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# Unveiling tourism potential of Zanzan Province

## Iranica Desk

Zanzan Province is located in the northwest part of the country, and many people pass through this province to reach their destinations. This province has unparalleled and unique capacities in various sectors, especially in the field of cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts. According to experts and authorities, these specific and sometimes astonishing capacities have not been introduced to the public as they should be, and this issue requires more attention.



● Soltaniyeh Dome



● Katleh Khur Cave



● Mahneshan Colored Mountains



● Grand Bazaar of Zanzan



● A garden in Khorramdarreh

## Historical significance

Statistics show that more than 2,000 historical and natural sites have been identified in Zanzan Province, of which 925 have been registered on Iran's National Heritage List. Additionally, Zanzan Province is home to numerous valuable archaeological sites, with landmarks such as the Soltaniyeh Dome, the largest brick dome in the world, and the Grand Bazaar of Zanzan, one of the longest covered bazaars in Iran, standing out among them. The existence of six salt men dating back 2,700 years, the Sangi Caravanserai (Stone Caravanserai) from the Safavid era, the seven-story Katleh Khur Cave in Khodabandeh dating back 120 million years, the Mahneshan Colored Mountains as a natural attraction, as well as historical bridges, tombs, baths, and mosques, along with exquisite handicrafts, are among the other tourism capacities of this province. Experiencing them is truly rewarding for any traveler.

## Tourism events and growth

Deputy head of Zanzan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization stated that 44 tourism events are held in Zanzan throughout the year, with 22 of them registered in the national calendar of tourism events. Davood Abayan emphasized the positive impact of these events on neighboring provinces such as West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan, adding that Zanzan is considered one of the leading provinces in hosting tourism events in the northwest region. This official noted that this year, the number of tourists choosing Zanzan Province as their travel destination has increased.

He mentioned that the capacity of beds in the province's accommodation centers was fully occupied this summer, a level of occupancy that has not been seen before. It

indicates the development of the tourism sector and the benefits of tourism for the local economy. Abayan said, "We strive to effectively showcase the province's offerings at the national level through structured planning and hosting various tourism events in national, regional, and local dimensions." He further stated that fortunately, this goal has largely been achieved in the province, and on the other hand, the risk of tourism investment has decreased in the region. This is important as it could lead to not only the creation of added value but also the enhancement of tourism infrastructure in the province. He mentioned that the provincial investment technical committee meets every two weeks to issue preliminary approvals for investment requests, indicating investor interest in the tourism sector of Zanzan Province.

## Investment opportunities

Head of Zanzan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department stated that the Grand Bazaar of Zanzan, the World Heritage Site of the Soltaniyeh Dome, and the gardens of Khorramdarreh and Abhar are among the main attractions of this province. Mehdi Baqeri added that being located on a major northwest transit route, the existence of highways, proximity to eight important provinces, the availability of a railway and airport, suitable transportation facilities, especially buses, access to land for creating tourism infrastructure, and the beautiful nature of the province's villages are other advantages of this province.

## Challenges in tourism development

This official referred to the challenges facing the tourism sector in the province and said that the lack of up-to-date, thoughtful, and

creative management in the tourism sector, the absence of consultancy and attraction of new investments, the lack of innovative proposals to attract both foreign and domestic investors, and the creation of income and added value for local residents, as well as the absence of comprehensive planning to guide investors toward special tourism projects, are among these issues.

## Future projects and potential

Baqeri noted that the implementation of prestigious and large-scale projects, such as a health village with clinics, health centers, hotels, and specialized and super-specialized hospitals adhering to global standards and at reasonable costs to attract health tourists from neighboring countries, could significantly help in revenue generation and job creation in the province.

He stated that in this regard, the execution of such prestigious and large-scale projects could greatly contribute to income generation and employment in the province. He continued that the creation of a recreational and tourism area near the expressway, the use of advanced high-speed trains, proper rail laying for quick and safe transit, and the establishment of a place for the temporary accommodation of tourists with appropriate facilities can help enhance tourism in the province.

## Funding challenges

Hossein Khamseh, a tourism expert in the province, referred to the lack of sufficient funding as the most significant challenge facing tourism in the region. He mentioned that despite the province's capacities, large-scale tourism projects have not been defined, adding: "This issue is related to reasons such as the high costs of implementing these

projects, which has in turn created challenges."

## Need for strategic planning

This expert emphasized that the establishment of large-scale tourism projects in the province has national significance and continued: "For example, the launch of the Mahneshan Geopark has been considered in the provincial planning document, which is defined based on geographical location and provincial capacity, and geological studies have shown that Zanzan has the capacity to establish such a geopark." Khamseh stated that the establishment of such a park would have a national and eventually international impact, indicating that undertaking such a project would naturally require a substantial amount of funding, which has unfortunately been neglected and somewhat forgotten, although there is still a possibility for such a plan to be implemented.

## Importance of budget allocation

He noted that the allocation of budget for tourism projects is another challenge in this sector, stating: "In many provinces, specific budgets have been defined for certain issues, allowing them to spend on their priority matters." He added: "An example is the promotion and advertising of tourism, which has a specific budget line in some provinces, including Kurdistan, but unfortunately, such a line has not been foreseen in Zanzan Province." Khamseh emphasized that the province must focus on the important issue of advertising and information dissemination for progress and development in tourism, stating: "The results of this are clearly observable in neighboring provinces; therefore, in the current situation, this issue should not be overlooked."