

Iran's strides in cultural heritage preservation and tourism development

Iranica Desk

With Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, arriving on March 21 and signaling the year's end, it's a perfect moment to consider the significant progress in Iran's cultural heritage and tourism sectors. These areas not only protect Iran's deep history and artistic achievements but also boost the economy, encourage cultural exchange, and strengthen Iran's identity. Throughout the year, Iran has been involved in various projects to preserve its culture, promote responsible tourism, and enhance its global appeal as a destination rich in history, heritage, and hospitality.

This past year, there's been a stronger emphasis on international cooperation, understanding that partnerships are vital for protecting cultural treasures and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Efforts have focused on creating sustainable tourism that values local involvement and minimizes environmental impact, ensuring the benefits of tourism are shared fairly. Simultaneously, ongoing archaeological discoveries continue to uncover new chapters in Iran's rich past, shedding light on the civilizations that have shaped the nation's identity. These combined efforts show Iran's dedication to preserving its cultural legacy while embracing opportunities in an interconnected world, paving the way for continued growth and innovation.

Artifacts repatriation from Turkey



Some of the artifacts returned to Iran
● MEHR NEWS AGENCY

Turkey has repatriated 55 historical artifacts to Iran, fulfilling an agreement established last year to prevent cultural property trafficking between the two nations. The handover took place on June 4, 2024, at the Erzurum Archaeology Museum, where Turkish officials presented the artifacts to the Iranian Consulate. Birol Incecikoz, Director-General of Turkey's Cultural Heritage and Museums, stated that the artifacts' Iranian origin was confirmed. The collection includes 42 coins, a Sassanid-era sword, a bronze jug, and 11 items from the Bronze Age and Islamic periods.

Return of 1,100 Achaemenid tablets



The unveiling ceremony of the Achaemenid tablets
● ILNA

Following his participation in the 79th session of the UN General Assembly in New York in late September, 2024, President Masoud Pezeshkian brought with him 1,100 historical clay tablets from the Achaemenid era. This repatriation was the result of intensive consultations between the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Iranian Vice President for Legal Affairs Majid Ansari, and the Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS) at the University of Chicago. Dating back to the sixth century BCE, the Achaemenid tablets are considered invaluable works of Iranian art and history. They offer critical insights into Achaemenid society, including road resource management, social relations, basic necessities, wages, and the economy. According to Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Ali Darabi, these tablets represent records of "the rituals and the way of life of our ancestors." Originally, around 30,000 clay tablets were unearthed in the 1930s by University of Chicago archeologists during excavations in Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Persian Empire. Approximately 90 years ago, these tablets were loaned to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. While several batches of tablets and fragments have been returned to Iran in recent years, thousands more remain at the institute.

Attendance in BRICS Tourism Forum

The First BRICS Tourism Forum took place in Moscow on June 20-21, 2024, with delegations from all nine member states participating: Iran, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia. The first day featured a work group meeting for industry representatives, along with negotiations and presentations from travel agents showcasing products, services, and tourism projects from various countries. On the second day, Evgeny Kozlov, the First Deputy Head of the Office of Mayor and the Government of Moscow, addressed journalists, emphasizing the importance of tourism as a key strategy for the city's mayor. He highlighted the mutual benefits of tourism, stating, "We share a lot of love and genericity with the tourists and there is much money



Flags representing participating countries
● IRAN DAILY

and profit in tourism sector." When discussing the potential impact of BRICS membership on tourism cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, Kozlov noted the complementary nature of the two cities. He mentioned a

specific Moscow hotel popular with Iranian visitors, possibly due to its location or nearby restaurants. He also pointed to the success of the visa-free group regime launched the previous year, which has already facilitated visits for hundreds of Iranian tourists to Moscow. "We have this special visa preferences for Iranian groups come here". Kozlov urged Iranian representatives to further promote their country's attractions to Russian travelers. He also emphasized the sister-city relationship between Moscow and Tehran, stating that while valuable, it's not enough. "It is because tourism is the partnership between tourism operators and we should support at the federal level or the official level. So, it is really important to hold the sister-city partnership between local authorities."

Hegmataneh's designation as UNESCO World Heritage Site

The archaeological remains of Hegmataneh, also known as Ecbatana, located in northwestern Iran, have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This inscription, made during the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee held in New Delhi July 21-31, 2024, marks Iran's 28th entry on the prestigious list. Hegmataneh, or ancient Ecbatana, is situated in modern-day Hamadan, Iran, and boasts a rich history spanning over 3,000 years. It is believed to have been the capital of the Median Empire and later served

as an important administrative center for the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires, often functioning as their summer capital. The site offers invaluable archaeological insights into these civilizations. Discoveries include a massive defensive wall and a distinctive checkerboard urban plan, providing tangible evidence of the city's historical importance and urban organization. Hegmataneh stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of ancient Near Eastern civilizations.



The historical site of Hegmataneh
● IRNA

Discovery of 6,000-year-old skeleton



Reydokht's skeleton
● IRAN DAILY

An excavation team from Shahid Beheshti University unearthed a more-than-6,000-year-old skeleton of a girl in Cheshmeh Ali, an important archeological mound at the edge of the ancient city of Shahr-e Rey and a few kilometers from Tehran, on November 11, 2024. Some archeology students, who were cooperating with the excavation team, immediately named her as Reydokht or the Daughter of Rey. Head of the excavation team Hamidreza Valipour told Iran Daily that the most important achievements of the excavation in Cheshmeh Ali, which opened on October 1, was unearthing the architectural remains of a prehistoric village and this grave, dating back to approximately 4,300-4,000 BCE. He said these new findings could shed light on the life and burial rites of prehistoric humans. Evidence showed that the prehistoric girl had tiny shell, bone and stone ornaments and beads, which were worn by her as anklet, necklace, bracelet, and headband. There was also ochre clay in her grave.

Achaemenid find in Gonabad

An ancient site dating back to the Achaemenid period has been discovered in Gonabad, Khorasan Razavi Province. The announcement was made in early December of 2024 by the head of the Gonabad Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. A local resident with a passion for cultural heritage discovered the site. Its discovery fills a gap in the archaeological map of the Gonabad, promising to complete our understanding of the area's past. The site's age, contemporary with the Qasabeh Qanat of Gonabad, strongly supports the idea of the region's importance during the Achaemenid period. The presence of historical and prehistoric pottery, remnants of glass containers, stone construction materials, sarooj mortar, stone tools, and plaster, all point to the historical significance of the site.



Artifacts found in Achaemenid site of Gonabad
● IRNA

18th Int'l Tourism Expo held in Tehran



Visitors exploring the pavilions at the exhibition
● hamshahrionline.ir

The 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition took place from February 11-14, 2025, at Tehran's Permanent Fairgrounds. The event hosted 700 domestic and international companies. Eight foreign delegations and fourteen countries, including Turkey, Qatar, Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Madagascar, and the

UAE, were represented with their own pavilions. This year, 395 square meters were dedicated to international exhibitors. The exhibition showcased a diverse range of activities, including 20 expert-led workshops, 10 specialized panels on tourism organizations, contributions from academic and scientific associations, and presentations by inno-

vative students. As part of the exhibition's side programs, international students participated in tourism tours designed to cultivate them as ambassadors for Iranian tourism. A dedicated pavilion also highlighted the potential of nomadic communities and ecotourism, emphasizing their role in initiatives like reducing road accidents.