



Iran's minister hails eco-lodges as backbone of rural tourism revival

Social Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, on Tuesday, July 59, praised eco-lodges as the "true carriers" of indigenous culture and a strategic pillar in the government's grassroots development agenda. Speaking at a meeting with heads of provincial eco-tourism associations in Tehran, Salehi Amiri underlined the critical role of eco-lodges in reviving local traditions, halting rural decline, and boosting domestic tourism. "These are not just places to sleep," he said, "they breathe life into languages, customs, and culinary heritage that hotels simply cannot replicate." The event brought together senior ministry officials and provincial representatives to discuss fiscal, legal, and infrastructural hurdles facing Iran's 3,744 registered eco-lodges. Salehi Amiri emphasized that these establishments stand at the heart of the government's strategy to decentralize tourism and empower rural communities. The minister described them as "symbols of people-centered governance" and "ve-

hicles for cultural identity." Amiri also highlighted the "inspiring" role eco-lodge operators played during the recent 56-day conflict, particularly in Kerman province, where free accommodation was offered to displaced civilians. "This showed that eco-lodges are more than businesses — they are part of our national social fabric," he noted. The minister stressed that rural festivals, focused on local food, dress, and rituals, are catalysts for drawing visitors and bringing income back to underdeveloped areas. "When jobs are born in villages, they are sustainable and rooted," he said. According to Salehi Amiri, reversing rural migration and sparking "life back in forgotten corners" is no longer a dream. "Eco-tourism is not a tool," he declared, "it is the goal." On regulatory matters, Salehi Amiri warned that while the government remains firmly behind licensed operators, unregistered facilities would face legal action to preserve industry standards. He added that a push for renewable energy was underway, with solar panels being rolled out at eco-lodges in several provinces. "The President has thrown his



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri (c), speaks at a meeting with heads of provincial eco-tourism associations in Tehran on July 15, 2025.
● IRNA

support behind this clean energy initiative. \$6bn has been earmarked to make it happen." During the same event, Deputy Minister of Tourism Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey described eco-lodges as a "vast accommodation network" that actively shapes cultural values. He said their response during the conflict "was nothing short of remarkable," showing both social responsibility and national solidarity. Elsewhere in the discussion, ministry advisers and provincial representatives raised concerns over taxation, bank credit access, and outdated regulations. Salehi Amiri tasked the tourism division with fast-tracking solutions, instructing them to "clear the roadblocks without delay." Yavar Abiri, head of the national Eco-lodges Association, underlined their



economic potential. "They help curb migration, reduce poverty, and create jobs," he said, calling for continued financial backing. "We're not just keeping up — we're competitive with global standards," he added. Salehi Amiri, who also chaired a separate

economic coordination session on Monday, revealed that 54 stimulus packages have been designed to help the tourism sector bounce back after the war. "Tourism was hit hard, but it's also the first to bounce back. The road ahead is clear, and we're committed."

Iranian drama 'They Loved Me' to compete at Portugal Avanca festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian director Mohammadreza Rahmani's feature 'They Loved Me' was officially selected for competition at the 69th Avanca International Film Festival,

to be held from July 63 to 67 in the northern Portuguese town of Avanca. This is the film's international debut. The Avanca festival, launched in 1997, is one of Portugal's most prominent showcases for inde-

pendent cinema and media arts. In addition to screenings, it hosts technical workshops and masterclasses led by veteran filmmakers and educators from around the world, IRNA reported. 'They Loved Me' stars Amirhossein Arman, Amir Jafari, Mahsa Esmaeili, Nasim Adabi, Shahram Qaedi, Hadi Taslimi, Seyed Ali Salehi, Iraj Rahmani, and Leila Boloukat. The drama, which had faced a period of suspension by Iranian authorities, finally opened in domestic cinemas in autumn 6464. International distribution is handled by Elaheh Goodarzi of Minerva Film Institute. Rahmani's film joins a competitive lineup at Avanca that frequently features bold storytelling from emerging voices. Festival organizers said this year's selection "bridges borders and genres," with a strong focus on films rooted in social realities.

Tehran to host war memorial art show

Arts & Culture Desk

A group exhibition titled 'Tehran,' honoring those who died in the recent war, will open on Friday, July 58, at Artibition Gallery in Tehran. The month-long exhibit is a joint effort by several galleries and features works from eight contemporary Iranian artists, aiming to portray the capital as both a battlefield and a place of belonging. The event reflects on the emotional toll of war, forced displacements, and the struggle of a city caught "between attachment and chaos." The participating artists include Arman Yaghoubipour, Kiumars Harpa, Marjan Nemati, Mohammad Eskandari, Fatemeh Zanjani, Behrouz Majidi, Amin Tavakol, and Fateck Mousavi. The poster was designed by Alireza Shafiee, ISNA reported. "Tehran stands somewhere in the twilight of its residents' identity," the exhibition's curatorial statement reads. The city is described as both a "capital for migrants" and a birthplace for generations who have lived its every joy and trauma—pulled between



love for home and the exhausting realities of "crowds, noise, speed and smoke." Referencing Plato's Republic, the statement paints Tehran as distant from the philosopher's ideal of a "just city," yet still a cradle for memory, resistance, and resilience. "In the twelve gray days just past, Tehran emptied out under missile strikes. Some departures were permanent. Others, temporary and forced. But the city—scarred and watchful—remains." The show will run through August 56.

Iran ranks 11th among Islamic countries in 2026 QS university list

Social Desk

Iran ranked 55th among Islamic nations in the 6466 edition of the QS World University Rankings, according to figures released in July by the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC). The data shows that Malaysia led the list with 36 universities, followed by Indonesia and Turkey with 66 each. Iran had 55 institutions on the global ranking. The results, published in June 6469 by QS Quacquarelli Symonds, evaluated over 5,944 universities worldwide in its 66nd edition, ISNA reported. The top-ranked institution among Muslim-majority countries was Universiti Malaya (UM) of Malaysia, placed 98th globally. It was followed by King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Saudi Arabia, ranked 67th, and Qatar University at 556. "The Islamic world was represented by 694



universities from 69 countries," said Mohammad-Mehdi Alavianmehr, head of the ISC, adding that 97 Islamic nations were eligible. Globally, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) held on to the top spot for the 54th consecutive year, while Imperial College London climbed to second. Stanford, Oxford, and Harvard followed in third to fifth place respectively. The ISC is the Tehran-based institute that monitors and analyses science and technology developments across the Islamic world.



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