

Natural, historical features make Mehriz unique city in heart of desert

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INTERVIEW

Mehriz is one of the summer resort cities of Yazd Province. Thanks to its unique natural and historical landscape, it is considered one of the most distinctive cities in Iran and, due to these features, has the potential to be recognized globally as a historic garden city. Mehriz is located about 30 kilometers south of Yazd, near the foothills of Mount Shirkuh. The continuation of the Shirkuh Mountain range along the western part of the city, which remains snow-covered for much of the year, has led to the formation of rich underground aquifers and a milder climate compared to other parts of Yazd Province. These climatic characteristics have turned Mehriz into a green jewel in the heart of the desert, making its recreational areas popular destinations for visitors and tourists from across the province and even the country. The lush, tree-filled nature of Mehriz is such that upon entering the city, one feels as though they have stepped into a vast village. In every corner, fruit trees — especially pomegranates — extend their branches over the garden and house walls, creating beautiful green canopies and shaded lanes that add to the charm of Mehriz's traditional garden alleys. Many historical and traditional gardens still stand in Mehriz today. Among them, the Pahlavanpour Garden is one of the most beautiful, and together with the Hassanabad Qanat of Mehriz, which runs through it, they are both inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The global registration of these natural and historical sites makes Mehriz a strong candidate for recognition as a historic garden city. Regarding the unique nature and landscape of Mehriz, Iran Daily conducted an interview with Ali Dehqan Mongabadi, head of the Department of Natural Resources and Watershed Management of Mehriz.



Ali Dehqan Mongabadi

IRAN DAILY: Please explain the climate, natural environment, and attractions of Mehriz.

DEHQAN MONGABADI: Mehriz, along with Taft, is one of the summer resort destinations of Yazd Province. The climate of this region, influenced by the foothills of Shirkuh Mountain, is cooler and milder compared to other cities and areas of Yazd. Most of Yazd Province's summer resorts are located in Mehriz and Taft counties.

Mehriz, with an area of over 670,000 hectares, contains vast gardens — so much so that gardens occupy more than 50% of the city's area. Pahlavanpour Garden is just one of the many historical gardens in Mehriz, and numerous others are scattered throughout the city.

In addition to the city itself, there are many summer resort villages located in the Miankuh and Tangeh rural districts of Mehriz, which enjoy very pleasant weather. Due to its temperate climate throughout the year — especially in summer and during holidays — Mehriz and its surrounding villages host many visitors from across the country.

Mehriz is home to several excellent natural and historical attractions, such as the Gharbalbiz Spring located on the slopes of Shirkuh Mountain. This spring is not permanent, but during rainy seasons and wet years, water flows from it, adding beauty



Shirkuh Mountain
tishineh.com

to the area. Gharbalbiz Spring is also an ancient site; beside it lies an underground city that was once used as a fortress and refuge. Near this underground city, tombs have been discovered containing remains of human bodies buried in the fetal position, just as they were in the womb.

How would you describe the plant and animal life of Mehriz?

Over 90% of the city's lands are natural resource areas, of which about 650,000 hectares have been designated as national land and host rare plant and animal species. The region's vegetation includes sweet asafetida (*Ferula asa-foetida*), rhubarb, tamarisk, wild pistachio, mountain almond, cumin, wild fig, and more. One remarkable site is Dasht-e



Dasht-e Rivas
yjc.ir

Rivas (meaning Rhubarb Plain) located above Aliabad village in the Ernan district of Mehriz. The entire area is covered with rhubarb plants, and in May, when the rhubarb blooms, the red flowers create a breathtaking view. Every year, many tourists



Pahlavanpour Garden
alibaba.ir

visit the Rhubarb Plain to enjoy its natural beauty. Mehriz is also rich in wildlife. Over one-third of the city's natural resource lands are managed by the Department of Environment. Rare species such as wild cats, Asiatic cheetahs, and Per-

sian onagers inhabit these areas. Camera traps installed in Mehriz's protected zones have repeatedly captured images of rare species like cheetahs, caracals, Pallas's cats, and sand foxes. Additionally, there is a breeding site for Persian onagers in the region. The city's Department of Environment has also established several private wildlife reserves managed by local nature enthusiasts. There are currently two to three such reserves in Mehriz, considered exemplary nationwide. Thanks to the efforts of environmental rangers and wardens, the population of wild species in the city has grown in recent years. Moreover, over 100 traditional grazing lands have been designated across Mehriz's natural lands. Each has an official registry, and herders must obtain

permits specifying the type, number, and grazing period of their livestock before being allowed to use the rangelands.

