



# Iran seeks to turn Alborz into tourism hub to boost economy



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri (c), walks with officials during a visit to tourism and heritage sites in Alborz province, Iran, July 23, 2025.  
● IRNA

Speaking during his one-day trip to Alborz on July 23, Salehi Amiri said the province, which sits just west of Tehran, “reflects all that Iran stands for – history, nature, culture and industry – in a dense and unique form.” His remarks came as Iran tries to ramp up tourism revenues amid biting Western sanctions, IRNA reported. Alborz, home to about 3 million people, bears Tehran’s demographic spillover and lies along strategic transport corridors connecting central Iran to the Caspian and western provinces. Salehi Amiri urged “massive national investment” to elevate the region’s tourism infrastructure to global standards, branding it a potential “gateway for international tour groups.” The minister noted that Alborz is

dubbed Iran’s “capital of ancient mounds” for its archaeological richness, with few parts of the province devoid of historical sites.

Scientific excavations are set to begin soon across ancient settlements, lasting roughly one year. “Specialized archaeology teams in collaboration with the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage will conduct excavations,” he said, adding that findings would be shared transparently with residents and local officials.

Plans include restoring historical spaces, building specialized museums, preserving rural heritage and creating public visitor routes.

Salehi Amiri called these steps vital to positioning Alborz as “a national brand and a future global destination.”

A five-star hotel in Karaj, Alborz’s capital, is slated for imminent opening with provincial support. Several other tourism projects are under construction. “This is a significant move to internationalize Alborz tourism,” he said, adding that smart planning and institution-

al backing are crucial.

Nationwide, Iran has over 2,700 active tourism projects. Last year, 7.3 million foreign tourists visited Iran. The government initially targeted 10 million arrivals in 2025 before regional conflicts disrupted projections. Tehran now eyes a medium-term goal of attracting 15 million foreign visitors, banking on private sector cooperation to “pick up the slack” amid economic constraints. “Tourism is not only an engine for national economic growth,” Salehi Amiri said, “it is a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy to reimagine Iran’s regional and global standing.”

Amid a severe economic crunch from what Iranian officials call “hybrid wars and external pressures,” he expressed regret over public hardships. But he assured citizens that the administration is “pulling out all the stops” to ensure security, economic stability, and basic goods supply.

“Alborz is no marginal province,” he said. “It is a civilizational center that must become Iran’s new tourism pole.”

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, on Wednesday called Alborz

province a “compressed mirror” of the country’s civilization, urging its transformation into a national tourism hub to help lift Iran’s economy and global image.

## Iran readies 32 airports for Arbaeen pilgrimage flights



### Social Desk

Iran’s Airports and Air Navigation Company said on Tuesday it had prepared 32 international airports to handle Arbaeen pilgrimage operations starting August 8.

The company’s managing director Mohammad Amirani told state media that a central Arbaeen taskforce was formed three months ago to coordinate airlines, security forces, airport police and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps aviation protection unit to ensure smooth travel for pilgrims heading to Iraq, IRNA reported.

“We expect a sharp rise in flights to Najaf and Baghdad from border airports including Ilam, Kermanshah, Ahvaz and

Abadan,” Amirani said, adding that infrastructure upgrades had been prioritized to “facilitate pilgrims’ movement.” Flights for Arbaeen, which marks the 40th day after Ashura and draws millions of Shia pilgrims annually, will operate from August 8 to August 17. All aviation, airport operations, and airspace control centers are on standby for the surge in passengers.

Amirani noted that Isfahan and Tabriz airports, damaged during recent Israeli airstrikes, were rebuilt and are now fully operational. The 12-day strikes targeted multiple Iranian cities, prompting emergency repairs to keep aviation services running.

He urged pilgrims to book tickets only through official channels and arrive early at airports to avoid delays, warning them against carrying prohibited items.

“Serving Arbaeen pilgrims is a great honor for us,” Amirani said. He described them as “special guests” deserving the highest standard of services at what he called “Zero Pole,” an expression referring to airports as the starting point of the pilgrimage journey.

