

Restoration of Zahhak Castle in Hashtrud bridges past and future

Iranica Desk

Amid the varied landscapes of East Azarbaijan Province, atop a solitary mountain in the southern part of Hashtrud, stands a fortress built from stone, woven into the fabric of ancient legends. Not only does this site serve as a historic stronghold, but it also symbolizes resilience, wisdom, and the rich stories embedded in Iranian cultural memory. Known as Zahhak Castle, an enigmatic structure with a history exceeding three thousand years, it now occupies a strategic intersection of history, mythology, and regional cultural-tourism development. Reexamining this site is not merely an archaeological task but a key element of our collective identity for today and the future.

Constructed with sophisticated engineering, Zahhak Castle rests on a bed of reddish rocks, its strategic location reflecting a wise choice for military fortifications in antiquity. Its elevation above sea level, challenging surrounding terrains, comprehensive oversight of nearby plains, and access to water resources all contribute to its distinction as a unique fortress in Iran's history, chtn.ir wrote.

Architecturally and functionally, Zahhak Castle displays evidence from the Median, Parthian, Sassanid, and early Islamic periods. Sassanid arches, colonnaded halls, deep water basins, remnants of temples, and defensive structures demonstrate that the site was not only a military base but also a religious, political, and educational hub.

Deputy Head of the East Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Vahid Navadvad, emphasized the importance of safeguarding this valuable site. He stated: "Zahhak Castle is one of the most significant examples of rocky architecture and ancient engineering in northwest Iran. Unfortunately, over recent decades, this crucial historical fortress has not played as prominent a role in



the province's cultural tourism as it should. However, we are now committed to introducing, documenting, and developing the relevant infrastructure of this historic site with full dedication."

He added: "Based on stratigraphic studies and historical records, restoration work is currently underway at the main entrance and eastern side of the castle. Protecting this fortress is akin to preserving a part of the

region's historical memory and cultural identity. Our approach is minimal intervention — respecting the authenticity of the materials and the original form of the structure — and avoiding incompatible constructions." On the other hand, Zahhak Castle's unparalleled tourism potential can today become a pillar of sustainable regional development — if accompanied by a cultural perspective and careful planning.

Alireza Bayramzadeh, deputy head of East Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization for Tourism Affairs, expressed: "Zahhak Castle is not just a sightseeing spot; it's an embodied experience — a blend of history, nature, myth, and architecture. Our plan includes improving access routes, installing multilingual informational signs, and developing basic infrastructure to promote

cultural tourism." He continued: "We are developing eco-tourism initiatives with local community participation, aiming to boost the local economy and facilitate transmission of cultural values. Additionally, specialized mythological and historical tours can attract an educated audience — a practice now common in many civilizations with a rich cultural heritage." In terms of strategic develop-

ment, Ahmad Hamzehzadeh, director general of the East Azerbaijan Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization, emphasized the need for coordination among the sectors of cultural heritage, tourism, and investment. He said: "In our new approach, preserving historic monuments is more than a heritage duty; it's part of a comprehensive regional cultural and economic development strategy. We see Zahhak Castle not only as a historic site but as a living asset for re-establishing regional identity." He added: "In this regard, negotiations are underway to attract cultural investors for creating museum sites, launching night-time tourism programs, and developing access routes. These initiatives, while preserving the site's authenticity, can serve as drivers of economic growth for Hashtrud and surrounding areas."

Zahhak Castle is not merely an ancient structure nestled high in Hashtrud's mountains; it embodies the enduring connection between history, wisdom, and cultural identity — standing against oblivion through centuries. While today it appears silent, worn by time and passing years, within this magnificent monument lies the potential to be revitalized within a vibrant cultural ecosystem — if perspectives extend beyond mere figures and budgets to explore the deeper meanings, authenticity, and wisdom woven into its layers of history.

In the current era, when sustainable development hinges on the cultural and indigenous assets we cherish, Zahhak Castle can serve as a model for innovative utilization of historical capacities in fostering economic and cultural growth.

If cultural heritage is wisely directed toward responsible tourism, public engagement, and targeted investment, it will not only be preserved but also become a dynamic, living asset in society. With its millennia-old history, Zahhak Castle deserves to shine within such a progressive paradigm.

Delfard village; an ecological oasis with waterfalls, mountains, rich flora

Delfard village is situated along the road connecting Jiroft to Baft and Kerman, approximately 45 kilometers northwest of Jiroft and about 25 kilometers from the ancient Iranian urban settlement of "Aratta" in Kerman Province. The valley, stretching over 40 kilometers, is surrounded by Hezar Mountain to the northwest and the village of Abgarmu

to the southeast, located on the heights of Sarbijan. The village lies at an elevation of nearly 1,378 meters above sea level. The Delfard River flows through the village and the valley, which is also the source of the Shour River. Delfard is divided into two main parts: the upper, mountainous Delfard and the lower, more desert-like and tropical Del-

fard. The houses are primarily constructed from stone, iron, brick, and cement blocks, and are mostly single-story. Several medicinal pools are found in Delfard, offering potential for water therapy. Key features of Delfard include an abundance of waterfalls and rivers that flow in all seasons, natural ice houses, qanats (underground channels), water springs,

and the unique coexistence of both tropical and cold climates.

Climate and nature

Delfard enjoys a diverse climate characterized by both subtropical warmth and cold mountain air, creating a remarkable microclimate. Summers are generally mild to hot, especially in the lower, tropical parts, while winter brings cold tempera-

tures and snowfall in the mountainous regions. The area's rich natural beauty includes lush greenery, diverse forests, and a vibrant array of flora and fauna, making it a haven for nature lovers and eco-tourists.

Agriculture and local flora

Agricultural products are highly valued in Delfard, with notable

crops including walnuts, dates, grapes, cherries, pomegranates, apricots, oranges, as well as wheat, barley, peas, beans, and other summer crops. Local flora includes White poplar, Acer monspessulanum, Pistacia atlantica, hawthorns, raspberries, and medicinal herbs such as Teucrium polium, thyme, viper's-bugloss, licorice, yarrow, and milkvetch.

