



Iran's tourism aims for 20mn visitors, seeks government support for growth

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's tourism industry needs significant government investment and support to reach its goal of attracting 20 million foreign visitors annually, according to Shahab Ali Arab, Vice Chairman of the Iran Chamber of Commerce's Tourism Commission. Speaking at a seminar held alongside the Iran Expo 2025 at the Tehran International Fair on Monday, Arab emphasized that while the nation has a strong potential for tourism growth, realizing this target will require active engagement from the government, IRNA reported. "Opportunities for investment in this sector must be better introduced to traders and the private sector," Arab said.

The expo, which coincides with the renewal of informal talks between Iran and the United States over the nuclear issue, has brought together a diverse group of business representatives from around the world, including more than 100 tourism agencies active in the country. Arab also noted the presence of numerous tour operators invited by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. "This year's Expo will help familiarize foreign businesses with Iran's tourist attractions, providing a significant opportunity for the tourism sector," he added. Despite a lackluster performance in 2023, Arab expressed optimism for the future. "This year, we expect to see a marked improvement in tourism as the country welcomes more

international visitors," he said, particularly pointing to the potential for increased tourist arrivals from neighboring Arab countries like Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar, as well as a possible rise in visitors from Saudi Arabia following improved diplomatic relations. The growth of Iran's creative industries also took center stage at the Expo. Morteza Haji Aghamiri, head of the Iran Chamber's Handicrafts and Art Commission, highlighted the vital role of cultural and creative industries in driving economic recovery. "Despite challenges like sanctions, these sectors have continued to thrive, especially during periods of economic downturn," he said. Haji Aghamiri pointed to the global creative industries market, valued at



approximately \$700 billion, as a clear indication of untapped potential. "Iran's handicrafts and traditional arts, including carpets, offer significant export prospects," he said.

However, he also stressed the need to overcome the obstacles posed by international sanctions and to enhance cultural diplomacy, which could pave the way for better market access.

Iran returns to Arabian travel market in Dubai after 12 years



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Iran has made its first appearance at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai after a 12-year absence, aiming to promote its growing tourism sector. The Iranian delegation, including seven companies, is showcasing

the country's rich cultural heritage and burgeoning health tourism industry at an 84-square-metre pavilion, IRNA reported. Moslem Shojaei, Director General of Marketing and Tourism Development at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, highlighted the event as a

key platform for attracting Persian Gulf visitors and strengthening global collaborations, especially in medical tourism. Iran's participation is supported by government funding covering 85% of costs, and aims to tap into sustainable tourism and digital innovations.

The ATM 2025, running from April 28 to May 1, is one of the largest travel exhibitions in the Middle East, with over 2,800 exhibitors from 166 countries. Iran's return marks a pivotal step in revitalizing its tourism industry and forging new international partnerships.

Reza Babak, an actor who lives through poetry, painting

By Saeideh Ehsani Rad
Staff writer

Reza Babak, the actor beloved for his iconic role in 'Ziba Barbershop,' showcased his paintings at Saless Gallery in Tehran. Despite his extensive career in acting, Babak's artistic journey as a painter has been just as significant. Visitors to his exhibition 'Ba Babak' (meaning "With Babak") were able to meet the actor, chat with him, and take photos alongside his artwork. In recent years, more filmmakers and actors have begun displaying their visual art, offering their fans a glimpse into their creative world beyond the screen and stage. Babak's exhibition is part of this growing trend, where actors invite audiences to explore a new dimension of their artistic expression in galleries. His friendly nature was evident as he hosted his fellow veteran colleagues, greeting them warmly and sharing laughter. Curated by Arghavan Boroujeni and Shahram Azimi, Ba Babak features a selection of Babak's

works created over recent years. The exhibition opened on April 18 and closed on April 28. In the exhibition statement, Boroujeni describes Babak's work as deeply connected to his acting career, with paintings that are as poetic and gentle as his film roles. She notes that Babak's art taps into a childlike unconsciousness, conveying raw emotions and memories. Babak himself has shared his artistic journey: "I've been painting for years. It began early in my life, though there were periods when I stopped. Over time, I became more serious about it, starting with watercolors. When I wasn't acting, painting helped release my emotions and filled the void of not performing." This exhibition is Babak's second solo show. His first, 'The Sound of Painting,' took place in 1999 at the Sako Gallery. Azimi, the curator, explained that his friendship with Babak led to the exhibition, after seeing the emotional depth in Babak's paintings. The works on

display span from the 1970s to the present, reflecting Babak's ongoing passion for art. Babak has mentioned that painting gives him peace and helps release the stresses of everyday life. The exhibition includes nearly 100 pieces, all with unique emotional depth. Babak views acting as a profession to earn a living, but painting is a heartfelt, personal expression. Azimi believes the involvement of filmmakers in visual art depends on the quality of their work. "Some actors create impressive art, and there's no harm in showcasing it," he said. "The fame of an actor may influence pricing, but it's up to the buyer whether they value the signature or the quality of the work." The exhibition's title, 'Ba Babak,' reflects the warmth Babak shares with his audience, much like his paintings, which connect effortlessly with viewers. Prices for his works range from 15 million to 100 million Iranian rials, making them accessible to a wide audience.

Childlike and captivating works

Reza Babak's paintings are filled with elements like fish, birds, plants, and imagination—each a testament to his vivid creativity. Displayed in small to medium sizes at Saless Gallery, these works offer a window into his rich artistic world. While Babak is primarily recognized for his acting career, his artistic endeavors are equally significant. His roles in theater, television, and film have made him a beloved figure in Iran, embodying calmness, warmth, and kindness. Through his diverse work in acting, directing, writing, and voice acting, Babak showcases his open-minded, exploratory nature. Oman Bonakdar's introduction to Babak's visual art came through a group exhibition highlighting the works of filmmakers. Intrigued by Babak's personal approach to painting, Bonakdar visited the actor's home to explore his collection further. There, he encountered a kind, straightforward man whose personality matched the warmth Babak exuded on



screen. When complimented on one of his paintings, Babak humbly responded, "I don't know!" Initially seen as a humble reply, it soon became clear that for Babak, painting transcends notions of "good" or "bad." It is a form of personal reflection and a meditative process that unfolds in moments of quiet solitude. What makes Babak's paintings stand out is their deep connection to his personal character. The works are characterized by simplicity, intuition, and a

fearless approach to color. His paintings reflect the playful, carefree spirit of a child, one who enjoys the act of creation without being concerned with the final outcome. His style is bold and spontaneous, with an uninhibited use of color and medium. Through his art, Babak reveals a new side of himself—a creator who invites the viewer into his imaginative world, offering vibrant and free-spirited expressions that speak to his inner creativity.

