

# Serene beauty of Fandoqlu Forest in Ardebil Province

## Iranica Desk

Fandoqlu Forest is considered one of the most beautiful attractions in Ardebil Province for nature enthusiasts. If you long for the fresh air of a valley teeming with flowers such as chamomile and a pristine, untouched forest, to immerse yourself in this beauty with the freshness and purity of the air, and to revitalize your weary body and soul, a visit to this enchanting and pristine natural wonder is a must.

Fandoqlu Forest is situated in the south of Namin, covering an area of approximately 16,000 hectares. Given its vast expanse, the tourist offerings of Fandoqlu are incredibly diverse, with some of the finest nature hiking trails in Iran found within this forest.

The abundance of hazelnut trees in this forest has earned it the name Fandoqlu Forest (Fandoqlu means hazelnut in Persian).

**Meshe Sui Hot Spring:** Located in the heart of the forest at an altitude of 630 meters, near the villages of Aladizgeh and

Gildeh, Meshe Sui Hot Spring is renowned for its therapeutic properties.

**Chamomile Flowers Valley:** Fandoqlu Forest transforms into a stunning carpet of chamomile flowers from spring through early summer. The annual Chamomile Flower Festival coincides with the World Day of Flowers and Plants on June 14th and 15th. This festival attracts both domestic and international tourists to this pristine region, known for its natural reserve of medicinal plants. Spanning several hundred hectares of chamomile meadows, the festival is organized by the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Ardebil Province. Skilled local artists and craftsmen showcase heritage items like rugs, mattresses, saddlebags, and traditional woolen blankets at the event.

**Flora and Fauna:** In the Fandoqlu Forest, 19 species of forest trees have been identified, including rare varieties like hazelnut, maple, ash and oak, enhancing the region's value.

The area is also home to wildlife such as foxes, wolves, brown bears, and martens, as well as birds like magpies, partridges, golden eagles, and hooded crows.

The valleys of Fandoqlu Forest boast one of the world's most beautiful and rarest flowers, the *Lilium ledebourii* presenting great potential for tourism development. Chamomile, a fragrant annual plant reaching heights of 20 to 40 centimeters, grows naturally in fields, valleys, gardens, and predominantly in the Fandoqlu Forest. Fandoqlu Forest is where the dry and cold climate of Ardebil Province meets the warm and humid climate of Gilan Province. As a result, the forest is often shrouded in fog throughout the year, with low-level cloud movements observable even on the hottest summer days. The elevated location contributes to a moderate and cool climate overall.

## Accommodation

Tourists visiting Fandoqlu Forest can stay at a small accom-

modation facility offering overnight stays. For those seeking a more adventurous experience, camping in the picturesque surroundings of Fandoqlu is also an option.

## Recreational activities

One of the standout recreational activities in Fandoqlu Forest is the grass ski slope. This beautiful slope rises to 1700 meters above sea level and meets all necessary standards. The Fandoqlu-Heyran Cable Car is another thrilling attraction in the area, capable of transporting 1,350 people per hour along a 1752-meter route.

## Best time to visit

Thanks to its elevation, Fandoqlu Forest enjoys a pleasantly cool summer and a cold, humid winter. Situated in the cold regions of Ardebil Province, this forest offers a refreshing escape from the summer heat. During the spring and fall seasons, Fandoqlu Forest showcases a variety of flowers, including tulips and chamomile, adding to its natural beauty.



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Shushtar, a city in Khuzestan Province, is home to over 100 historical water structures that have stood the test of time. Among these structures is the Lashkar Bridge, one of Shushtar's standout attractions, originally constructed for water management. Beyond its primary function, the bridge was also intended to facilitate communication between Shushtar and neighboring settlements. While the main structure of the bridge hails from ancient Iran, its horseshoe arches exhibit architectural features typical of the Safavid era.

The Lashkar Bridge stands as one of the most well-preserved remnants from the Sassanid period and is a highlight of Khuzestan Province. Spanning 124 meters in length and rising eight meters high, the bridge is situated outside the Lashkar Gate. Its construction aimed to enhance connectivity between Shushtar and other provinces and villages to the south.

The Lashkar Bridge is constructed from stone, sand, and Sarooj mortar and originally featured 13 arches, with 11 still standing today. This robust structure underwent renovation and reconstruction during the Safavid era. Unfortunately, five of its arches were destroyed in the Qajar period, and due to the high restoration costs, the city's ruler opted not to repair them. Consequently, locals had to improvise by using temporary barriers to uphold communication with other provinces, but this makeshift solution proved ineffective as the barriers eventually succumbed to pressure.

In recent years, a leisure complex has been developed alongside the Lashkar Bridge, significantly boosting tourism in the region. Travelers from various cities in Khuzestan Province

## Timeless charm of Shushtar's Lashkar Bridge



frequent this recreational spot for weekend retreats. The complex's design incorporates the flow of the river, which not only enhances its aesthetics but also helps maintain a cool atmosphere. This natural feature results in a temperature differential of approximately 10 degrees Celsius between the interior of the complex and the outside environment.

The Lashkar Bridge, along with 15 historical sites forming the "Historical Hydraulic System

of Shushtar," is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This bridge holds a crucial place in the history of Iran and Shushtar. It is known as the entrance point for the Iranian army, as it facilitated their passage into Iranian territory after the Arab invasion of Iran. Subsequently, the city fell under Mongol rule during the Islamic centuries.

Shushtar is an ancient city with a history dating back 10,000 years. Situated near the

Bakhtiari Mountains, the city stretches from Dezful in the west to Masjed Soleyman in the east, indicating its deep roots in the history and civilization of Elam.

Shushtar experienced significant growth during the Safavid era. Vakhushti Khan, a ruler of that time, took charge of the city and undertook substantial efforts to enhance its development and population. Historical records indicate that Vakhushti Khan oversaw the renovation

of the Lashkar Bridge, a project that laid a strong foundation for the city. Today, various sections of the Lashkar Bridge showcase architectural elements from the Safavid era.

The best time to visit the Lashkar Bridge in Shushtar is during the spring and autumn seasons. The weather in Shushtar during these two seasons is moderate and the water level of the river rises, enhancing the beauty of the surrounding nature near the bridge.



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