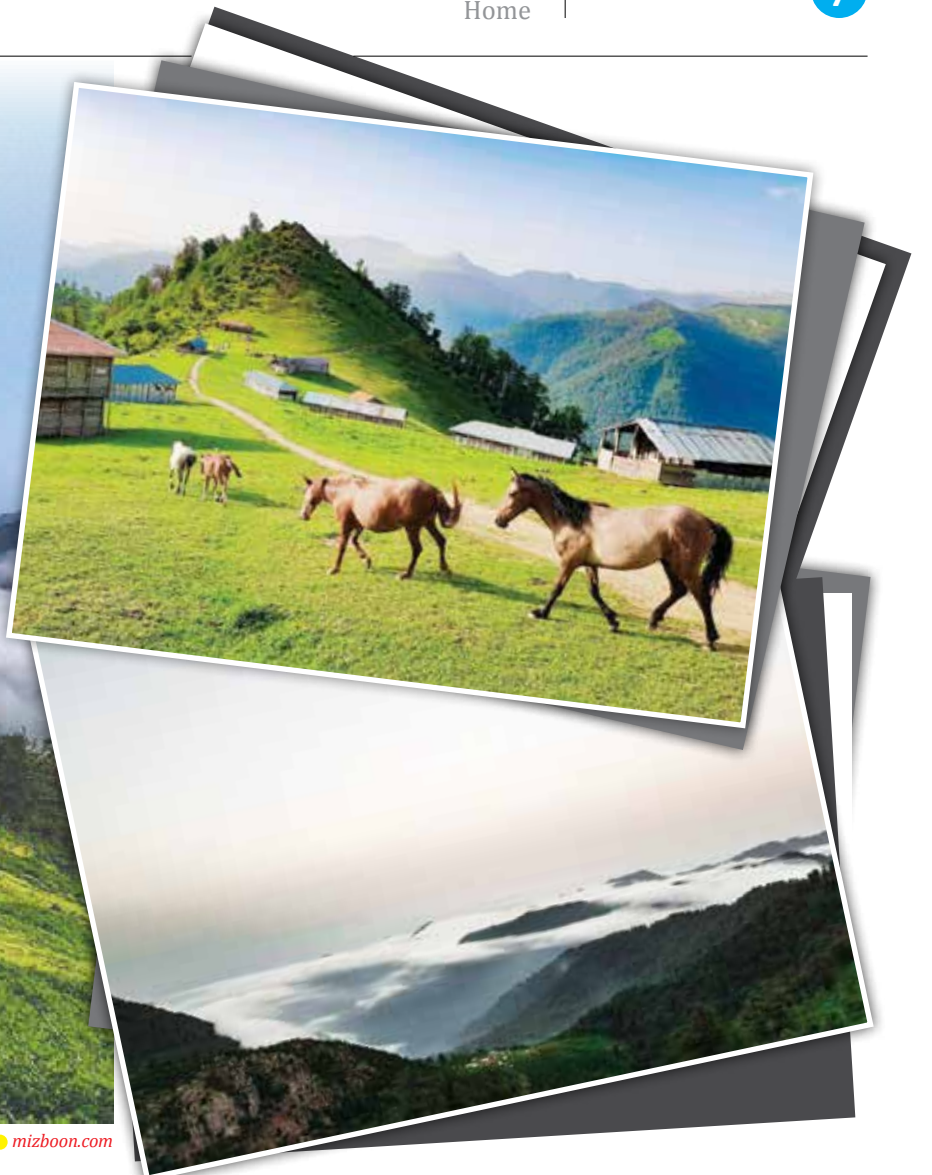


Masal welcoming nature lovers to foothill paradise



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Iranica Desk

Masal, located in Gilan Province, is a charming foothill town that was formerly known as "Rudkenar." Today, it stands as a paradise for nature enthusiasts, where every step invites travelers into a journey through clouds, history, and artistic heritage. Positioned 50 kilometers northwest of Rasht, Masal is divided into two main districts — Shanderman and Markazi — and geographically encompasses three distinct areas: plains, foothills, and mountainous zones. The majority of the local population engages in farming and animal husbandry, contributing to Masal's traditional rural charm. With its abundant natural attractions, Masal has become one of the most sought-after destinations in northern Iran, renowned for offering a unique four-season experience, each unveiling a distinctive landscape. Whether joining a guided domestic tour or crafting a personalized travel itinerary, visitors will find Masal brimming with wonders to explore. Masal's natural beauty is highlighted by its flowing rivers, dense and majestic forests,

roaring waterfalls, and a refreshing mountainous climate, all combining to present a truly spectacular face of nature. The town's allure extends deeply into its past, with archaeological excavations revealing ancient graves and ruins dating back millions of years. Originally recognized for its pleasant weather and its proximity to the famed Khalkai River, Masal has long been appreciated as a pristine pastoral area and one of Gilan's finest sightseeing gems, IRNA wrote.

One of Masal's most iconic attractions is the Green Roof, situated about one kilometer southwest from the city center. This scenic site is lined with a variety of cafes and restaurants serving delicious local cuisine, ready to welcome tourists. Standing atop the Green Roof, visitors are treated to breathtaking panoramic views of Masal itself, along with the neighboring cities of Somehsara and Bandar Anzali, all nestled beautifully within Gilan Province's lush landscapes. Olasbelangah, a name derived from the Taleshi language meaning "Hornbeam tree on a high elevation," is a spectacular summer pasture accessible only by passing through Masal.