## Iran’s top-grossing animation ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ targets global market

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian producer Mohammad Mehdi Mashkouri said on Wednesday that negotiations are underway to take the animated series ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ to international markets, following the domestic box office success of its feature film adaptation ‘Woolina and the No Birds’.

The three-dimensional series, directed by Hossein Safarzaghegan and produced by Mashkouri for the Owj Arts and Media Organization, builds on the its franchise, which first aired in two-dimensional format.

Its cinematic version, released in early 2024, grossed nearly 70 billion toman (around \$1.3 million), becoming the highest-grossing animation in Iranian cinema history. ‘Woolina and the No Birds’ has already been screened in Turkey, Russia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

The new series airs weekly on Iran’s Nahal TV channel every Thursday and Friday at 5 p.m. Mashkouri described its core mission as building a sustained relationship with children by creating an enduring Iranian hero through “repetition and continuity.” He argued that successful global brands thrive on consistent portray-

al of heroes across films and series, while Iranian children’s productions remain seasonal and fragmented.

“Childhood content is about persistence. That’s how heroes are created,” Mashkouri told IRNA in Tehran. He explained that the series continues the story world of ‘Woolina and the No Birds’, where the main characters, having achieved their goal of flying in the film, now use their flying tools to help others.

Each episode follows a standalone story designed around teamwork and problem-solving, avoiding the traditional good-versus-evil plotlines. “We emphasized cooperation and participation, using humor and child-friendly language,” Mashkouri noted.

Scripts were developed in consultation with child psychologists, family media experts, and children’s writers to ensure clarity and immediacy. “Children don’t have time for long analysis. Educational content must be simple and tangible.”

Mashkouri also highlighted the intensive pre-production phase, during which the team chose 52 core themes, writing a separate screenplay for each. At the end of each episode, characters receive medals for overcoming challenges, a device intended to keep



viewers engaged and pave the way for a planned second cinematic feature, already in early script development. On visual design, he acknowledged criticism over the absence of overt Iranian cultural elements, explaining that the fantasy nature of the characters necessitated a universal approach. “If the characters were human, we would have incorporated stronger Iranian symbols. But these are fantasy figures, aimed at international broadcast,” Mashkouri said.

Marketing efforts abroad began a year ago, with discussions ongoing in several countries, although Mashkouri declined to name them pending final agreements. “We are hopeful the series will join the network’s popular shows,” he said, adding that the animation has become one of Iran’s best-known children’s brands.

## Saudi eyes closer anti-drug cooperation with Iran

### Social Desk

Saudi Arabia is looking to step up cooperation with Iran in fighting drug trafficking, a senior Saudi official said on Wednesday in Tehran, signaling warming ties between the regional rivals.

Saeed Mohammed Al-Wadaei, head of the Counter-Narcotics Office at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Tehran, said Riyadh wants to expand work with Iran on intelligence exchange, training, and operational strategies to combat what he called a “cross-border scourge.”

He was speaking during talks with officials at Iran’s Drug Control Headquarters, IRNA reported.

“We are witnessing considerable progress in relations,” Al-Wadaei said, noting that Saudi Arabia aims to bring these ties “to the fore” through joint anti-drug efforts. He described the cooperation as part of building “friendly relations between two brotherly countries.”

Al-Wadaei stressed that drug crime often cuts across borders and even continents, underlining the need for international coop-

eration to tackle trafficking networks. “Fifty percent of the drugs seized in Saudi Arabia result from cooperation with neighboring countries,” he said, highlighting existing joint operations with states along regional trafficking routes.

Saudi Arabia’s National Committee for Combating Drugs is finalizing a five-year strategy that includes international cooperation as a key pillar, according to Al-Wadaei.

He revealed that the strategy lays out “major operational objectives” alongside its primary goals,

with counter-trafficking collaboration among them.

He also voiced hope that an anti-drug clause embedded in past bilateral security agreements with Iran would be reactivated. “It would be a great pleasure to see this clause back in action,” he said.

Islam prohibits drug trafficking as a crime, Al-Wadaei noted, adding that both Tehran and Riyadh were working “with full force” to curb the problem. He said Saudi Arabia had reactivated its embassy’s counter-narcotics office in Tehran to further boost collaboration.

