

## Uzbekistan welcomes more Iranian tourists: *Minister*

Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Aziz Abdulkhakov has said Iranian are always welcome to his country adding that increasing the number of flights between two countries and eliminating the visa requirements are very important in witnessing a rise in the number of visitors from Iran.

Abdulkhakov, who is also the minister of tourism and cultural heritage of the country thanked the Iranian government on removing visa requirements for Uzbek nationals to visit Iran noting that "Now, Uzbek citizens can very easily visit Iran to enjoy the Iranian cultural heritage and Iranian resorts.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in Khiva in Khorazm Region on June 2, he said that Iranian government put a lot of efforts to develop a touristic sector.

"We have already discussed the issue to eliminate the visa requirements for Iranian citizens and the discussions are still underway. Of course, it takes time before we should solve some technical issues. For us, Iranian tourists, are very important," the Uzbek minister stated.

In the conference in Khiva, we



discussed many issues related to digitalization of tourism, preserving cultural heritage, green tourism, ecological tourism, sustainable and resilient tourism as well as the future of tourism, he noted.

"In general, I can say this event was very successful. We had

a very fruitful and productive discussion with my colleagues from different countries, bilateral and the multilateral. But as you know, it's just our initial steps."

There is a huge potential to develop tourism among Muslim countries, the minister said

adding that as a chair country, we propose to establish a financial fund, which will help us to finance big projects aim to develop big touristic projects.

He went on to explain that the project contains constructing touristic complexes, which will include not only hotels or

restaurants, but also some cultural heritage and the cultural institutions like museums and galleries.

We are committed to collaborate and cooperate with all Muslim countries to develop so-called Ziarat tourism (visiting religious sites) which allow us to visit the travelers and the pilgrims from all Muslim countries to visit the holy places in different countries, including Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan hosted seven million tourists in 2023 as the country expects 10 million tourists for the current year; he said elsewhere in his remarks putting Uzbekistan's target for 2030 to attract at least 15 million visitors.

At the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in Khiva, it was announced that Dakar (the capital of Senegal) will become a tourist city of the Islamic world in 2025, Cairo, the capital of Egypt in 2026, and Lahore of Pakistan in 2027. Tabriz, in northwestern Iranian province of East Azarbaijan was named as the capital of Islamic tourism 2018 by the ICTM.

The 13th session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers of Tourism will be held in Qatar in 2026.

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## Iranian athlete makes hat-trick in Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games

Iran's strongest man Reza Gheytsi has registered a hat-trick after winning the championship of Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games hosted by Khiva, Uzbekistan.

The tournament, which took place on June 1-2, featured a diverse range of participant athletes from 17 countries, including Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

The event was organized in cooperation with the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the World Strongmen Federation (WSF), and the administration of the Khorezm region.

The tournament's program included various weightlifting competitions as well as challenging sections such as "Aqtash Kharsangi", "Obkach", "Towing the Amudarya boat", "Fireball throwing", "Towing the Moinoq anchor", and "Jalaliddin Manguberdi and Amir Temur sword fights".

The event also showcased Uzbekistan's tourism potential and opportunities on a global scale, highlighting the growing popularity of niche sports tourism.

Activities like Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games OIC Open, not only showcase the strength and skills of athletes but also promote regional and international cooperation in the development of sports tourism.

Gheytsi, who participated in the competition in recent two years, succeeded to defend his

title, making a hat-trick.

The Iranian athlete received his gold medallion and cup from Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdulkhakov Aziz in closing ceremony on June 2. Pahlavon Mahmud, known in Iran as Pourya-ye Vali, was a pahlavani wrestling champion, Sufi teacher and poet from the 14th century, famous for his exceptional strength. He became the patron saint of the city of Khiva.

He lived during the years of Mongol rule. He achieved great fame at the time both as a professional wrestler and as a poet-philosopher.

A special feature of Pahlavon Mahmud's school was the education of the students' minds through the martial art of wrestling, a discipline with which he made a name for himself as far away as Central Asia, Iran and India. In Persian as well as in Old Uzbek and Hindi, the word Pahlavon became a synonym for a wrestler, hero, or champion.

After his death he was venerated as a hero in Persia and Central Asia. In Iran, the nickname Pourya-ye Vali has been attributed to Pahlavon Mahmud.

One legend says that the location of his tomb is in Khoys of Iran, but another legends says that Pahlavon Mahmud was buried in his own workshop in Khiva, Uzbekistan, which was transformed into the Pahlavon Mahmud Mausoleum.



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