

Saholan Cave, one of the most exceptional in Iran

Iranica Desk

If you are considering a trip shortly and contemplating a visit to a natural wonder, we highly recommend adding Saholan Cave to the top of your list of destinations. You will be amazed by the beauty it offers.

Saholan Cave is a unique attraction situated in Mahabad, West Azarbaijan Province, within a village bearing the same name. Caves represent hidden worlds within mountains and beneath the earth's surface, often concealing astonishing beauty that may not be apparent at first glance, but stepping inside will surely captivate you. Saholan is renowned as one of the most exceptional caves and the second-largest water cave in Iran. Its history dates back to the Cretaceous period, which spanned from 145 million to 66 million years ago.

Every corner of this limestone cave is adorned with captivating sights. Stunning stalactites embellish the ceiling and walls of Saholan, alongside various limestone formations sculpted by water erosion, such as shapes resembling mermaids, octopuses, snakes, turtles, sea creatures, elephant's feet, lions, and grape clusters. These formations serve as

perfect subjects for capturing memorable photographs.

One of the most thrilling activities within this cave is boating on its lakes and ponds. With just a glance, you can uncover the hidden secrets within these crystal-clear waters that allow visibility for several meters. Boating through the lakes and traversing the corridors of Saholan Cave while listening to enchanting sounds will create unforgettable memories of your visit to this remarkable place.

Saholan Cave boasts two entrances: one with 178 steps and the other with 107 steps. Visitors enter through one entrance and exit through the other. Descending these steps leads you to a depth of 30 meters underground. As you near the cave floor, the air pressure rises, oxygen levels drop, and humidity reaches 78 percent.

The cave offers the opportunity for boating on three ponds or lakes within specified boundaries. The average depth of the ponds is 15 meters, with the deepest part reaching 31 meters.

Residents

It might be interesting to know that the inhabitants of this cave include

pigeons, leeches, bats, and tiny aquatic creatures. Pigeons have many holes for nesting and living in Saholan Cave, while bats have built nests in various parts of the cave. Due to the darkness and absence of light, no algae grow in the waters of Saholan Lake, with only microscopic organisms present.

How was Saholan Cave discovered? The famous story of Saholan dates back to 1890 when a French archaeologist named Jacques de Morgan entered the cave with the help of local people and sketched a map of it, which remains significant after all these years.

Jacques mentions this place in his book "Geography of Iran," even though it is not seen in other sources. Subsequently, during World War II, an English group and in 1996, Iranian cave explorers continued their studies. From the main hall, the large hall, and the entrance corridor, pottery belonging to the Parthian and Ilkhanid periods was found. Since 2000, this cave has been welcoming tourists and is registered on Iran's Natural Heritage List, being part of the protected areas under the Environmental Protection Organization.



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Fahraj village in Yazd Province, chosen as one of the eight nominees from Iran for the prestigious Best Tourism Villages of 2024 project presented to the World Tourism Organization, is undergoing evaluation based on its allure, infrastructure, value chain, and sustainability as a village.

