



# Iraq, Iran plan to boost tourist exchanges to 10m

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iraq's Minister of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Ahmed Fakkak Al-Badrani said his country is ready to expand tourist exchanges with Iran to 10 million visits a year, after holding talks with Iranian industry officials in Baghdad.

Iraq currently sends around 3.5 million visitors annually to Iran, mostly for health treatment and pilgrimage. Under the new plan, the two neighbors expect to raise the figure sharply, with about 5 million travelers heading in each direction, inn.ir reported. Hormatollah Rafiei, head of Iran's Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies, said an Iranian tourism roadshow will take place in mid-September in Baghdad, Karbala and Basra, featuring business meetings and cul-

tural nights designed to draw in potential partners.

During the Baghdad talks, a phone call was arranged with Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri. The two ministers agreed to "hammer out" cooperation on restoring historic sites and pledged closer coordination to let tourism "flourish" through detailed planning.

Officials highlighted health, cultural and educational tourism as priority areas. They are drafting a memorandum of understanding to underpin the initiatives.

Rafiei noted that combined tour packages including other regional countries are also on the table, and both governments will make "special efforts" to push ahead with the joint projects.



## Iranian filmmakers on global juries

### Armenia's Apricot festival appoints Hadi Afarideh as festival judge



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Iranian documentary filmmaker Hadi Afarideh has been named to the jury of the 11th Apricot Tree International Documentary Film Festival, set to run from August 30 to September 6 in Debed, Lori Province, Armenia.

The appointment brings a respected voice to a festival renowned across the Caucasus region,

ILNA wrote.

Afraid of pomp and red-carpet glamour, the Apricot Tree Festival thrives on its rural, intimate vibe. Nestled in the village of Debed, it pairs screenings with hands-on workshops and daily excursions, drawing filmmakers keen to exchange ideas—not spin publicity—on their craft. Afarideh joins jurors from France and Germany in assessing 20 short and feature-length documentaries drawn from an international selection. Many of the films have already earned recognition at major festivals such as Berlin.

From Iran, Mahdi Bagheri's documentary 'Old Boy' will be shown in a special section, alongside the competition films. Screenings will be held outdoors in the open-air cinema of Debed village and inside the local library. Cinema workshops run alongside.

Afarideh is known for directing documentaries such as 'Water Lorry', 'Hollein in Iran', and 'Chenarestan'.

### Javid Sobhani to serve on panel of Portugal's Arouca Film Festival



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Iranian director and screenwriter Javid Sobhani was named to the jury of the 23rd Arouca Film Festival, which will run from September 9 to 18, in Portugal, Mehr News Agency reported on Tuesday.

The Arouca festival, regarded as one of Portugal's most prominent cultural events, high-

lights international cinema and supports emerging talent.

This year's edition will expand its reach by adding a feature film competition for the first time, alongside its long-standing contests for short fiction, documentary, animation and experimental works, Mehr News Agency reported.

Sobhani, born in 1991 in Karaj, Alborz Province is a member of Iranian Society of Screenwriters. He previously served on the festival's jury in 2024. His credits include writing the feature film 'Azhdar' and both writing and directing the short films 'Lullaby' and 'Walkie-Talkie'.

His latest screenplay, 'The White Horse,' won the top prize in the pitching section at the 20th Kazan International Film Festival in Russia. Organizers in Portugal said his return to Arouca reflects the festival's "commitment" to showcasing diverse voices in global cinema.

## Iran entrepreneurs to be showcased in Dubai city-museum project

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Iran will take center stage in the first phase of a new "International Entrepreneurs' City-Museum" being built in Dubai, with busts of 20 prominent Iranian business leaders to be installed, the United Network of Business Entrepreneurs and Development Organization (UNBEDO) said on Tuesday.

The multi-million dollar project, launched by UNBEDO in partnership with Golchin Holding, is rising inside Dubai's Global Village, one of the Emirate's busiest tourist and trade hubs.

UNBEDO chief executive Reza Yadegari called it the group's "largest networking initiative" and said the site was designed to foster investment ties and business ventures between Iranian entrepreneurs and their global counterparts.

By establishing its headquarters in Dubai, UNBEDO seeks to leverage the city's role as a trade corridor and meeting ground for international dealmaking. The mu-

seum will later expand to feature sculptures of entrepreneurs from more than 90 countries, alongside hyperreal statues and reconstructed offices of global figures such as Bill Gates and Elon Musk. Yadegari said the location, which attracts more than 13 million visitors annually, offered a "unique opportunity" to present Iranian business leaders on the world stage while building a platform for

cross-border collaboration.

"The goal is to introduce our entrepreneurs to millions of visitors and to create a setting for shared experience and joint investment," he said.

The museum will also house themed halls tracing the history of companies such as Hilton Hotels through detailed models, while a "Brand City for Children" will use interactive play to instill entrepreneurial ideas in younger generations. Yadegari, a veteran of more than three decades in the field, previously founded Tehran's first municipal entrepreneurship center in 1997 and later established Iran's National Museum of Entrepreneurs. He has authored a 1,000-volume series on Iranian entrepreneurs published on Amazon and was awarded the Jalal Al-e Ahmad prize in 2019 for his contribution to economic literature.

He said the Dubai project is expected to become a new global "hub for inspiration, networking and economic development."



## 'Like A Secret' to compete at Portobello in London

### Art & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Like A Secret,' directed by Saeed Zamanian and starring popular actress Elnaz Shakerdoost, was selected for the competition at the 30th Portobello Film Festival in London.

The festival, renowned for showcasing independent cinema, will run from August 28 to September 21, at venues including The Muse on Portobello Road and The Gate Picturehouse in Notting Hill.

The film explores the psychological turmoil of Baran, a 9-year-old girl grappling with trauma and neglect. As she navigates a blurred line between reality and nightmares, Baran seeks a confidant to share her burdens.

'Like A Secret' is produced by Hassan Mohammadi, with a team that includes cinematographer Pouyan Aghababaei and editor Emad Khod-



abakhsh. The international distribution is managed by Cinerama, led by Neshat Bagheri.

The Portobello Film Festival, established in 1996, is one of the UK's largest free independent film festivals. It has previously launched the careers of filmmakers like Guy Ritchie and Shane Meadows. This year's edition promises a diverse lineup, featuring over 200 new independent films, and continues its tradition of free admission and screenings across various venues.