

Minister promotes Makoran coast as Iran's upcoming tourism hotspot

Arts & Culture Desk

The Makoran Coast, located in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, is set to become a key player in Iran's tourism development, according to the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri. He described it as "one of the best beaches in the world" and an essential platform for the country's growth, IRNA reported.

During a visit to the region accompanying the President Masoud Pezeshkian, Salehi Amiri emphasized the government's focus on improving infrastructure, which he categorized into two levels, "basic infra-

structure such as roads, water, electricity, and gas," and "tourism infrastructure," including hotels and ecotourism for visitor accommodation. He remarked, "We need to create attractions in this region to draw private investment." Currently, Iran boasts 17,000 accommodation centers, with 2,700 projects underway. "Projects that are over 80% complete will receive financial support to expedite their opening," he noted.

Salehi Amiri pointed out that the interconnection of tourism, security, and accessibility in Sistan and Baluchestan is vital. "This area has the best geographical location along 300 kilometers of coastline,

and there are promising spots for tourism," he stated. He also highlighted that improving road access to southern villages could attract a large influx of tourists, stating, "This area has the potential to be the best coastal destination in the country."

The minister's remarks come as the government continues its efforts to address the region's challenges while promoting its tourism potential. In a follow-up visit, President Pezeshkian and his cabinet plan to discuss regional issues and inaugurate significant development projects aimed at enhancing the living conditions of locals and boosting economic growth.



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri (2nd L) visits Chabahar Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department in southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan on January 9, 2025.
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Rise of Simorgh as a symbol of Iranian cinema



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In the public view, Simorgh (phoenix) is recognized as a symbol of Iranian cinema. This mythical bird is intimately linked with the most significant cultural and artistic event in Iran, and winning the Crystal Simorgh statue at the Fajr Film Festival has become a dream for many artists. But how did the Simorgh become the most important emblem of the country's cinema?

The seventh Fajr Film Festival in 1989 marked a momentous turning point when Iranian cinema introduced its most important symbol. The golden plaque, awarded to winners until the 6th edition of the festival, was suddenly replaced by the "Simorgh," establishing this name as a mark of the highest cinematic honor in the country. This report explores the journey of the Simorgh from 1988 to the present.

The Simorgh is a mythical and legendary bird in Iranian culture and one of the significant symbols of Persian literature. It prominently features in celebrated stories such as 'Manteq-

ot-Tayr' by Persian poet Attar and 'Shahnameh' of Ferdowsi. Plus, there are prominent representations of this bird in the 'Avesta', stone inscriptions, and texts from the Sassanian era. In 'Shahnameh', the Simorgh symbolizes wisdom and possesses all the answers to life's questions. Its presence in this epic begins with the birth of "Zal," whose father, "Sam," abandons him in the desert due to his albinism. The Simorgh, out of divine compassion, takes Zal to its nest and raises him.

Another significant appearance of the Simorgh in 'Shahnameh' occurs during the battle between "Rostam" and the invulnerable "Esfandiar." Unable to defeat Esfandiar, Rostam seeks the Simorgh's help, and ultimately, through the guidance it provides, he successfully brings Esfandiar down.

In Attar's allegorical and universal narrative, 'Manteq-ot-Tayr,' a group of birds, led by the hoopoe, embark on a journey to reach the Simorgh. Each bird symbolizes a specific group of humans, and the hardships of the journey gradually

deter them from their initial desire. Ultimately, only thirty birds reach Mount Qaf, discovering that the Simorgh is, in fact, themselves.

In contemporary society, the Simorgh is recognized as the emblem of Iranian cinema, deeply intertwined with the nation's most significant cultural and artistic event. Winning the crystal Simorgh statue at the Fajr Film Festival has become an aspiration for many artists.

Interestingly, during the first six editions of the Fajr Film Festival, there was no crystal Simorgh; instead, winners received a golden statue. At that time, the Farabi Cinema Foundation was responsible for organizing the festival, and the cinema officials sought a unique and authentic symbol for the event. Ebrahim Haqiqi, a prominent graphic designer, was chosen to design this award.