History

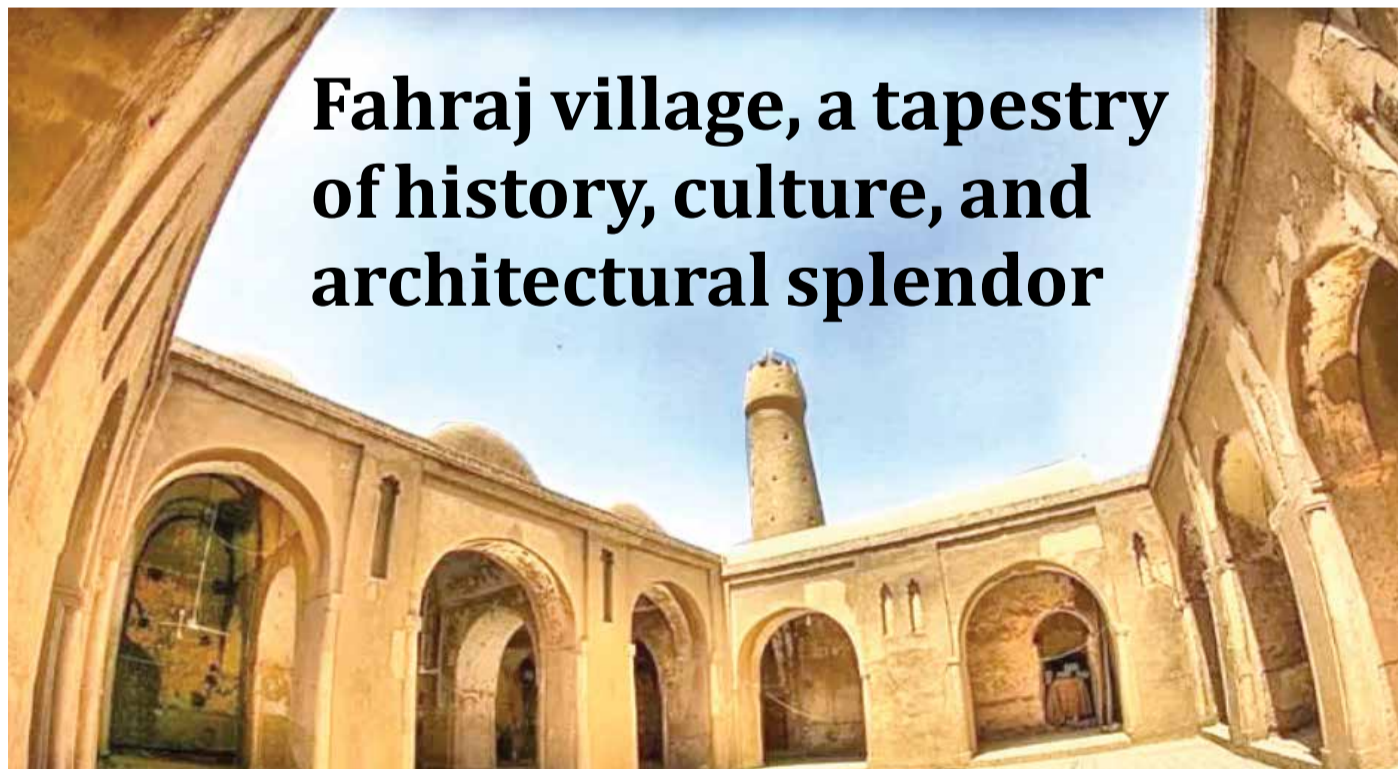
With a history that traces back to pre-Islamic times, Fahraj village is believed to have roots dating over 8,000 years. It was once among the four principal districts of the ancient city of Yazd and retained its prominence in Yazd until the 13th century.

Handicrafts and souvenirs

The traditional craft of *kar-bafi*, known for its intricate weaving techniques that produce exquisite textiles, thrives in Fahraj village. Given the renown of Yazd Province in carpet weaving, Fahraj has the potential to become a center for establishing handicraft workshops and eco-museums to exhibit and market items like fine fabrics.

Social-cultural features

The inhabitants of Fahraj village are Shia Muslims who observe religious ceremonies annually. During the lunar month of Muharram, which commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS), the third Imam of Shia Muslims, and his companions, the villagers participate in the *nakhl-gardani* ritual. *Nakhl*, symbolizing the Imam's coffin, is carried from one location to another in a symbolic gesture.



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Fahraj village, a tapestry of history, culture, and architectural splendor

Architecture

In Fahraj village, like other settlements in the desert province

of Yazd, most buildings are constructed using traditional architecture suited to the warm

and arid climate of the region. The village boasts two distinct architectural styles: the ancient

village layout, centered around the main mosque in Fahraj, follows a semi-concentric and

linear design, while the modern village envelops the ancient core and its historic structures. Houses in Fahraj predominantly utilize materials like mud, clay, and brick, with some preserving their historical character by incorporating wind catchers on their roofs. The village's narrow alleys feature semi-covered passageways called *sabat*, enhancing the architectural charm and offering shade to pedestrians, a practical solution for the desert heat.

Attractions

Jaame Mosque of Fahraj: Regarded as one of Iran's oldest mosques, the main structure of the Jaame Mosque dates back to the Sassanid era before being converted into a mosque during the Islamic period.

Fahraj Castle: Initially built alongside the mosque, the present facade and embellishments of Fahraj Castle reflect the architectural styles of the 10th and 11th centuries AH (15th and 16th centuries CE). The castle's four-sided layout includes four round towers at the corners, each with two floors and a distinct pointed arch design.

Cistern of Fahraj Hosseinieh: It is an ancient site in Fahraj, with origins possibly tracing back to pre-Islamic times, attracting visitors keen on exploring the rich historical heritage of Yazd.

Historical Complex of Fahraj Martyrs: Dating back to the 9th century AH (14th century CE), this complex, located about 30 kilometers northeast of Yazd, encompasses a tomb, a school, and a monastery, acknowledged as one of Iran's national heritage sites.