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Iran eyes tourism as ‘engine of sustainable change’

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri, marked World Tourism Day on September 27, by calling the sector an “engine of sustainable change” and a bridge between nations.

In a message written on the day, the minister said tourism for Iran was more than an economic pursuit, describing it as a “national strategy” and a “global responsibility”.

He linked the industry to cultural diplomacy, economic diversification and dialogue among civilizations, setting out how government reforms and financial incentives were designed to place the country on what he termed the “global orbit” of tourism.

The minister stressed that Iran's landscapes and cultural wealth – from the deserts of Yazd and Hyrcanian forests to the ruins of Persepolis and the Safavid squares

of Isfahan – offered not only a destination but a “civilizational experience”.

He said this illustrated how history and modernity could be “woven together” to create innovative forms of travel.

Policies introduced under President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration include scrapping fees on hotel construction in major cities, zero-tariff imports of new technology and allocating more than \$280 million in funding.

Salehi-Amiri said such measures were already paying off with fuller hotels, a sharp rebound in foreign arrivals and stronger investor confidence.

The government has set a target of drawing 10 million visitors by March 2026. Yet the minister argued that the real measure of success lay in the “international trust” being built in Iran as a safe and diverse destination. Tourism, he added, must serve as a “platform for dialogue” rather than just a commercial exchange.

He also underlined green tourism as a guiding principle, pledging that all projects would safeguard natural resources and heritage sites for future generations. Local communities, he said, must be empowered as the “true owners” of the industry, while smart tourism using new technologies could make travel more efficient and globally competitive.

Cultural festivals and rituals, the minister noted, were “living heritage” that could reinforce Iran's soft power abroad, while regional cooperation with Persian Gulf, Caucasus and Central Asian neighbors was creating new cultural and economic networks. Investment in youth and entrepreneurship, alongside the growth of domestic travel, would underpin a “sustainable future” for the industry.

“Our message on World Tourism Day is clear,” he said. “Tourism is a way of living better, building a greener tomorrow and shaping a more humane world.”



Kurdish-Iranian director wins Busan documentary prize



Arts & Culture Desk

The Busan International Film Festival handed its top documentary prize to ‘Singing Wings’, the debut feature by Kurdish-Iranian filmmaker Hemen Khaledi, in a competition that also honored two South Korean titles.

The Mecenat Award, the festival's chief accolade for Asian non-fiction cinema, was split between Khaledi's portrait of migration and Ju Romi and Kim Taeil's ‘Raining Dust’, IRNA

reported.

Organisers also gave a special mention to Ko Hyoju's ‘Relay Race’. The recognition places Khaledi, until now little known outside Kurdish film circles, among a growing generation of independent directors breaking ground on the international stage.

Shot in the village of Dareh Tafi in Iran's western Kurdistan region, ‘Singing Wings’ intertwines the stories of three couples grappling with the prospect of leaving their

homeland. At its center is an elderly woman caring for both her centenarian husband and an injured stork while her daughter prepares to join her spouse in Europe. The film, which Khaledi developed over four years, avoids the clichés of “poverty” or “nostalgia” and instead, as the director puts it, aims to show migration “without judgement” through a deeply human lens. The production was a joint venture spanning Georgia, Belgium and Iran, with producers Ina Tedjow, Zina Brooyan and Sargol Moradi steering the project through research, shooting and post-production. The collaboration underlines the increasingly transnational nature of documentary financing, with European backers helping to bring regional voices to global screens. This year's 30th Busan festival, which ran from September 17 to 26, screened more than 200 films and drew industry executives and audiences from across the world to what has become East Asia's largest showcase of cinema.

Golden Camera of Macedonia given to Iranian cinematographer Khondji

Arts & Culture Desk

Veteran cinematographer Dariush Khondji was honored with the Golden Camera 300 award for lifetime achievement at the 46th Manaki Brothers International Cinematographers' Film Festival in the northern Macedonian city of Bitola.

Khondji, who was nominated for an Academy Award in 1996 for Alan Parker's *Evita*, has spent decades behind the lens, working with directors as varied as David Fincher, Wong Kar-wai and Bernardo Bertolucci, *inn. ir* reported.

Festival organizers praised his ability to shift seamlessly across “vastly different styles” of filmmaking while leaving an indelible mark on world cinema.

The Iranian-born, Paris-raised cinematographer has collaborated on landmark productions including Fincher's *‘Se7en’*, Bertolucci's *‘Stealing Beauty’*, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *‘The City of Lost Children’*, Wong Kar-wai's *‘My Blueberry Nights’*, and Michael Haneke's *‘Amour’*. He has also shot works for Woody Allen, Danny Boyle, James Gray and Sydney Pollack.

More recently, Khondji was director of photography for Alejandro González Iñárritu's *‘Bardo’* and Bong Joon-ho's forthcoming



‘Mickey 17’. His body of work, blending meticulous technical craft with a painterly eye, has secured him a reputation as one of the industry's most versatile image-makers.

Running from September 20 to 26, the Manaki Brothers festival is regarded as the oldest event dedicated solely to cinematography.

Founded in 1979, it is named after Yanaki and Milton Manaki, pioneering Balkan filmmakers who are often described as the “fathers of Balkan cinema.”

“I never imagined, when I began, that one day I would be standing here,” Khondji told the audience at the Bitola theatre, calling the award “a profound honor” in recognition of his lifelong pursuit of cinema.

Iran signals readiness to join China's Heilongjiang green drive

Social Desk

Iran pledged to take part in China's newly launched “Heilongjiang Initiative”, a UNESCO-backed scheme on biodiversity and sustainable growth, during a global biosphere congress in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou. The pledge was delivered on the sidelines of the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves, where Hamid Zohrabi, deputy head of natural environment and biodiversity at Iran's Department of Environment (DoE), described the initiative as a turning point

in linking ecological protection with “sustainable economic development”, IRNA reported.

The plan, launched this year in partnership with UNESCO's Beijing office, focuses on biodiversity conservation, eco-friendly production and environmental education.

Zohrabi said biosphere reserves are increasingly viewed as models for “nature-based solutions, inclusive livelihoods and resilient markets” as countries accelerate their green transition. He underlined that the Heilongjiang plan highlights the

transfer of ecological values through unique reserves as a strategic tool.

Shina Ansari, vice president and head of Iran's Department of Environment, headed the delegation attending the Hangzhou congress, which runs from September 22 to 26.

The once-a-decade meeting seeks to streamline priorities and redefine collective action on sustainability, aligning its agenda with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris climate accord. The gathering is also tied to

the so-called “Hangzhou Action Plan”, first presented at the UN Climate Conference in 2023, which calls for immediate and joint steps to counter climate change. It urges states to adopt tougher emission curbs, boost community resilience, and secure more funding for green technologies and renewable energy.

By rallying governments behind shared frameworks, organizers hope the Hangzhou plan will forge cross-border coalitions to deliver on Paris Agreement targets and other environmental accords.

