



Iran's health tourism sector ready to flourish with vast opportunities

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's health tourism sector stands at a crossroads, brimming with untapped potential that could transform it into a leading destination for medical travelers. Despite generating less than \$500 million annually, the Iranian government has set an ambitious target of reaching \$6 billion in revenue. With neighboring countries rapidly developing their own medical tourism industries, the time is ripe for Iran to leverage its strengths. Yasser Nejadi, Secretary of the National Development and Empowerment Working Group of the Ministry of Health, recently shared insights on the country's health tourism landscape, Tasnim News Agency reported. He noted that while Iran boasts advanced medical systems, skilled surgeons, modern equipment, and affordable treatment options, it struggles to capitalize fully on these advantages. "As the dollar value rises, our medical services become cheaper compared to regional competitors. However, only 20% of health tourists are motivated by lower costs; over 68% prioritize the quality of services," he explained. Iran's reputation in the health tourism

arena is built on its professional medical workforce and state-of-the-art facilities. Nevertheless, the number of international patients arriving in Iran remains low, with estimates suggesting fewer than 500,000 visitors each year. "Most foreign patients come based on personal connections rather than organized efforts by tourism authorities," Nejadi added, pointing to traditional ties with countries like Iraq and Pakistan as key sources of health tourists. The need for a systematic approach to attract health tourists cannot be overstated. Nejadi expressed concern that many potential patients bypass Iran in favor of less familiar countries that have begun to establish themselves in the health tourism market. "Unfortunately, many opportunities have been lost as emerging competitors gain traction," he lamented. Despite its myriad advantages, Iran's health tourism industry grapples with many challenges, particularly the absence of a cohesive and transparent system for guiding medical tourists. Currently, many patients rely on informal channels, often leading to confusion regarding treatment costs and potential fraud. Nejadi pointed out the dire consequences



of this lack of regulation, stating, "This not only breeds financial misconduct but also undermines tourists' trust in Iran's medical system." To remedy these issues, experts advocate for the creation of an online platform that

showcases reputable medical facilities, simplifying the process for health tourists. Establishing clear financial practices and enhancing marketing strategies are also critical to rebuilding Iran's image as a

premier health tourism destination. "We must seriously commit to marketing and attracting health tourists. Streamlining the activities of intermediaries in this sector can also help clarify financial transactions," Nejadi concluded.

Fusion of Eastern, Western music at Fajr music festival



Arts & Culture Desk

In an appealing blend of sounds, the fifth night of the 40th International Fajr Music Festival showcased a unique musical exchange between Iran and the Netherlands, delighting audiences with an innovative performance. The concert, held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, featured a collaborative effort between local and international musicians, highlighting the significance of nurturing female talent in the music industry, IRNA reported. Taking the stage at 9:30 PM, the concert brought together three internationally acclaimed musicians: Sjahin During, a percussionist from the Netherlands; Bram Stadhouders, a guitarist also from the Netherlands; and Bence Huszar, a cellist from Hungary. They were joined by the all-female Iranian group "Nushe," led by the talented Niusha Barimani. The evening kicked off with

the three international musicians creating an Eastern ambiance. The electric guitar added atmospheric sounds, while the percussion instruments offered a dynamic range of effects, enriching the musical experience. The cello played a central role, delivering the main melodies in an experimental and engaging manner. This unique combination provided audiences with a refreshing and creative auditory experience. One of the standout features was the use of an electric cello connected to a pedal board. The performer produced sounds reminiscent of echoing birds in the mountains, creating an inspiring layer to the performance. The rhythmic riffs of the electric guitar infused a European flair, blending seamlessly with the Eastern influences. After several pieces, During engaged with the audience, sharing, "This is the first time all three of us are per-

forming together." He introduced his fellow musicians and expressed his admiration for Persian culture, mentioning that this was his third visit to Iran. During also reminisced about his first trip six years ago, thanks to an invitation from Barimani, and conveyed hopes for continued collaboration. Following this interaction, Barimani took the stage with her kamancheh, performing alongside During and the percussionist from Nushe. Her melodic improvisations created a novel fusion, drawing the audience deeper into the experience. As the concert progressed, other members of Nushe, all talented Iranian women, joined the stage, featuring instruments such as the oud, flute, bass, and piano. Initially, there was a slight lack of cohesion among the group, but as the performance unfolded, their harmony improved, resulting in a richer sound tapestry. Barimani's kamancheh performance was clean, melodious, and expressive, resonating with the audience through familiar Iranian tunes. The fusion of these sounds with jazz and blues piano solos, complemented by the Dutch guitarist, crafted a unique atmosphere that captured the essence of both traditional Iranian and contemporary Western music.

Tehran Auction House avows compliance over historical art sales

Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Auction House responded to claims by cultural heritage officials regarding the legality of selling historical artifacts during its 22nd auction. The institute asserts that all items featured in the event have obtained the necessary permits, IRNA reported. Scheduled for February, the auction showcased 100 pieces, including paintings, calligraphy, manuscripts, visual arts, and carpets, spanning from the Safavid era to the contemporary period. In a critical statement, Leila Khosravi, the director of museums at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts argued that the sale of 'Portrait of a Seated Girl' by Reza Abbasi was unlawful. She explained that the artwork had passed down through a family, which sought permission to sell it. However, prior to the formation of a trade working group, the family proceeded with the sale. Khosravi noted that they had not inspected the piece and could not confirm its authenticity. Consequently, communications were initiated with relevant authorities to halt the sale, and oversight agencies have been informed. Khosravi further clarified that a 2005 regulation mandates that owners of historical artifacts over 100 years old can only sell their pieces domestically after proper registration and obtaining a permit from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The head of the museums de-

partment emphasized that permits for selling historical artifacts over a century old are issued only after assessments by the ministry's trade working group. For items under 100 years, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is responsible for issuing permits. According to Khosravi, selling or exporting any historical or cultural artifacts over 100 years old without proper authorization from the Cultural Heritage Department is illegal under the National Cultural Heritage Protection Law enacted in 1930. On February 16, Fatemeh Davari, spokesperson for the Cultural Heritage Department, stated that the ministry had not issued any permits for the cultural-historical items presented at "Tehran Auction." She explained that the auction organizers must submit detailed information about the items for the relevant committee's review before permits can be granted. Davari noted, "After a letter dated February 15, the auction organizers sent information to the museums department, but this did not lead to the issuance of a permit." The spokesperson underscored that the initial letter from the Tehran Auction, which they cited as a permit, merely indicated that the auction could proceed "upon obtaining necessary authorizations." However, subsequent communications did not result in any permits being granted. In response to the controversy, the Tehran Auction House issued a statement on February



16, asserting its compliance with national regulations throughout its 12 years of operation. The statement highlighted that the auction had received the required permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and had followed proper protocols for presenting and selling the artworks. The auction took place from February 11 to 13, culminating in a bidding event on February 14, attended by collectors, artists, and media representatives. The auction house insists that all presented works, including those over 100 years old, were deemed culturally and historically permissible for sale. Despite the auction's successful run, Khosravi's remarks regarding the legality of the Abbasi piece sparked confusion, especially as earlier communications had suggested no issues with the auction's legality. The Tehran Auction House expressed concern that such statements could undermine its reputation and adversely affect the owners of the artworks. In a final note, the auction house plans to pursue legal action against those responsible for the damaging statements, emphasizing its commitment to operate within the law and uphold the integrity of Iran's art market.