

Urmia Grand Mosque inviting international attention

Iranica Desk

Urmia, the capital of West Azarbaijan Province, holds a precious gem at its heart: the Urmia Grand (Jaame) Mosque — a structure that has withstood the passage of centuries. This mosque is one of the most prominent examples of Islamic architecture in northwestern Iran, showcasing a blend of Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Zand styles. Its original core includes a vaulted prayer hall (Shabestan) built during the Seljuk era, featuring brickwork, domes, and geometric vaulting, ISNA wrote.

A stunning mihrab (niche) decorated with fine plasterwork and Kufic and Riq'a inscriptions was added during the Ilkhanid period. According to cultural heritage experts, this mihrab is one of the largest remaining from the Ilkhanid era. During the Safavid and Zand periods, the mosque was further expanded with a forty-column prayer hall and surrounding chambers, ISNA wrote.

Nestled within Urmia's historic bazaar, this magnificent structure has borne witness to the city's rich history and culture for centuries. It is now on the verge of being inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site; however, the path to this global recognition presents several challenges. Major hurdles include completing restoration projects, organizing the surrounding area, and finalizing legal documentation. While recent efforts have been made, a collective push is increasingly



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necessary to navigate this critical stage. This year is pivotal for the Grand Mosque. Heritage experts warn that if current deficiencies are not addressed promptly, the opportunity for global registration could be lost. The Urmia Grand Mosque is more than a historical monument; it is a symbol of the identity, culture, and resilience of the local people who have lived alongside it for centuries. Achieving UNESCO registration would

be a lasting honor for Urmia and a proud achievement for Iran. With its unique architecture, delicate plasterwork, and storied past, it is one of the masterpieces emblematic of Iranian-Islamic identity. Yet, at this crucial moment, challenges remain that require collective effort — any delay risking the future of this irreplaceable treasure. Global registration reflects more than an entry on an international list; it

symbolizes a commitment to preserving the heritage and culture of those who have venerably guarded it through the ages. Therefore, it is expected that officials, experts, and cultural enthusiasts will collaborate, demonstrating solidarity to establish the necessary conditions for the mosque's international recognition. In doing so, the Urmia Grand Mosque can shine as a symbol of Iran's rich history and culture on the

world stage. Mozaffar Abbaszadeh, head of the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning, and Art at Urmia University, stated, "In the 10-year tourism outlook for Urmia, there is no opportunity as significant for the city's globalization as the global registration of the Grand Mosque. This will place Urmia firmly on the map of international tourist destinations." He explained that, due to

restrictions on the number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, many historical sites are registered as collections of multiple properties. Yet, registering the mosque globally would prominently feature it as a key destination, drawing tourists specifically for its significance. For example, while tourists currently pass through Urmia en route to sites like Qara Kelisa (Saint Thaddeus Monastery) in

the north and Takht-e Soleiman in the south, the global recognition of the mosque would connect these sites, positioning Urmia within the wider network of international tourism destinations.

Abbaszadeh noted, "The dome of the Urmia Grand Mosque is 800 years old, and the mihrab itself is over a thousand years old. Its mihrab is the largest stucco mihrab in the world."

He urged local officials to make every effort to facilitate relocating the seminary by providing suitable land and funding for its construction — offering the faculty's assistance in designing and supervising the project free of charge. He emphasized, "The global registration of the Grand Mosque is a unique opportunity to put Urmia on the world map."

Highlighting the significance, he stated, "The mosque embodies a document of the city's Islamic identity that spans over a thousand years. We must seize this opportunity to address the challenges ahead, as previous meetings have shown that the seminary officials are ready for positive collaboration."

Regarding ongoing efforts, Abbaszadeh added, "So far, two phases of restoration have been completed. The first involved organizing the area around the mosque, and the second included extensive internal and external restoration of the dome. Currently, the mosque's decorations are being restored, and the additional wooden coverings around the columns have been re-

Traditional wool weaving in North Khorasan Province

Pelas is a traditional wool kilim with a rich history, used for centuries as a floor covering to protect against humidity, cold, and ground heat. These rugs adorn the floors of village homes and nomadic tents in North Khorasan Province, especially in damp environ-

ments. They also serve as prayer rugs and bridal tablecloths. Typically, the background of Pelas features horizontal, colorful strips, and although similar in design and motifs to Jajims, Pelas are distinguished by their horizontal strip orientation,

while Jajims have vertical strips. While Pelas are woven in other regions of Iran, North Khorasan Province is renowned for its distinctive Pichbafi technique, which involves no special knots. Instead, patterns are created by passing colorful wefts through wraps, with

wefts passing from both front and behind for added stability, giving the patterns an embossed appearance. Nomadic weavers produce these textiles on horizontal looms using wool from their own sheep. Women spin the yarns, dye them, and weave Pelas, rugs, and

other textiles. Depending on the product's size, they choose a suitable loom and stretch the yarns in a traditional Persian or "Zarb Dari" style. Once stretched, a mixture of flour and water (clay or paste) is applied to the top and bottom of the loom to prevent the wraps from

loosening if cut. Regarding the handicrafts of North Khorasan Province, the region is renowned for its diverse and vibrant textile traditions, including kilim weaving, embroidery, and leatherwork. These craftworks reflect the cultural heritage of various

ethnic groups, like Kurds, Turkmens, and Persians, preserving ancient techniques and motifs. The local handicrafts not only serve practical purposes but also form a vital part of the region's cultural identity and are highly valued for their artistry and craftsmanship.



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