



Eight historic mosques from East Azarbaijan nominated for UNESCO world heritage listing

From stone sanctuaries to wooden marvels, Iran's NW preserves centuries of faith, art

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INTERVIEW

From the turquoise domes of Tabriz to the carved stone columns of rural Asnagh, the mosques of East Azarbaijan stand as living testaments to centuries of Iranian art, faith, and craftsmanship. Nestled along ancient trade routes that once linked Persia to the Caucasus and Anatolia, the province is home to some of the country's most architecturally diverse houses of worship—many built of stone, wood, and glazed tile in styles that evolved through successive Islamic dynasties.

Now, eight of these historic mosques have been nominated for inclusion in Iran's new UNESCO World Heritage dossier, highlighting the enduring spiritual and cultural legacy of north-western Iran.

The deputy director of the East Azarbaijan Province Cultural Heritage and Tourism Department announced that eight historic mosques in East Azarbaijan have been selected in the final shortlist of the province's nominations for inclusion in Iran's UNESCO World Heritage dossier for mosques.

In a conversation with Iran Daily, Vahid Navadad explained that over the past few days,

evaluators from the ministry's world-heritage mosque dossier team visited these mosques across the province to study their historical and architectural features up close.

He said that preparations for inscribing Iranian mosques on the UNESCO World Heritage list began about two years ago, during which more than a thousand mosques throughout the country were evaluated. Through successive rounds of screening, officials from the ministry narrowed the field to 32 mosques across 14 provinces. These mosques date from as early as the 8th century AH through the Qajar era.

Navadad noted that the process includes the removal of later additions and obstacles within the precincts and buffer zones of the mosques, alongside necessary restoration work—tasks overseen by the ministry's evaluators in support of the global nomination.

He added that under the umbrella of the Iranian Mosques World Heritage dossier, selected mosques from across the country are under review. Once the dossier is fully drafted, it will be submitted to UNESCO. Initially, the East Azarbaijan heritage office put forward fifteen candidate mosques, but subsequent evaluation and consolidation reduced that number to eight.

Referring to the list of East

Azarbaijan mosques in the UNESCO dossier, he named the following, Blue Mosque (Tabriz), Sheikh Shahab al-Din Ahari Mosque (Ahar), Jameh Mosque of Sarab, historic village mosque of Asnagh, Stone Mosque of Tark in Miyaneh, Molla Rostam Mosque (Maragheh), Mehrabad Mosque (Bonab), Jameh Mosque of Tasuj. Navadad emphasized that one of the most significant in this list is the Blue Mosque of Tabriz, built during the Aq Qoyunlu era and renowned as the "Turquoise of the Islamic World."

This mosque possesses exceptional features, and in 2010 it was registered as part of the Tabriz Bazaar complex on the UNESCO World Heritage List as one of the constituent elements.

He also noted that the Molla Rostam Mosque in Maragheh and the Mehrabad Mosque in Bonab are among the few remaining wooden mosques in Iran. Their construction dates back to the Safavid period, and they incorporate wooden beams in their roofs, columns, and other structural components.

Discussing Ilkhanid-era mosques in East Azarbaijan, Navadad said that many such structures survive in various parts of the province, including the Jameh Mosque of Tasuj, the Jameh Mosque of Marand, and the Jameh Mosque of Sarab.



Vahid Navadad

citBlue Mosque of Tabriz
● IRNA

He also pointed out that the Sheikh Shahab al-Din Mosque in Ahar dates back to the Ilkhanid period but was later renovated during the Safavid and subsequent eras.

On the province's stone mosques, he explained that the stone mosque in Asnagh and the stone mosque in Tark are two prominent examples, both with origins in the Ilkhanid era. Because of their unique stone materials and decorative work, they are considered among the most valuable mosques in the province and in the country. The Asnagh mosque, dating to

the early 8th century AH, lies in the center of the village of Asnagh; its structure includes four monolithic cylindrical stone columns, giving it special aesthetic appeal. The Tark stone mosque is located in the city of Tark (under Miyaneh County) and is one of the few stone mosques in Iran.

He asserted that each of these eight mosques has distinctive qualities that align with the criteria of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for global inscription, making them eligible candidates for world recognition. All are al-

ready registered at the national level, and with the approval of the ministry's evaluators, they will be included in the final dossier for UNESCO submission.

Navadad went on to explain that the Iranian Mosques World Heritage dossier is modeled after previous dossier efforts by the ministry—such as those for Iranian gardens and caravanserais—where the inscription was not limited to a single monument. Instead, a chain of Iranian monuments was submitted together as a serial nomination and registered collectively on the World Heritage list.

Iran calls for 20-year tourism blueprint to guide future growth



Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi Amiri (c) addresses a managerial meeting in Tehran on October 13, 2025.
● IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi Amiri urged the creation of a 20-year roadmap for the country's tourism sector, saying the industry needs a long-term vision to ensure sustainable development and global competitiveness. Salehi Amiri said Iran must

design "a model of ideal governance" to steer tourism policy for at least two decades ahead, IRNA reported. "The future of tourism depends on long-term planning," he told ministry officials, calling for expert-led policymaking that treats the industry as a pillar of Iran's cultural economy.

Deputy Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Band-

pey described the minister's visit as "a signal of special attention" to tourism, saying it had brought fresh "motivation and optimism" to the ministry's staff.

He said the government plans to allocate \$54 million at the central level and \$72 million to the provinces to revitalize tourism activities, create jobs and attract private investment.

Salehi Amiri emphasized that tourism policy should move away from quantity-driven targets and focus on the quality of travel and services. Oversight of accommodation and tour operators, he said, would be strengthened, while greater roles would be given to capable private-sector players. He also called for a unified communication strategy to highlight what he described as a "Secure Iran" in the international arena. Targeted content production has already begun in all 31 provinces, with the first joint media and artistic projects completed.

The minister outlined priority markets for attracting visitors, including neighboring countries, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf

states and populous Muslim nations, with China singled out as a key growth market following Tehran's visa-waiver for Chinese nationals.

Mohseni Bandpey said a crisis-management task force had been established within the Tourism Deputy's Office to keep the industry resilient amid regional or global disruptions. Under Iran's Seventh National Development Plan, the ministry aims to sustain recent gains that placed the country among the world's top 20 tourism destinations, with foreign arrivals up 48.5 percent year-on-year in April 2025. Salehi Amiri highlighted three priorities for the ministry's workforce as enhancing status, improving livelihoods and ensuring job security, calling them "non-negotiable" goals for his administration.

He said the proposed long-term blueprint should draw on academic and professional expertise to turn tourism into "a lasting engine of cultural and economic vitality" for the nation.

Fifty years later 'Journey' comes alive in restored short at BFI London



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Iranian filmmaker Bahram Beyzai's 1972 short film 'Safar' (Journey) will have its international premiere in a newly restored 4K version at the 69th BFI London Film Festival. The screenings are scheduled for October 9 and 13, inn.ir reported.

Produced by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon), 'Journey' follows a 12-year-old orphan's quest to find a family, accompanied by a friend through the desolate outskirts of Tehran. The film features per-

formances by Sirus Hassanpour and Abbas Dastranj. It has garnered acclaim, winning the Golden Statue at the International Children's Film Festival in 1972, and Best Short Film awards at both the Moscow and Chicago film festivals in 1973.

The restoration was completed at Roshana Studio under the direction of Kamran Saharkhiz, with support from Kanoon.

The BFI London Film Festival, a premier event in the global film calendar, features over 240 films from 79 countries this year, with an emphasis on female directors.