

Iran's ancient Rab'-e Rashidi academic complex to be restored



Arts & Culture Desk

The restoration of Rab'-e Rashidi, the medieval academic complex in Tabriz, has been ordered amid growing concerns over its deteriorating condition. Originally established in the 13th century by the Ilkhanid vizier Rashid al-Din, the site is considered one of the earliest and largest universities in the world, according to IRNA. During a meeting with cultural heritage officials, including Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, President Masoud Pezeshkian instructed the restoration of the ancient site. "Rab'-e Rashidi is a symbol of our scientific and cultural legacy," he stated, highlighting its role as a multi-lingual

intellectual hub 750 years ago.

The complex housed a library, translation center, industrial complex, and an autonomous financial system. It operated in seven languages, influencing academic thought across Asia and the Persian Gulf. However, years of neglect, environmental damage, and urban encroachment have put the site at risk.

According to Bahram Ajorlou, project director of Rab'-e Rashidi and head of Tabriz University of Art, recent excavations have unearthed significant artifacts from both the Ilkhanid and Ottoman periods.

Among the discoveries are advanced water management systems and exquisite tile work, shedding light on the region's architectural and academic

innovations.

Despite these breakthroughs, challenges remain. Ajorlou criticized the lack of support from Tabriz's city authorities, citing construction permits that have further encroached on the site. "Only 13 hectares remain of the original 100," he said, calling for urgent measures to protect the area from further development.

In 2023, a four-party agreement between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the University of Art, Tabriz Municipality, and a German archaeological institute allowed archaeological activities to resume after a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, securing adequate funding remains a pressing issue, with the site requiring approximately \$1.1 million for preservation.

33 countries to join Tehran tour operators forum

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Iran will host the international tour operators forum from April 28 to May 2, with over 100 travel agencies from 33 countries attending. The event, aimed at boosting the country's tourism industry, will be held at the Esteghlal Hotel in Tehran and coincide with the 7th Export Capabilities Exhibition (Iran Expo 2025). Moslem Shojaei, Director General of Marketing and Tourism Development at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, emphasized that the event seeks to address a decline in foreign tour operators visiting Iran.

He noted that the country is on track to handle 14 million tourists annually, but infrastructure challenges remain. "We need to rethink tourism pathways to distribute visitors more evenly across the country," Shojaei said, IRNA reported. Tourism experts believe that this in-

ternational gathering will provide an essential boost to the sector. Shojaei explained that the event's highlight is the B2B Business Meeting, a key opportunity for networking and collaboration between Iranian and foreign tour operators.

The participating countries range from neighboring nations like Turkey and Iraq to more distant regions, including Vietnam, Thailand, and South Africa. This global presence marks a crucial step toward attracting more tourists. As part of the event, foreign delegates will visit iconic Iranian landmarks, such as the Golestan Palace and the ancient Museum of Iran, as well as the scenic island of Kish.

Despite the growing number of international arrivals—currently at around 11 million per year—Shojaei stressed that Iran must remain competitive. "We have to fight for market share," he said, underscoring the need for infrastructure improve-

ments, including the construction of 500 new hotels and enhanced transportation options.

Looking ahead, Shojaei put the spotlight on Iran's plans to participate in ten international tourism exhibitions and organize five [tourism] roadshows across cities such as Basra, Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf, as well as in Poland, Hungary, Serbia, and Russia. Shojaei also discussed the importance of overcoming barriers to tourism, such as the difficulties travelers face in converting foreign currencies to rials. However, he reassured that issues related to the issuance of tourist cards are being resolved, with a new system in place for banks to issue these cards.

Iran's long-term strategy involves using tourism as a tool for public diplomacy. "Tourism helps show the world the real Iran," Shojaei stated. He also emphasized that the country's membership in the United Nations World Tourism Organiza-



tion remains a valuable asset, with plans for hosting more international events in the coming years. Moreover, he revealed plans for Iran to host a conference dedicated to

the Silk Road countries in Semnan and the third International Health Tourism Conference for ECO member states in Hamedan in the current year.

First Avaye Solh Int'l Film Festival to take place in Aras Free Trade Zone

The first Avaye Solh International Film Festival will be held in Aras Free Trade Zone, showcasing a diverse range of films, including feature-length, short, documentary, and animated films.

Organized by the Cultural and Artistic Deputy of the House of Iran's Peace Corps, in collaboration with the Cultural and Tourism Department of the High Council of Free Trade Zones, the festival aims to promote peace through the medium of cinema, IRNA reported.

The festival is set to create an inspiring and vibrant atmosphere for filmmakers, emphasizing the themes of peace, friendship, and collaboration in both personal and global contexts. It also seeks to strengthen international ties and offer a platform for Iranian cinema to be introduced worldwide. The festival's focus will be on various aspects of peace, including its impact on daily life, community development, cultural heritage, environmental chal-



lenges, and the role of innovation and technology in fostering peaceful solutions. Personal stories and inspiring experiences will also be featured. Films, both Iranian and international, that align with the festival's themes are eligible for submission. The event will provide a unique opportunity to bridge cultural and artistic gaps, fostering global cooperation and understanding.



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