Tell us more about Mehriz's gardens and natural environment. Can this city be registered as a "Garden City"?

As mentioned earlier, a large portion of Mehriz is covered by gardens, making it unique in Iran. Within the city, there are numerous almond, fig, and especially pomegranate trees; almost every home has a courtyard with several fruit trees, particularly pomegranates.

Mehriz's pomegranates — especially those from Saryazd — are well-known across the country. The historic Mehriz Garden City is already registered at the national level, and given its distinctive features, it certainly has the potential to be inscribed globally as a historic garden city.

Officials from the city's Cultural Heritage Department, the Municipality, and the Governor's Office are pursuing this goal, and the Department of Natural Resources of Mehriz is fully committed to supporting the effort. The global registration of Mehriz as a historic garden city would not only promote the city and attract more tourism and revenue but also help prevent illegal construction, protect existing gardens, and preserve the city's natural landscape by discouraging tree cutting.

Reviving historical buildings to breathe life into cities

Iranica Desk

A heritage restoration expert believes that bringing historical buildings back to life helps preserve the cultural identity of cities, revitalizes their spirit, and serves as one of the most effective tools for urban regeneration and tourism development.

Ahmad Razavi, a historical restoration specialist and university professor, told Mehr News Agency: "Restoration means returning a building to its original and stable state, but revival goes a step further. In the process of revival, we strive to reintegrate a historical structure into contemporary life so that it regains a social and economic role within the urban fabric. For instance, an abandoned caravanserai can be transformed into a traditional guesthouse or cultural center."

He continued, "Reviving cultural properties marks the beginning of urban regeneration. When an old structure is brought back to life, the surrounding neighborhood also flourishes. Local businesses emerge, people move around more, and the sense of belonging

to the area grows stronger." According to Razavi, local businesses are those economic activities created and operated by residents within their own neighborhoods.

He explained, "When a historic house is revived, cafés, handicraft workshops, or souvenir shops often emerge nearby. Local residents become guides, shopkeepers, cooks, or even drivers for visitors. In essence, the revival of heritage buildings fuels the local economy and promotes sustainable employment."



Razavi emphasized that "reviving buildings is not merely about protection; it acts as a driving force for urban tourism. Tourists seek tangible experiences of a city's history and culture, and the revival of historic buildings provides exactly that. When a visitor steps into a traditional bathhouse turned teahouse, or walks through a restored mansion converted into a museum, they not only enjoy the experience but also connect emotionally with the past." Regarding the high costs of revival

projects, Razavi said, "This is one of the real challenges in the field of heritage preservation. Many owners or residents of old properties lack the financial means to restore them, particularly when the buildings are registered as national heritage sites, where strict regulations limit reconstruction or alterations. At first, these projects may appear expensive, but in the long term, they become valuable cultural and economic investments. A revived building can generate dozens of jobs and attract both domestic and inter-



MEHR

national tourists." The university professor added, "In reality, reviving architectural landmarks is practically impossible without the participation of the government and public institutions. The private sector alone cannot bear the full financial burden, especially for nationally registered monuments that involve technical and legal restrictions. Therefore, collaborative models must be developed — where the government provides legal and financial frameworks, and the private sector or local communities

take part in implementation." He further suggested, "Municipalities can encourage restoration by offering tax exemptions, low-interest loans, or service incentives. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage could establish support funds to cover the specialized costs of restoration. This approach has proven successful in many countries, including Italy and France, where it has preserved historic districts and attracted tourism investment."

Razavi stressed that "neglecting historical structures not only erases urban identity but also multiplies future reconstruction costs. Timely involvement by governmental and public institutions is, in fact, a preventive measure against the destruction of cultural heritage, not merely an expenditure." He concluded, "Reviving historical buildings is, in truth, a bridge between the past and the future. When a city preserves its historical memory, it builds an identity-rooted and sustainable future. Each revived monument brings a fragment of the city's soul back to life."