as the indigenous traditional music, the attire of hardworking rural residents, and their relentless pursuit of livelihood have turned the villages of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province into a premier destination for Nowruz tourism.

## Influence of Islamic art and craftsmanship in 19th century Vienna

Broadly speaking, the 19th century witnessed a slow economic rise in Europe. Much of the rest of the world, including several Islamic countries, were to a large part integrated into the colonial empires of European powers. The Austro-Hungarian Empire possessed no overseas colonies and showed no obvious interest in acquiring any. The empire's status meant that it was a comparatively neutral trading partner for Persia, which held a relationship with the Habsburg Dynasty that dated back to the 16th century.

At that time, the Habsburgs tried to forge alliances with the Safavid Empire against their common enemy, the Ottomans. From around 1600 onwards embassies were exchanged between Vienna and Persia and friendly relations continued between the Habsburgs and the later Persian dynasties.

Although politically more and more marginalised and economically weak, skilled craftsmanship of the Islamic world continued to be appreciated in Europe. During the Biedermeier period, for instance, there was a fascination on behalf of female consumers with cashmere shawls from north India, which were then produced in Europe imitating Indian models. The Museum für angewandte Kunst includes several valuable pieces that derive from 19th-century Viennese producers. Not only were objects from the wider Persian world admired in Vienna, but they were occasionally also copied there, just like the Mamluk glass vessels by the celebrated Viennese glass manufacture J. & L. Lobmeyr.

In addition, carpets from the Islamic world con-

tinued to be revered and during the 19th century they furnished countless Viennese homes. The exhibitions of the celebrated painter Hans Makart (1840-1884) in the Wienmuseum and the Belvedere have provided a notion of what a fashionable fin-de-siècle salon looked like. In such an environment Ottoman and Persian carpets were abundant.

Industrial production heavily influenced the development of 19th-century European decorative arts. Thanks to new technologies many objects were mass-produced and could be sold at more competitive prices than handmade works. Therefore more people than ever before had access to decorative objects. As a result, during the second half of the 19th century a supposed decline of taste proliferated and was lamented in Europe, especially during the world exhibitions. In this context traditional craftsmanship from the Islamic world was seen very positively and as such played a vital role in the Viennese world exhibition of 1873 where a "Persischer Pavillon" — a space especially installed for the exhibition displaying products of Persian craftsmanship — was featured prominently.

The organizers placed a special focus on the representation of the arts that were considered to be "Oriental" because of their high quality and because they could be used as models by the Austro-Hungarian industry. Many museums acquired art at the 1873 fair as they had at previous events in London and Paris. Parts of the famous Hamzename (1558-1573), a splendid Mughal Indian manuscript commissioned by the Great Mughal Akbar, were sent from Per-

sia for the Vienna fair, and were subsequently purchased by the Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

Lavishly illustrated, this masterwork recounts the history of Amir Hamze (PBUH), an uncle of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and remains today one of the masterpieces of the Museum für angewandte Kunst. Interestingly, the organizer of the Persian exhibition was Jakob Eduard Polak (1818-1891), an Austro-Bohemian physician working in Persia where he reformed medical institutions.

As a consequence of the successful display of the so-called Oriental art at the world's fair, which was attended by Nasir al-Din Shah of Persia (ruled from 1848-96), the Orientmuseum was founded in 1874-75 as a private institution. It was largely the invention of its founder and long-term director Arthur von Scala (1845-1909), and it became only the second museum in Europe dedicated entirely to the arts of what was then perceived as the Orient, including East Asia and the Islamic world. In 1907 large parts of the museum collection were integrated into the Museum für Kunst und Industrie.

The later 19th century also experienced the creation of Vienna's large museums into which both the imperial and other private collections were integrated. Objects from the Islamic world, thus also modern-day Iran, that had existed in Vienna for centuries were distributed to the new museums, namely the Kunsthistorische Museum and the Naturhistorische Museum (opened in 1889). The creation of these museums was motivated by an aim to educate



A Persian carpet in a Vienna's museum

the subjects of the emperor, at this point Franz Joseph I, and to show them his splendours. By publicly displaying his possessions and sharing his knowledge with the people of Austria didactically, he became, in a way, the first teacher of his subjects.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter titled, 'Persian Art in 19th-century Vienna', from a book titled, 'The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia' edited by Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.