Haqiqi chose the legendary Simorgh after studying ancient symbols and artifacts. He found traces of this bird in various forms of Iranian art, such as tile work, miniature

painting, carpets, gilding, and wood carving. Before reaching the final design, he reviewed numerous sketches and drafts. Haqiqi believes that the crystal Simorgh is the most famous symbol he has ever designed. Unlike many renowned film awards worldwide, which are represented in three-dimensional forms, the Simorgh's design is two-dimensional, etched onto a crystal base. Haqiqi explains this choice by stating, "The Simorgh is not just a bird or a volume; it is a concept in literature and mysticism, representing transcendence and light. Therefore, nothing but crystal could symbolize it."

In another interview, Haqiqi mentions, "In designing the Simorgh for the Fajr Film Festival, I aimed for this symbol to break away from the regular geometric structures. Most of our symbols are geometrically structured due to visual training and education in art schools, so I intentionally distanced myself from this method to evoke our miniature painting."

This intelligent choice not only differentiates the design and structure of this award from those of other festivals but also reflects and embodies the culture, thought, and ancient philosophy of Iran.

At the seventh festival, where the crystal Simorgh was unveiled for the first time, the award had a different appearance than it does today. The base of this crystal statue was made of black stone, possibly symbolizing Mount Qaf and its nest. The design depicted this mythical bird in flight from its nest. Notable figures such as Massoud Jafari Jozani, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, Mahmoud Jafari, Roya Nonahali, and Ezzatollah Entezami were among the first recipients of the historic crystal Simorgh award.

The use of stone as the base of the statue made it excessively heavy, making it difficult for one of the veteran winners to carry during the closing ceremony of the seventh festival. Consequently, in the 8th edition of the festival, Haqiqi made changes to the statue's structure, replacing the stone base with a hollow bronze one while retaining the two-dimensional design of the Simorgh in its crystal form.

The structure of the crystal Simorgh remained unchanged in the 9th festival, but by the 10th edition, the statue was lightened again, with the base color changing from gold to black. The shape and treatment of the crystal Simorgh over the years largely reflect personal tastes, as minor modifications did not significantly alter its visual quality.

For a long time, the general shape of the Simorgh statue remained constant, although certain details would change periodically. For instance, the geometric shape of the crystal body would shift from angular lines to curves and revert to its previous form after several editions. The base color would also fluctuate between gold and black over various periods. However, during the 14th edition, another change occurred in the statue's design. The two-dimensional form of the crystal Simorgh was represented with golden lines in harmony with the base color.

Another significant change in the appearance of this award coincided with the 25th edition of the event in 2006.

At the 25th festival, the film 'Persian Carpet,' produced by Reza Mirkarimi, was screened out of competition. This work involved the contributions of notable filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi, Kamal Tabrizi, Bahman Farmanara, Dariush Mehrjui, Beh-

rouz Afkhami, Bahram Bayzai, Mohammad-Reza Honarmand, and Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami.

During this festival, 'Persian Carpet' won the award for Best Film from the National Perspective. Interestingly, for the first time in this edition, the Simorgh statue was awarded in a three-dimensional form. This statue weighed 550 grams and was made of gold, awarded to Mirkarimi, the producer of 'Persian Carpet.' However, the awards in other categories continued to be the crystal statue.

The practice of awarding the Best Film from the National Perspective with a three-dimensional golden Simorgh continued for several editions. However, a significant change in the appearance of the crystal Simorgh occurred during the 31st festival, when Haqiqi designed a different, three-dimensional version. This led to considerable negative reactions, as the final statue resembled other commonly designed birds and no longer embodied the mythical essence of the Simorgh.

As a result, from the following year onward, this statue returned to its former design, and the crystal Simorgh was awarded to the winners once again.

The form of this important award in Iranian cinema became standardized from the 33rd Fajr Film Festival, with the base and main body both made of crystal, more elegant than ever.

Another interesting point is that the crystal Simorgh was manufactured in the Czech Republic until the thirty-eighth festival. However, in 2019, a call was issued for a domestic company to produce the statue according to the specified standards, and since then, this award has been produced in Iran.