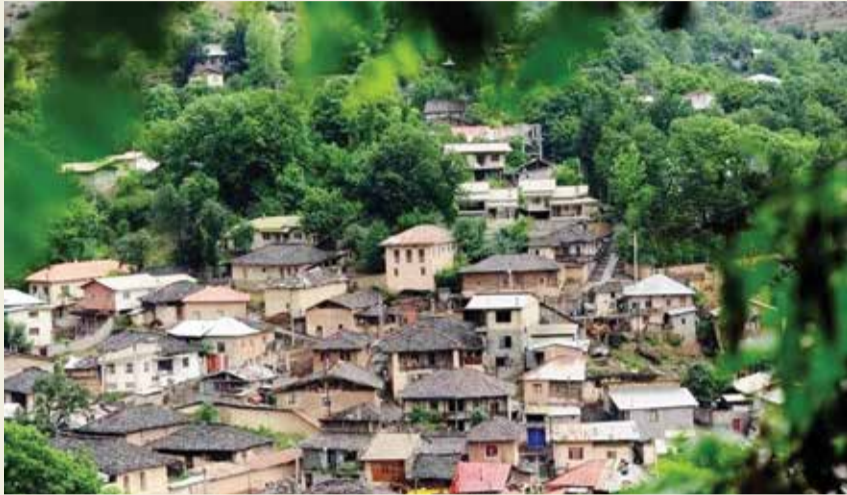


# Kandolus journey to world tourism village status



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## Iranica Desk

Efforts are underway to resolve the infrastructural issues hindering the global registration of Kandolus village in Mazandaran Province, according to the director general of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, Hossein Izadi.

He stated that for the first time, Kandolus village, alongside seven others from Iran, was introduced to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2023 for consideration as one of the best world tourism villages, resulting in Kandovan Village in West Azarbaijan Province being selected, [chtn.ir](#) wrote.

Izadi continued that with necessary follow-ups, the dossier for Kandolus village was resubmitted to the UNWTO in 2024, along with other selected villages from the country, for the title of World Tourism Village. He highlighted the unique features of Kandolus, including the romantic tale of Mina and the Leopard, an active workshop for medicinal and cosmetic plants, and its historic fabric, as well as the largest rural museum in the country. He noted that the narrative of Mina's love for a leopard is an important mythical belief in the village, which has been developed into a literary tourism route from the village to the forest through the efforts of the local council and administration.

Izadi emphasized that the local workshop for producing medicinal and cosmetic plants not only creates job opportunities but also revitalizes health products and supports the independent economy of rural areas — a benefit that few villages in the country enjoy. He pointed out that the village's unique architectural features, including its streets, alleys, forms, and facades, set Kandolus apart from its peers. Additionally, the presence of a museum of historical and anthropological artifacts in the heart of the village further supports its case for registration.

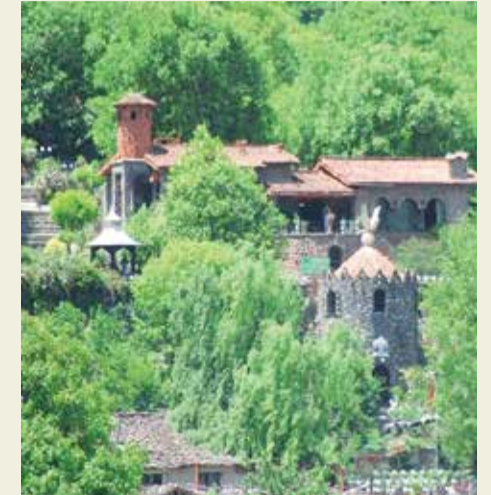
He reminded that these attributes, along with the local cuisine, beliefs, customs, and attractive natural environment, have made Kandolus one of the important rural destinations in Mazandaran Province. Consequently, tourism now plays a direct role in the employment and economy of the village.

He stated that the efforts of all officials and experts in the province are focused on resolutely addressing the existing challenges hindering the registration of the village.

