

Iran eyes Central Asia, Caucasus as key destinations for Nowruz tourism

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is targeting 13 countries, primarily in Central Asia and the Caucasus, to boost tourism during the upcoming Nowruz celebrations.

The plan spans nations from Turkey to Pakistan, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and other neighboring states, IRNA reported.

The Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, said that Iran aims to revitalize its tourism sector, encourage cultural exchanges, and strengthen ties between Iranians and the people of Nowruz-celebrating countries.

He disclosed that he had recently travelled to Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia to bolster these connections.

Salehi Amiri stressed that Iran's approach to tourism is not confined to specific geographical boundaries. "We are leveraging all 29 globally recognized types of tourism," he explained. This includes historical and heritage

tourism, scientific tourism due to Iran's vast academic resources, and agricultural tourism featuring picturesque gardens. Coastal tourism from Chabahar to Khorramshahr and Anzali, as well as desert tourism in regions like Maranjab, also form key parts of the strategy. Plus, culinary tourism and rural tourism are being promoted through over 3,500 ecotourism lodges across the country.

To showcase Iran's diverse attractions, the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition was held recently. The event aimed to introduce Iranian tourism offerings to both domestic and international audiences. During the exhibition, Iran signed an agreement with Tajikistan to increase tourist numbers from 8,600 to 100,000. This followed a previous signing in Dushanbe with the presence of the Tajik president.

Despite facing international sanctions and external pressures, Salehi Amiri said that Iran's tourism sector remains unaffected. However, he acknowledged the chal-

lenge posed by negative portrayals in Western media. "There is a false narrative about Iran," he noted, adding that if international tourists visited Iran and witnessed its attractions, the misleading propaganda would naturally lose its impact.

Addressing the measures taken to counter anti-Iran propaganda, Salehi Amiri outlined several initiatives, including promoting Iran's cultural and natural attractions globally.

He stressed the need for strategic advertising, content creation, and collaboration with influential platforms. Efforts are underway to produce multilingual content, with plans to disseminate it through influential figures, particularly celebrities with a broad following.

"We are also focusing on publishing appealing content on regional airlines and international news agencies," he explained. In addition, Iran is actively participating in international tourism events to reshape its global image. This includes attending Spain's FITUR 2025 and the upcoming Berlin travel fair.



Salehi Amiri stressed the importance of presenting an accurate image of Iran, asserting, "Iranophobia is a long-standing project. It cannot be countered overnight; it requires a strategic and sustained effort."

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Winners of 40th International Fajr Music Festival announced

Celebrating legacy of composer Javad Maroufi



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The 40th International Fajr Music Festival concluded with the announcement of its winners, underscoring the importance of mentorship in nurturing young talents.

At the closing ceremony, held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, the festival's secretary, Reza Mahdavi, emphasized the cultural significance of music, stressing the need to believe in and strengthen these cultural assets, Tasnim News Agency reported.

He said the festival's continuous efforts to enhance the quality of performances, aiming for a 20 percent annual improvement while investing in better infrastructure.

Mahdavi mentioned the festival's growing influence in the region, pointing to its advanced technical and organizational capabilities.

He said that with more agility in

organizing awards like the Barbad Awards, named after a prominent figure in Iranian music, the festival could further elevate its status on the international stage.

Acknowledging the crucial role of youth participation, Mahdavi said, "We believe that empowering the younger generation is vital for festivals like this."

He expressed hope for the event to expand each year, becoming both a celebration and a competition, provided that experienced masters participate and mentor emerging artists. "Young musicians need the guidance and support of seasoned maestros," he said.

Nadereh Rezaei, Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance for Artistic Affairs, noted that the festival, which marked its 40th year, serves as an event "by the people and for the people." She emphasized efforts to rebuild

trust and strengthen social capital despite existing challenges.

She pointed to the increased participation of young talents alongside veteran artists, as well as the presence of international groups, as steps towards fostering national unity and enhancing Iran's cultural diplomacy.

Rezaei stressed that restoring public trust and enhancing social capital are strategic assets, particularly amid sanctions and international isolation. She expressed optimism about continuing the festival at a higher standard with increased participation, leveraging the power of cultural diplomacy.

