

Iranica Desk

Museums, as living treasures of culture and history, play a crucial role in deepening societies' understanding of human heritage and have become one of the key pillars of cultural tourism in today's world. They serve as vibrant spaces where the past is narrated through tangible, accessible means, often enhanced by modern technologies that bring history to life for visitors. In Iran, the National Cultural Heritage Week is being held from May 18-24. These institutions create opportunities for people to connect with their cultural roots, explore diverse civilizations, and appreciate the artistic and historical achievements of humanity in an engaging and meaningful way.

Ali Akbar Baniasadi, Secretary of the Iran Silk Road International Center, emphasized in a written note that museums, as guardians of cultural and historical treasures, do much more than preserve artifacts; they function as vital destinations within the tourism industry, offering visitors profound and enriching experiences. He pointed out that museum tourism, which involves exploring these cultural institutions to deepen understanding of history, art, and knowledge, has grown significantly in recent decades and has become a fundamental element of cultural travel. This form of tourism creates an essential link between the past and present, allowing tourists to become familiar with the identity, traditions, and culture of different societies while simultaneously contributing to the economic and social development of the regions that host these institutions, chtn.ir wrote.

Innovative tools

In today's globalized and technologically advanced society, museums have adopted innovative tools, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive exhibitions, to provide dynamic and engaging experiences that transcend traditional object displays. From historic museums like the National Museum of Iran in Tehran to pioneering establishments such as the Dubai Future Museum, these institutions serve as cultural bridges that connect different civilizations and foster mutual understanding. Additionally, initiatives such as the International Alliance of Museums of the Silk Road (IAMS) aim to strengthen international cooperation and promote the shared heritage of the Silk Road routes, highlighting the strategic role that museums play in global tourism. In Iran, the membership of Amir Museum Garden of Semnan in this alliance represents a significant

Amir Garden Museum; a key player in Silk Road Museums Alliance



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step toward showcasing the region's rich history and culture to tourists from around the world, elevating its profile on the international stage.

This article, focusing on the importance of museums in tourism, explores this alliance and examines the role of Amir Garden Museum of Semnan within the broader context of international heritage preservation and cultural exchange. Museums, as the beating heart of culture and history, hold an unparalleled place in attracting tourists and fostering cultural awareness globally. They do more than just display objects — they narrate stories of civilizations, arts, and human progress, which are highly appealing to tourists seeking meaningful and immersive experiences. The significance of museums in tourism can be better understood through several key aspects:

Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage: Museums safeguard invaluable historical and artistic works, enabling visitors to connect with the past of nations and regions. For example, the National Museum of Iran, with its extensive collection spanning from

the Paleolithic age through to the Islamic periods, introduces Iran's rich history to the world and preserves it for future generations.

Education and awareness-raising: Museums function as educational arenas where tourists — especially the younger generation — can expand their understanding through exhibitions, workshops, and guided tours. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), museums attract over one billion visitors annually, most of whom are motivated by a desire to learn and explore cultural narratives.

Strengthening local and national identity: By showcasing the unique culture and history of a region, museums help reinforce a sense of pride, unity, and identity among local communities. This, in turn, encourages visitors to develop a deeper understanding of their travel destinations, fostering cultural appreciation and respect.

Economic impact: Museums contribute significantly to the local economy by attracting tourists, creating employment opportunities, and stimulating surrounding businesses such

as hotels, restaurants, and craft shops. ICOM's report indicates that in 2023, museums contributed over \$700 billion to the global economy, highlighting their role as powerful drivers of economic growth and sustainable development.

Innovation and appeal: Modern museums increasingly utilize digital technologies, such as virtual tours and interactive exhibitions, to deliver contemporary and engaging experiences. These innovations not only attract new visitors but also promote repeat visits by offering fresh, immersive content. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Louvre Museum successfully offered virtual tours to millions worldwide, demonstrating how technological adaptation can expand a museum's reach and relevance.

International Alliance of Museums of Silk Road

IAMS is an international initiative designed to promote and preserve the rich cultural and historical heritage of the Silk Road routes by establishing a connected network of museums and cultural institutions

across multiple countries. The Silk Road, which was active from the 2nd century BCE until the 15th century CE, was a complex network of trade routes that facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, technologies, and cultures between the East and West, leaving a lasting legacy of intercultural interaction.

This alliance, developed in collaboration with major organizations such as UNESCO and ICOM, unites museums situated in countries along the historic Silk Road — including Iran, China, Kazakhstan, and Turkey — with the goal of fostering cooperation and shared cultural stewardship. The key objectives of the alliance are:

Promotion of shared heritage: Museums showcase artifacts related to the Silk Road, including textiles, coins, pottery, manuscripts, and archaeological finds, enabling visitors to understand the depth of cultural exchanges, mutual influences, and civilizations that interacted along these routes.

Strengthening international cooperation: Through joint exhibitions, artifact exchanges, shared research initiatives, and educational programs, the alli-

ance seeks to enhance collaboration among member institutions, promoting best practices for conservation and interpretation.

Attracting global tourists: By highlighting the cultural attractions and stories of the Silk Road, the alliance aims to increase tourism to less-known regions, spreading awareness of their historical significance and encouraging sustainable tourism development.

Iran, as one of the key countries along the Silk Road, plays a vital role in this alliance. Cities such as Semnan, located directly on the historic route, have gained new opportunities to showcase their unique heritage, cultural richness, and historical sites to international visitors through participation in this collaborative framework.

Amir Garden Museum

Amir Garden Museum in Semnan, which recently joined IAMS, was constructed between 1876 and 1886 CE by Haj Mirza Agha Family. It is named after the Amir-e-Azam Garden, a significant surrounding landscape associated with the region's history and illustrious rulers of Khorasan Province. The museum houses artifacts that tell the story of Semnan's cultural and historical development, including handwritten Holy Qur'ans, traditional lighting tools, Safavid-era porcelain, and important historical documents. These collections provide a vivid window into the region's rich cultural tapestry and historical evolution.

Joining the alliance marks an important step forward for Amir Garden Museum in terms of international recognition and cultural promotion. The benefits of this membership include:

Increased global recognition: Becoming part of an international network enhances the visibility of Amir Garden, attracting foreign tourists and researchers interested in Silk Road history.

Cultural exchange: The museum gains opportunities for collaboration with other member institutions through joint exhibitions, artifact sharing, and research projects, enriching its offerings and promoting intercultural understanding.

Development of local tourism: Membership, combined with regional tourism initiatives such as festivals — including the prominent Taska Festival in Semnan — serves to boost local economic vitality, foster cultural pride, and expand community engagement with regional heritage.

Overall, the IAMS symbolizes a significant effort to foster transnational cooperation, preserve shared cultural legacies, and promote sustainable tourism through the rich historical narratives of the Silk Road.