Kandolus Village is a historical settlement located adjacent to the Hyrcanian forests in the Kajor district of Nowshahr, at the foot of the Alborz Mountains. It is considered one of the most significant villages in Iran, with a history spanning thousands of years. Traces of pre-Christian and Persian civilizations can be found here, both before and after the advent of Islam.

Located 75 kilometers from Nowshahr, Kandolus is distinguished by its old houses with wooden facades and ceilings, beautiful small windows, mud walls, cobblestone alleys, mineral springs, and flowing rivers. The village is also home to several attractions, including the Museum of Anthropology, abundant waterfalls, the Museum of Medicinal Plants, an old bathhouse dating back to the Qajar era, and various handicrafts and souvenirs. These features have contributed to its nomination for registration on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

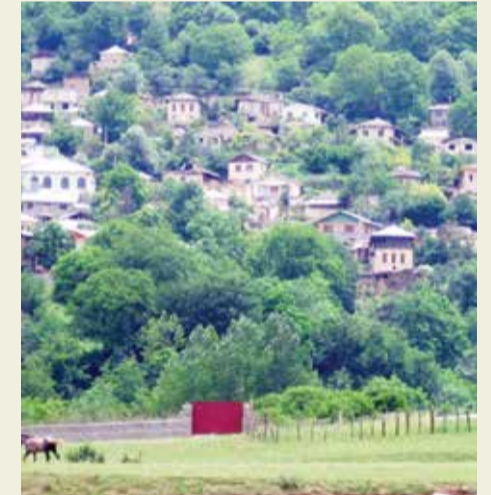
Each year, many domestic and foreign tourists visit Kandolus to experience its attractions firsthand. The customs and traditions of the village's residents further enhance the allure of traveling to this remarkable destination.



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## Maryam Castle, a blend of hand-carved tradition, ancient worship

### Iranica Desk

The hand-carved site known as Maryam Castle in Sarpol-e Zahab is an ancient place of worship situated next to a spring called Sarab-e Qarah Bolagh. A structure has been constructed to conceal this pilgrimage site from the faithful.

In an interview with ISNA, Sajjad Alibeigi, an assistant professor at Razi University in Kermanshah, noted that there are several hand-carved sites in Sarpol-e Zahab, including Dukkan-e Daud, Bard-e Asheqan, and Hoz-e Asheqan. These sites primarily serve funerary functions and clearly showcase evidence of hand-carved architectural traditions in the western foothills of the Central Zagros.

He added that among the hand-carved sites in this area, Maryam Castle possesses distinct features and a unique role, blending brick architecture with hand-carved elements. Based on historical texts and archaeological analyses, this site can be regarded as particularly significant. Maryam Castle is originally a small natural cave located on the southern slope of a mountain, positioned between the Zahab Plain and the Qaleh



Sarpol-e Zahab  
itto.org

Shahin Plain. Its facade and parts of the ceiling have been smoothed out due to rock carving, giving it a resemblance to the entrance of Dukkan-e Daud. Although this similarity is evident at first glance, the two sites differ fundamentally in their nature.

Alibeigi further stated that it appears a small structure has been built in front of this man-made cave to conceal it. This raises questions about the purpose of

this structure, particularly regarding the manmade cave behind it, and the rationale for erecting such a building in front of it.

He explained that, based on archaeological analyses and references in Syriac and Islamic texts, the manmade cave likely served as an ancient place of worship. After alterations to the cave's shape and form, a structure was constructed in front of it.



Maryam Castle  
abadis.ir

He emphasized that due to the sacredness of the cave and religious considerations, this site needed to be kept hidden from view. Consequently, a structure has been built in front of the cave to obscure the entry and exit points for visitors.

Sarpol-e Zahab is a city in Kermanshah Province, sharing land borders with Iraq to the west. The city is comprised of two cities and seven rural districts,

featuring a semi-warm and semi-arid climate through which the permanent river Alvand flows.

The antiquity of Sarpol-e Zahab is estimated to be around 4,800 years, based on its ancient monuments and inscriptions. Numerous historical and ancient artifacts can be found in Sarpol-e Zahab, making this region a haven for history and archaeology enthusiasts.