



# Iran eyes tourism pacts with UAE, Mexico, Ghana, UNWTO support



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## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's deputy tourism chief held a series of high-level meetings on Thursday on the sidelines of the 49th Executive Council session of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), discussing deeper cooperation with officials from the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, and Ghana. Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpei, deputy minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts, led Iran's delegation during the sessions in Segovia, pushing to strengthen "people-to-people ties" and expand cultural and tourism diplomacy, IRNA reported. In a sit-down with UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem bint Ebrahim Al Hashimy, both sides underscored the importance of shared cultural roots and "close geography" in shaping regional con-

nectivity. Bandpei floated joint projects in health tourism, ecotourism, and arts-based travel, proposing tailor-made packages and cultural exchanges. The Emirati side welcomed the ideas, calling tourism a "strategic necessity" and expressed hope for a "clear jump" in bilateral ties through "practical planning." Toward the end of the meeting, Al Hashimy requested Iran's backing for the UAE-supported candidate in the race for UNWTO Secretary-General. Iran responded that it would make its final decision based on "professional standards," qualifications, and national interests, after reviewing all candidates' full documentation. Later, in talks with Mexican officials, including the country's tourism minister, discussions turned to training, branding, and cross-border travel promotion. The Mexican delegation

offered to share expertise and sought Iran's support for its own candidate in the UNWTO leadership race. Bandpei pointed to shared civilizational heritage as fertile ground for deeper diplomatic and cultural engagement. "Cultural and tourism cooperation is the missing link," he said, stressing the long-term potential of sustained cultural initiatives. In another meeting, Iran and Ghana explored partnerships in medical tourism and ecotourism. Ghana's foreign and tourism ministers both welcomed Iranian proposals and echoed calls for deeper technical collaboration. A Ghanaian candidate also laid out reform plans for the UNWTO post, calling for equitable hiring across member states and a shift away from what he described as "political bias" in the organization's approach to global disputes.

## Iran, Tajikistan to form joint committee on Persian literature, civilization

Tehran urges greater regional cooperation on water security

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A high-level joint committee on Persian language, literature, and cultural heritage between Iran and Tajikistan was proposed on May 29 in Dushanbe, as Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref called for stronger academic and cultural collaboration to preserve "shared identity" and deepen historical ties.

In meetings held May 29 and 30 in Dushanbe, Aref emphasized the nations' "deep cultural, historical, and linguistic connections" and called for the formation of a joint committee on Persian language, literature, and civilization, fvpresident.ir reported.

The proposal was welcomed by Tajik officials during a series of high-level talks.

Calling Tajikistan "a second homeland for Iranians," Aref described the two countries as neighbors "within a single civilizational zone," adding that cultural affinity had helped strengthen bilateral ties over the past three decades.

The two sides also discussed deepening scientific and academic exchange, including student and faculty cooperation, and expanding partnerships in technology and engineering.

"We're ready to share the progress Iran has made in science and technology with friendly nations," Aref told Tajik leaders.

Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda said the two peoples were "tied together by shared cultural and historical val-



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ues" that can drive economic and social growth.

Cultural diplomacy wasn't the only focus. Aref represented Iran at the International Conference on Glaciers Preservation in Dushanbe on Friday. The conference, held May 29-31, centers on climate resilience and water security.

Addressing global warming and its threat to freshwater reserves, Aref said, "Glaciers are a hidden treasure" and warned that their melting could lead to floods, soil erosion, and the destruction of infrastructure.

He noted that Iran, with its long history of water management in arid regions, has managed to bridge "traditional systems and modern technology."

Iran's experience with qanats—underground aqueducts designed to prevent evaporation—was presented as an example of sustainable innovation.

"We believe the world needs creative

and fair solutions," Aref said, emphasizing the importance of joint efforts to turn environmental "challenges into opportunities."

The visa waiver between the two countries was also credited for a sharp uptick in tourism and private-sector engagement. Officials said the 17th session of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Commission in Shiraz had yielded "solid agreements," including 13 new cooperation documents worth over \$450 million.

Both sides pointed to growing trade and called for continued efforts to remove barriers. "There's no obstacle to moving our ties forward," Aref remarked after his meeting with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon.

The Tajik president, in turn, stressed the importance of preserving the two nations' "shared heritage and customs" and expressed support for cultural projects.

## Tehran launches Balkan Iran Cultural Institute to bridge Balkans, Middle East



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Iranian officials and academics on Thursday unveiled the Balkan Iran Cultural and Media Institute at a ceremony in Tehran's Milad Tower, calling it a "shared home" for Iran and the Balkans aimed at fostering regional dialogue through culture and media.

Among the attendees were Mohammad Hossein Ranjbaran, senior advisor to Iran's foreign minister, former ambassador to Yugoslavia Mohammad Javad Asayesh, and Eastern Europe director Alizadeh from the foreign ministry, Mehr News Agency reported.

The founder and CEO of the new institute, Mohsen Sohani, told the audience the project was more than a virtual space. "We are not just launching a cultural-media platform," he said. "We are building a living bridge—a bridge of words that have echoed for

centuries in Balkan books, mosques, churches, and streets."

Sohani described the Balkans as a region where the "call to prayer and church bells meet," and emphasized its shared history with Iran.

He called the new institute a step toward telling stories rather than receiving them. "Let's not be passive recipients. Let's create the narrative—with our pens, our cameras, and our voices," he urged.

The institute's focus will include cultural exchange, public diplomacy, and promoting Persian language and literature across the Balkans.

The event also featured a live theatrical performance by Iranian actor and playwright Ayoub Aghakhani, drawing strong applause from the audience.

"The 20th century knew the Balkans through war," Sohani said in closing. "Let's make its 21st century about poetry, peace, and dignity."

## Staying out of FATF ...

Only North Korea, Iran, and Myanmar are on FATF's blacklist. The question is why Iran should be lumped in with these countries. Iran is a nation with a rich civilization, culture, significant global standing, and vast economic potential. It borders 15 countries, boasts huge oil, gas, and mineral reserves, and has

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access to both northern and southern seas. A country with such assets should not be placed alongside those nations. Staying out of these treaties makes it difficult to repatriate foreign currency, and freezes up state assets abroad, and forces Iran to import non-essential goods just to make up for blocked funds. Moreover, non-membership takes a toll

on money transfers for Iranian students and deters foreign investment. Today, many Iranians abroad are eager to invest in their homeland, and major foreign firms are willing to enter the market, but the lack of FATF membership puts the brakes on these opportunities. The biggest hurdle to foreign investment in Iran right now is precisely

this non-membership. The biggest hurdle to foreign investment in Iran right now is precisely this non-membership. When a country is labeled high-risk, it scares off foreign capital. For investors, staying out of FATF sends the message that doing business here is too risky—so they hold back. Consequently, millions of dollars in na-

tional interests have been left on the table due to FATF non-membership. Now that the Expediency Council has come around, swift action must be taken. With Palermo on its way to implementation, hopes are high that the Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) bill will soon follow, paving the way for Iran's full FATF membership.