This year's festival showcased a notable rise in female participation, with women's groups delivering significantly more performances compared to previous editions. Collaborative performances between Iranian and international groups also received widespread acclaim. Rezaei expressed hope that the festival, now a mature cultural event, would continue to grow in quality, featuring influential artists and a new generation full of promise.

Ahmad Sadri, Director General of the Music Office at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, highlighted the festival's diversity, showcasing Iran's rich musical heritage.

"We aimed to present a comprehensive tableau of Iran's musical genres, from traditional folk music to contemporary adaptations," he said, noting the increased presence of regional music, both in its pure form and in modern arrangements. During the ceremony, Abbas Salehi took the stage at the host's request, delivering the closing remarks: "We are grateful to have shared the 40th

edition of the International Fajr Music Festival with you. With Iran, always for Iran, may the melody of Iran remain eternal."

The event also honored female musicians through the Mana Award, presented by the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs. The jury recognized the participants' artistic excellence, highlighting the role of women in Iranian music as a testament to their individual and collective talents. The statement emphasized the importance of empowering and supporting women, whose contributions are deeply rooted in Iranian cultural heritage. After thorough evaluation based on singing, musical arrangement, stage presence, lighting, and costume design, the Mana Award winners were announced.

First and second winners are Mahani Ensemble, led by Maria and Mandana Hossein Ghafari; Rastaan Ensemble, directed by Azadeh Amiri, respectively.

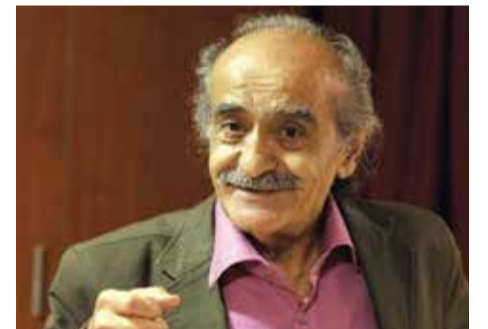
The third winner is Ivar Quchan Ensemble, under the leadership of Toktam Molaei.

The closing night also paid tribute to the legendary Iranian composer and pianist Javad Maroufi with a special piano performance by Mohammadreza Amirghasemi at Tehran's Rudaki Hall.

Maroufi's legacy, deeply intertwined with Iran's musical history, was celebrated through his lesser-known compositions, offering a nostalgic yet fresh experience for enthusiasts.

This year's festival, held from February 11 to 17, featured performances by 100 Iranian bands, comprising over 1,400 musicians, alongside international participants.

Veteran Iranian voice actor Iraj Rezaei dies at 89



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Veteran Iranian voice actor and dubbing director Iraj Rezaei died at the age of 89 due to old age on February 17.

Born in 1935 in the village of Gurab, Rezaei began his dubbing career in 1959 and took on the role of dubbing director in 1979. His voice became iconic through his work in memorable roles, including Albert Foiret (played by Bernard Hepton) in the series 'Secret Army', Charnier (played by Fernando Rey) in 'The French Connection II', and the deputy sheriff in the animated series of the same name, IRNA reported.

Rezaei's talent for bringing characters to life made him the voice behind renowned actors such as Bud Spencer in 'Ace High', Robert Duvall in 'True Grit', Richard Harris in 'Robin and Marian', and Peter Sellers in 'The Party'. His portrayal of Hercule Poirot in the television series 'Poirot', featuring David Suchet, remains etched in the memories of Iranian audiences. He also voiced "Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah," played by Mohammad-Reza Sharifinia, in the historical series 'Mokhtarnameh'.

In addition to his extensive dubbing career, Rezaei contributed to Iranian cinema by writing screenplays for films such as 'Spring in Autumn', 'Greedy', and 'The Story of Mahan'. He also supervised the dubbing of numerous Iranian films, including 'Zero Heights', 'Toy', 'The Evil Call', 'Temptation', 'Travellers of Moonlight', 'Helpless', 'Grandfather', 'The Command', and 'Border'.

His work was not limited to Iranian productions. Rezaei also directed the dubbing for foreign films like 'Gunfight at the O.K. Corral', 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', and 'The Towering Inferno', solidifying his legacy as one of the most versatile figures in the industry.