En route, visitors are greeted by elderly locals dressed in traditional clothing and felt hats, welcoming guests from wooden gazebos crafted from irregular, dry tree branches, while offering golden local bread. Located at an altitude of 1,489 meters above sea level, Olasbelangah features wooden plank-built houses with some sporting colorful roofs, typical of summer homes in the region. This enchanting pasture is undeniably one of the most beautiful places imaginable, where colorful flowers dance with the wind and stunning sunsets and sunrises mesmerize visitors. The ever-present clouds add to the ethereal beauty of this site, making it a must-visit destination for those seeking extraordinary natural splendor. With its untamed, pristine environment, Olasbelangah has long captivated travelers with its lush meadows, twisted trees, wooden cabins, and thick fog that blankets the terrain, shaping a landscape that words seldom do justice. Among Masal's notable natural features are its caves, with about 17 identified in the county. The largest and most significant is Avisho Cave, located 22 kilometers from the city and

officially registered as a natural national monument of Iran under number 90. Geologists estimate the cave's formation to date back approximately 75 million years. Avisho is a limestone and water cave containing seven springs and a continuously flowing river running from its entrance to its depths. The cave features nine main shafts and one secondary shaft, and inside, visitors are greeted by an array of unique limestone formations created through the gradual dissolution of limestone by water. Stalactites hang from the ceiling, while stalagmites rise from the floor, both formed by calcium carbonate deposits. The formation process results from rainwater absorbing carbon dioxide and becoming acidic enough to dissolve limestone, with calcium carbonate remaining as the water evaporates, gradually sculpting the cave's spectacular interior. Among the vibrant summer pastures of Masal is Khoshkeh Darya, nestled within a valley and known for its lush green expanse. Originally a lake that has since dried, Khoshkeh Darya boasts pleasant weather and a network of flowing rivers which contribute to its

refreshing climate. Situated at approximately 1,500 meters above sea level, reaching this tranquil pasture requires a five-kilometer hike, rewarding visitors with a peaceful and verdant retreat.

Nearby, Sue Chale Summer Resort, located south of Masal near Olasbelangah, is famed for its pristine environment, colorful two-story houses, misty ambiance, and awe-inspiring views. Situated at 1,900 meters above sea level, Sue Chale offers visitors sweeping vistas of green hills and an expansive sea of clouds.

In mid-January 2021, Shalma village received the National Woodcarving village certification, underscoring its cultural significance. Positioned 12 kilometers west of Masal and surrounded by the Alborz Mountains, this charming summer pasture features five natural springs and the confluence of the Shalma and Chesli rivers. The tranquil sounds of flowing water, wind rustling through the trees, and birdsong create a uniquely serene atmosphere. Woodcarving is a hereditary craft in this region, with many artisans working from their homes. To support this traditional industry, the Cultural

Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Gilan Province plans to establish a handicrafts market along Shalma road, providing a dedicated space for local woodcarvers to showcase their handmade works to tourists.

Another remarkable historical attraction in Masal is the ancient Asb Rish site, situated in a village of the same name. This site features a very old cemetery dating back to the Achaemenid era, showcasing unique and striking architecture that makes it highly worth exploring. Beyond its historical significance, Asb Rish attracts adventure seekers and sports enthusiasts, offering activities such as kayaking and rock climbing. The stone wall of Asb Rish is famed for having one of the tallest climbing cliffs in Iran. Efforts are underway to make this cliff fully accessible for climbers, allowing them to enjoy the natural challenge alongside the roar of a river flowing at the cliff's base. Despite being one of Masal's lesser-known treasures, Asb Rish's captivating allure ensures visitors often return multiple times to experience its blend of history, nature, and adventure.

Explore Timurid Chahartaq in Shirvan

Iranica Desk

Timurid Chahartaq (an architectural unit consisting of four-barrel vaults and a dome) in Shirvan, North Khorasan Province, belongs to the Timurid dynasty. It is the resting place of Amir Timur. There is a description over the tomb of this military leader that indicates he died in 1405. It is natural that the building was constructed at the same date. The Chahartaq is located on the site of Imamzadeh Hamzeh Reza, a shrine in the village.

What can be seen from the outside of the building is the view of an octagonal structure. Although the tablet of the Chahartaq dates it back to the Timurid dynasty, the fact that it is octagonal and has basements provides a basis for the speculation that it was built during the Ilkhanate era.



Another hypothesis is that the tomb belongs to Sheikh Timur. But it has been rejected by many scholars because, according to the endowment contract of the Chahartaq, written in 1636, the building was endowed by a person named Amir Mohammad Sheikh Timuri. There are some words on

the tombstone located in the Chahartaq that, despite being unreadable and faded, show two words of Eid Khajeh. According to historical books, this is the name of one of Amir Timur's commanders in chief, visitiran.ir wrote. There is a gateway on each of the eight sides of the building. The



● IRNA

upper part of the structure has been constructed using vaults. There are also windows positioned above the doors and having the same width as them, and ivans each decorated with unique brickwork. The entirety of this tomb is made of bricks and cob bricks. It should

not be overlooked that the inner part of the building is covered with plaster. The upper portions of the gateways feature bricks in the color of turquoise. Stucco and reliefs of the building have been decorated with arabesque motifs. The first phase of restoration of Timur Chahartaq was conducted

in 1977. After that, the façade of the building changed to a great degree. The restorations continued in 2005 and 2007, when further destruction of the structure was prevented by reinforcement. Archeological investigations resulted in the discovery of the main entrance to the building and its basements, as well as the surrounding fences. It is speculated that these fences were later added to stop the spread of the graveyard into the district of the building.

Timur Chahartaq was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2001. In the southwest of the Chahartaq, there is a shrine attributed to Hamzeh Reza. This shrine has a dome that is two meters high from the outside and four meters from the inside. The distance between the shrine and Chahartaq is about fifty meters.