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Iran eyes UNESCO recognition of 50 cultural heritage sites to revitalize tourism

Iran initiates tourism talks with Saudi Arabia

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, announced on Tuesday that the country currently has 50 cultural heritage sites awaiting registration with UNESCO.

Speaking at a meeting with provincial governors at the Ministry of Interior, he emphasized the importance of engaging in talks with neighboring countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, to promote tourism, IRNA reported.

The people of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain are interested in visiting Iran. Their primary destination is Mashhad, and they certainly have a second destination in mind as well, the minister added.

"We have initiated discussions with our neighbors, and there is significant interest from Arab nations in visiting Iran," Salehi Amiri stated.

He noted that the demand for travel to Iran is high, particularly for religious tourism destinations such as Mashhad. The minister highlighted that Iran is making strides in securing positions on UNESCO's list, with minimal distance in terms of the number of registrations from Spain, France, and Italy. "Our queue for registration is long, but we manage to register one site each year," he added.

He pointed out that despite public declarations of ambition, the reality is starkly different. "We were supposed to be number one in all areas as part of our vision, but we have fallen behind our neighbors," he remarked, urging a reevaluation of priorities in tourism.

The minister elaborated that 90 percent of the country's cultural and tourism heritage resides within the provinces, indicating a need for concentrated efforts to activate these regional treasures.

He identified urgent actions required by provincial governors to address the

deterioration of cultural heritage structures. "We are facing a dangerous level of decay in our heritage sites, which necessitates immediate attention and restoration efforts," he warned.

Salehi Amiri emphasized that Iran boasts unique and unparalleled cultural heritage, stating, "No country in the world has the same capacity for heritage and civilization as Iran."

He illustrated this point by comparing the cultural appreciation in Tajikistan, where the works of renowned poets like Saadi and Hafez are celebrated and visible in public spaces.

"We must eliminate the false dichotomy between Islam and Iranian identity; these elements have always complemented each other in our history," he asserted.

Iran is filled with ancient relics from the Achaemenid, Sassanid, and other periods. The earliest eye and skull surgeries were performed in the Burnt City, and Sistan and Baluchestan boasts the richest culture and civilization, yet we have failed to utilize this potential. Hegmataneh is a mysterious region. Iranians used animation to design vessels 5,000 years ago, but we, the administrators, have not been able to adequately showcase this rich culture and civilization to our youth, our people, and the world. Cultural knowledge exchange enhances awareness and fosters identity reproduction. One of the main reasons for migration is that we have failed to educate the younger generation that everything they desire can be found in this land, he explained. The minister also stressed the importance of instilling a sense of pride in the younger generation regarding their cultural heritage, advocating for educational reforms to foster a national identity. "Our citizens should feel that every part of this land they explore reveals a piece of their history," he urged, highlighting the role of cultural exchange in enhancing national pride and identity. In terms of tourism statistics, Salehi



Amiri revealed that Iran welcomed over 6.3 million foreign tourists in the previous year and saw 5.7 million arrivals in the first nine months of the current Iranian year, representing a 17 percent growth compared to the same period last year. He set an ambitious goal for the country to reach 15 million tourists in the near future. The minister outlined a strategic focus on developing tourism in border provinces to attract visitors from neighboring countries. "We are organizing our agencies to promote health tourism in our western and eastern provinces, leveraging our strong medical and healthcare professionals," he remarked. Plus, he spoke about the potential for sea tourism, noting that significant initiatives are underway from Khor-

ramshahr to Makoran and Chabahar. "We have pristine coastal capacities that need to be activated swiftly," he emphasized. Salehi Amiri also mentioned ongoing discussions to allow tourists from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iraq to enter Iran with their personal vehicles, which he described as a positive step toward attracting more visitors. He highlighted that his ministry has implemented a new policy for border tourism and urged provincial governors to enhance tourism capacities at border areas. As part of the effort to combat negative perceptions of Iran, he stated, "We have developed strategies to neutralize fears surrounding Iran. Studies show that 85 percent of tourists who visit find Iran

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, speaks during a meeting with provincial officials at the Ministry of Interior in Tehran, January 20, 2025. ● IRNA

to be safe and beautiful." Salehi Amiri invited provincial governors to participate in the upcoming largest tourism exhibition in Iran, scheduled for the end of this month. "This exhibition will focus on showcasing Iran's tourism potential to both domestic and international audiences, with the participation of numerous regional countries," he concluded, calling for continued collaboration to foster a vibrant tourism sector.

'Kamal al-Fann' virtual exhibition focuses on resistance via caricature art

Arts & Culture Desk

The 'Kamal al-Fann,' exhibition, featuring 120 pieces of cartoons and caricatures of Yemeni artist Kamal Sharaf, focusing on the theme of resistance, went virtual at the Negarestan gallery. The exhibition, which was initially displayed at the Aali Art Gallery of Iran's Art Bureau on January 7, is now available online for art enthusiasts as of January 20.

Sharaf elaborated on his perspective on caricature as a form of resistance, affirming his commitment to using caricature as a tool for resistance. "Caricature is a language understood by all artists globally, regardless of the language they speak," he concluded. "Negarestan is an online platform offering virtual gallery tours, aiming to increase art exposure by utilizing the attractions of this medi-



um and eliminating the limitations of physical exhibitions," said the director of Negarestan. Virtual galleries are designed and modeled in two categories: Real-

istic simulations based on existing physical exhibitions and conceptual simulations, which are based on the creativity and ideation of the Negarestan design team".

VP: Government Open ...

The senior official added that at that time, the government needed a medium to both publicize its achievements and benefit from the opinions of critics and the public.

"It aimed to create an independent newspaper to raise the tolerance threshold in the country," Aref explained.

He emphasized that the "basic principle" for any media outlet was to "remain independent and serve the people."

The VP highlighted what he called "serious cultural and social challenges" facing Iranian society, saying that media criticisms could help address them. "Such criticisms should always be coupled with practical solutions to tackle the issues," he pointed out.

Aref also referenced Pezeshkian's commitment to his electoral campaign slogan of "National Unity," saying the motto paved the way for the media to criticize the government's strategies. "The government has no intention of hitting back at criticisms levelled

against it. On the contrary, it welcomes media criticisms as part of its mission to promote unity," he said.

Pezeshkian, who took office in late July, has made national unity the cornerstone of his government.

Aref urged the Iran newspaper to act as a "reliable advisor to the government" and instill hope among the public, especially in the face of anti-Iran propaganda.

"Through constructive criticisms and advice, media outlets can help the government respond to the people's demands," he added.

Speaking at the event, Minister Salehi underscored that Iran had "never been a mouthpiece for the government" but rather "a questioning media and a two-way road between the state and the people." He also praised the newspaper for its efforts to preserve Iranian identity and safeguard national interests.

Meanwhile, Jaberi Ansari noted that the Iran newspaper was determined to "bridge the gap between the government and the public."