

Embracing the cultural and economic heritages of Tabriz Bazaar



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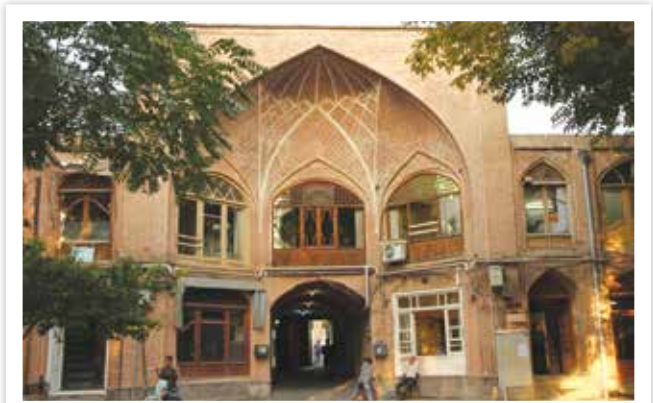
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The city of Tabriz, the capital of East Azarbaijan Province, is renowned for its unique historical attractions and invaluable intangible heritage, earning it the title of the City of Historical Houses in Iran. Among its treasures, the historic Tabriz Bazaar stands out as one of the most significant and largest covered bazaars in the world, playing a vital economic, cultural, historical, and social role in the region.

With its intricate structure and stunning architecture, the Tabriz Bazaar symbolizes Iranian art and culture. Home to over 5,500 shops, 26 caravanserais, 20 corridors, 30 smaller sections, 33 passageways and 28 mosques, it ranks among the largest commercial and architectural complexes globally. Its strategic location along the Silk Road has historically made the Tabriz Bazaar a hub for trade and the exchange of diverse goods, chtn.ir wrote.

As a traditional Iranian market, the Tabriz Bazaar features distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other historical bazaars. The use of brick and plaster, complemented by exquisite arches, domes, and tile decorations, reflects the artistry and taste of Iranian architects. Moreover, the bazaar incorporates public spaces such as mosques, baths, and schools, highlighting its consideration for social and cultural dimensions alongside commercial activities.

Given the historical and cultural significance of the Tabriz Bazaar, there is

a pressing need for focused attention on the preservation and restoration of these invaluable structures. Additionally, further research into the history, architecture, and socio-economic roles of the Tabriz Bazaar could deepen our understanding of this unparalleled complex.

Naser Rezai, the director of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism's Department for Tour and Natural Heritage Groups, emphasized the importance of conducting research and addressing tourism issues: "The benefit of the local community from development programs is a crucial factor in their success, and for sustainability, we must also consider environmental capacities. Moreover, in the realm of environmental design and man-made attractions, the significance of engaging with existing tourism sites becomes even more pronounced. This necessitates foundational studies and attention to infrastructure.

"It is important to note that tourism attractions only hold value when they are transformed into tangible properties, which is achieved through precise planning. Tourism impacts not only the local economy but also the security and cultural development of the environment," he said.

He noted that today, Tabriz is recognized as one of Iran's major cities, making strides toward development while preserving its historical and cultural values. With a population exceeding 1.5 million, Tabriz stands as a significant industrial, commercial, and cultural hub in the country. The

city plays a vital role in the national economy and scientific advancement, hosting universities, research centers, and large factories.

However, maintaining the cultural heritage of Tabriz, particularly its historical bazaar, should be viewed not only as a national responsibility but also as an investment in attracting tourists and ensuring sustainable urban development. Further research in this area can enhance our understanding and protection of this invaluable heritage.

Seyyed Ramin Asbaqi, the head of Tabriz's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, highlighted the unique potential of East Azarbaijan Province — especially Tabriz — in introducing this proud ancient city to younger generations.

He stated, "Tabriz Bazaar, as a UNESCO World Heritage site, represents a significant asset. Additionally, the intangible cultural heritage, along with tangible sites like globally registered caravanserais, the first global tourism village, the Arasbaran forests, and the designation of Tabriz as a World Craft City for Carpet Weaving, showcases valuable historical homes, special sweets, and a rich culinary diversity. All of these factors indicate the immense potential of East Azarbaijan Province, particularly Tabriz, to be recognized as a national and global tourism destination."

"East Azarbaijan boasts a rich cultural and civilizational heritage, featuring historical landmarks such as the Tabriz Bazaar, St. Stephanos Church, the Blue Mosque, and the Ali Shah

Citadel. Additionally, it is home to a vibrant culture of Ashiq music, carpet weaving, beautiful handicrafts, and religious ceremonies, establishing it as one of Iran's most important tourist destinations. The province attracts many domestic and foreign tourists with its stunning natural landscapes, including the Arasbaran forests and Lake Urmia, along with its unique cultural and linguistic diversity," he said.

Seyyed Alireza Qahari, head of the Association of Iranian Architectures, emphasized the importance of designating a province as a "Province of the Year" to promote the historical, social, and cultural potentials of its various regions and to familiarize young people with the attractions of each province.

He remarked, "this initiative, which began in 2007 has provided a unique opportunity to showcase the attractions, heritage, civilizational, cultural, and tourism features of that province." East Azarbaijan Province was selected as the eighteenth province by the Iranology Committee of the association.

"After enduring natural disasters such as devastating earthquakes, the Tabriz Bazaar has been repeatedly reconstructed through the dedication and efforts of the people of Tabriz, returning to its former glory and prosperity. These efforts reflect the deep cultural and communal significance of the bazaar, as locals view it not just as a marketplace, but as an integral part of their identity and history, which they have lovingly restored. The Tabriz

Bazaar serves as the beating heart of the city, symbolizing the unbreakable bond between its people and their cultural heritage.

Hossein Esmaeili Sangari, a faculty member of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and former president of the Tabriz Bazaar's World Heritage Site, highlighted the notable features of the bazaar, noting its inscription as a World Heritage Site due to its significant criteria. This recognition underscores the monument's immense potential on a global scale. The developmental trends of the Tabriz Bazaar throughout various periods — especially following the severe earthquakes — demonstrate its resilience. The bazaar has consistently managed to regain its identity after these devastating events, illustrating its vital role in social interactions and in shaping the urban landscape and quality of life for its inhabitants.

Khosrow Rafiei, head of the Association of Public Relations, commented on the historical bazaar's social significance, saying that the bazaar has been the largest hub for communication among people, facilitating face-to-face interactions.

In addition to its main role as a venue for financial transactions, the bazaar holds special value by fostering connections among people. Before the foundation of the public relation department, they were intrinsically present in the large bazaars of Iran, where people, alongside trade and commerce, engaged in mutual problem-solving, reciprocal communication, and information-sharing.