



Iran eyes attracting 15m tourists through int'l collaboration: *Minister*

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced a strategic plan to attract 15 million international tourists. This ambitious goal aligns with the country's Seventh Development Plan, emphasizing the need for robust infrastructure and investment as critical priorities.

Highlighting Iran's diverse tourism potential, the minister pointed out that the country boasts a wealth of attractions from north to south. "Each region represents a valuable asset for the development of this industry," he noted, specifically mentioning Mazandaran Province's unique offerings, which position it as a potential tourism hub, Tasnim News Agency reported.

To effectively draw visitors, the minister stressed the importance of proactive engagement rather than passive waiting for tourists to arrive in Tehran. He added, "We must facilitate the entry of foreign tourists through diplomatic trips, inter-

national consultations, and collaborations with neighboring countries." Currently, efforts are underway to strengthen tourism ties with regional partners, including Tajikistan, which presents significant opportunities for Mazandaran.

Reflecting on recent statistics, the minister revealed that approximately 6.3 million foreign tourists visited Iran in the previous Persian year, which concluded in March 2024. To meet the target of 15 million tourists, he reiterated that enhancing infrastructure and securing investment are paramount, leading to the upcoming investment opportunities conference in Mazandaran.

The minister also emphasized the untapped potential of Iran's handicrafts, asserting that these cultural treasures could play a crucial role in bolstering the economy. "During my field visits, I've witnessed the extraordinary capabilities in this sector," he added, advocating for prioritizing handicraft exports and removing existing barriers.

He expressed optimism, noting

that with international market development, Iran's handicraft sector could initially generate over \$1 billion in foreign exchange.

Addressing the significance of Iran's rich historical and cultural heritage, the minister stated, "We live in a land that shapes identity, where our historical artifacts embody our national pride."

He underlined the importance of educating the younger generation about this heritage to foster cultural appreciation.

Plus, he highlighted the duality of Iranian cultural identity, which interweaves national and religious elements. Celebrations such as Yalda and traditional events during Muharram and Ramadan exemplify this blend, illustrating the deep-rooted connection between history and faith in Iran.

The minister also talked about the need for developing ecotourism alongside traditional hotels, as sustainable tourism models like ecotourism can significantly contribute to the sector's growth. "Many travelers are



drawn to authentic experiences and local customs," he explained, asserting that promoting ecotourism would not only preserve local culture but also stimulate the local economy.

The minister expressed confidence in the current government's commitment to improving the nation's circumstances. "Today, with national unity and collaboration, the government is

tirelessly working to address the challenges facing our people," he affirmed, adding that ongoing cooperation among various state entities is paving the way for national development.

Iran Film Week underway in Russia's Astrakhan



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The Iranian Film Week is being held for the second consecutive year in Astrakhan, Russia, celebrating the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. This cultural initiative, hosted at the Illyuzion theater, aims to bolster collaboration between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Astrakhan region.

The opening ceremony, which took place on January 30, was marked by speeches from key figures including Mehdi Akuchkian, the Consul General of Iran in Astrakhan, and regional officials such as Vladimir Galafkov, the head of International Relations Agency of Astrakhan, and Olga Prokofieva, the Minister of Culture. Akuchkian highlighted the significance of cultural cooperation amidst what he described as a growing trend of cultural and media aggression by certain global powers.

He added, "In recent years, we have witnessed attempts to present dis-

torted narratives of independent cultures and societies through media and cultural instruments." He further emphasized that cultural collaboration among independent nations—particularly those sharing values of peace, justice, and respect for cultural diversity—is essential in today's world.

Galafkov echoed these sentiments, recognizing Iran as a principal trade partner of Astrakhan and asserting that bilateral relations are expanding not only in commerce but also in cultural and humanitarian spheres. He underscored the importance of the Iranian Film Week in deepening these ties and expressed gratitude for the efforts of the Iranian Consulate in making such events possible. In a similar vein, Prokofieva pointed out the importance of enhancing human connections between Iran and Russia.

She noted the successful participation of Iranian artists in the 'The Seasons' classical music festival and regarded cinema as a powerful

medium for fostering mutual understanding of each country's culture and history.

Prokofieva expressed optimism for continued cooperation in the cinematic realm.

This year's film selection features socially themed narratives that reflect the everyday lives of Iranians, aiming to enhance the cultural understanding of the Astrakhan audience.

Akuchkian, in an interview with Astrakhan 24, shared his personal affinity for historical, social, and comedic films, underscoring cinema's critical role in bridging the gap between the Iranian and Russian peoples. He also mentioned that Iranians have a keen interest in foreign films, particularly Russian productions that explore World War II themes.

As a well-established cultural event in Astrakhan, Iranian Film Week serves as a valuable opportunity to enhance cultural interactions and foster mutual understanding between the two nations. Both Iranian and Russian officials expressed hope for the further expansion of these collaborations, with cinema acting as a bridge to strengthen ties between their peoples.

Following the opening ceremony, the film 'Sima's Unfinished Narration' was screened, with audience feedback collected post-viewing. The schedule for the upcoming days includes the film 'No Prior Appointment' on January 31, and 'In the Arms of the Tree' on February 1. Also, the animated feature 'The Passenger from Ganora' is set to be showcased on February 2.

Iran's '21 Weeks Later' to compete at two int'l film festivals



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Iranian short film '21 Weeks Later,' directed and produced by Nasrin Mohamadpour, will compete at the 17th Santo Domingo International Film Festival in the Dominican Republic and the 9th Santander International Independent Film Festival in Colombia.

Taking place from January 31 to February 6, 2025, the Santo Domingo festival, which is officially recognized by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF), serves as a pivotal platform for showcasing cinematic talent. Established in 1933, FIAPF is a global organization dedicated to safeguarding the economic and legal interests of its members, which include producers of film and television content. Initially headquartered in Paris, the organization now operates from Brussels and is recognized internationally as a regulatory body overseeing film festivals to protect producers' rights.

The Santo Domingo festival, also known as "FCGSD," is noteworthy for being the first festival in the Caribbean to receive

FIAPF accreditation. Meanwhile, the Santander International Film Festival, running from February 24 to 28, 2025, promises to be a gathering point for independent cinema from around the world, emphasizing its role in fostering global artistic collaboration.

'21 Weeks Later' has already garnered significant accolades, including the Special Jury Award at the 11th La Mirada Tabú Film Festival in Spain, the Best Asian Short Film award at the 28th Busan International Film Festival in South Korea, and a Special Jury Award at the 31st Golden Bull International Film Festival in Adana. Also, it has been showcased at various prestigious events, such as the 32nd Raindance Film Festival in the UK and the 57th Hof International Film Festival in Germany.

The international distribution of '21 Weeks Later' is managed by Cinérama, led by Neshat Baqeri. The film features a talented cast, including Banafsheh Riazi, Leila Hosseinzadeh, Soudeh Bahraminejad, and Parisa Asgari, all of whom contribute to its compelling narrative.