

Semnan hosts first Silk Road tourism conference

Historic corridor hailed as gateway to Semnan's int'l tourism future, official says



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's central city of Semnan hosted its first International Tourism Conference on the Silk Road, launching a drive to position itself as a key destination on the ancient trade route and a hub for international cultural exchange. The forum at Semnan University gathered senior Iranian tourism officials, including Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Tourism and Handicrafts; Masoud Shojaei,

Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts speaks during first International Tourism Conference on the Silk Road held at Semnan University on October 29, 2025.
● [semnan.ac.ir](#)

director-general of International Tourism Marketing and Development; and Atousa Momeni, director of UNESCO's Regional Center for Intangible Heritage Studies in West and Central Asia. The conference, titled 'Opportunities and Prospects, Silk Road Tourism in Semnan,' marks the city's bid to represent Iran within the International Union of Tourism Cities (IUTC), a 40-member network linking historic Silk Road destinations, half of them in China. "This is a unique opportunity," Shalbafian told participants. "The Silk Road can be the brand and axis of Semnan's tourism identity." Shojaei highlighted Semnan's natural and cultural diversity, "from desert to mountain", and its proximity to the Asiatic cheetah's habitat as key draws for international visitors. He said the ministry will create a Net-

work of Iranian Silk Road Cities to strengthen regional cooperation and global visibility. "Countries around the world are using tourism to shape their image," he said. "Visualization helps tourism soar." UNESCO's Momeni called the Silk Road "a highway of the cultural biosphere," describing it as a living bridge among civilizations. She urged community-based initiatives and good conservation practices to keep the route's legacy alive. Stretching about 600 kilometers, Semnan contains the longest continuous section of the Silk Road in Iran and the country's densest concentration of caravanserais and nationally registered heritage sites, several under review for UNESCO listing. Officials say the city aims to develop a coherent tourism brand linking its historical, ecological, and cultural resources.

Iranian-born maestro Rahbari returns to lead Russia's Mariinsky Symphony

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Celebrated Iranian-born conductor Ali Rahbari will once again take the baton at Russia's storied Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra from November 1, the Mariinsky Theatre said, marking the start of his fifth artistic season as the venue's permanent guest conductor. Now in his 70s, Rahbari remains one of the few Middle Eastern maestros to hold a long-term post with a major Russian orchestra. His return underscores the Mariinsky's commitment to keeping its stage open to international talent despite political headwinds, while for Rahbari, it extends a collaboration that began in

2021 under artistic director Valery Gergiev, IRNA reported. During his two-week residency in St. Petersburg, Rahbari will lead two major programmes. On November 8, he will conduct Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 and Mahler's Symphony No. 4, while the November 15 concert, billed as 'Spanish Night,' will feature works by Chabrier, Lalo, Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov. He will be joined by acclaimed Russian soloists Maxim Fedotov on violin and soprano Anastasia Kalagina, both regulars on the Mariinsky stage. Rahbari, born in Tehran in 1948 and trained in Vienna, has conducted over 120 orchestras world-



wide, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the Czech Philharmonic and the Brussels Radio and Television Philharmonic. He was first invited to the Mariinsky in 2021 to conduct works by Shostakovich and Rimsky-Korsakov, and was soon after appointed its first permanent guest conductor. Beyond the podium, Rah-

bari has used his Mariinsky tenure to introduce several Iranian artists to international audiences, including violinist Amin Ghaffari and opera singer Reza Fekri. Critics in Russia describe his interpretation as "deeply lyrical yet sharply disciplined," a blend that has become a hallmark of his performances in St. Petersburg.

Iran proposes naming BRICS Literary Award after national poets

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Iran has proposed that the annual BRICS Literary Award be named after a national poet from each member country, an initiative unveiled during the 2025 shortlist announcement in Jakarta. The suggestion came from Hamid Nazarkhah Alisaraei, poet, writer and Iran's national coordinator for the BRICS Literary Network. The move underscores Tehran's aim to link literature with "cultural diplomacy" and strengthen Iran's presence in international literary circles. For Iran, the prize could honor classical figures such as Hafez, Sa'adi or Rumi, reinforcing Persian cultural heritage while fostering cross-border dialogue, IRNA reported.

"The BRICS Literary Award is the first international prize focused on cultural, human and indigenous values, independent of politics," Alisaraei told delegates. "We propose that each year the award bear the name of a national poet from a member country." He added that translating shortlisted works into all official BRICS languages would "widen dialogue" among the bloc's writers. This year's shortlist features ten authors from BRICS members and partner nations, including Mansour Alimoradi for Iran, alongside nominees from Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, the UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Egypt. Iran's other entrants for the first edition were Reza Amirkhani and Majid Gheisari, showing the country's

strong literary footprint. The final winner will be announced on November 27 in Khabarovsk, Russia. Founded in November 2024 at Moscow's inaugural Forum of Traditional Values, the BRICS Literary Award honors works reflecting the spiritual and cultural identity of member nations. Each country may nominate up to three writers, with shortlisted works translated to support cross-cultural readership. Russian Union of Writers co-chair Vadim Terekhin said the award provides "a forum for mutual understanding and cultural empathy" among contemporary authors. "It strengthens connections and deepens respect for each nation's literary heritage," he added.

Croatian Drago Štambuk's trilingual poetry unites cultures



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The gallery of Saless Publications, one of Iran's most respected publishing houses, hosted a literary gathering for the launch of 'Damavand / Wounded by Flowers,' a trilingual collec-

tion of poems by Croatian poet and ambassador Drago Štambuk. The volume, translated into Persian by Ebtehaj Navaei, Mahmood Dehaghi, and Mohammad Javadi, gathers selections from three of Štambuk's earlier works published in Iran, alongside an exclusive bilingual interview with the author. Opening the event, Peyman Sarmasti, the host, called the gathering "a meeting of words, art, and thought in peaceful harmony," describing Štambuk as "a poet and philosopher who transcends worlds and reminds us that beauty in language brings hearts closer than distance can separate."

Writer Hossein Khatibi, who co-edited the selection with Siavash Soufinejad, said the launch symbolized "a journey of words that connects continents and civilizations," calling the collection "a map of the soul in motion." He highlighted Štambuk's dual life as a poet and diplomat whose travels reveal "the essence of humanity through love, languages, and culture." Mahmood Dehaghi, university professor and one of the translators, praised the poet's fusion of mythic imagery with rhythmic musicality, describing his work as "a blend of classical and modernist sensibil-

ities marked by deep compassion for humankind." Štambuk, he noted, "sees the world as a blurred mirror, impenetrable yet full of reflected truths that only poetry can reveal." Štambuk and Khatibi read poems in Croatian, English, and Persian, including 'Damavand,' '1918,' 'Wrist,' 'Nordwind,' 'Black Wave,' and 'Zefir,' before an audience of about 150 poetry enthusiasts. The event drew nearly 20 ambassadors, Masoud Habibi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Student Affairs at the Iranian Ministry of Health, and renowned writer-director Masoud Foorutan, among other public figures and journalists.

Iranian 'Tadji' to compete at Ireland Foyle Film Festival

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The Iranian short film 'Tadji,' written and directed by Mehdi Borjian, was selected for competition at the 38th edition of the Foyle Film Festival in Derry/Londonderry in Ireland, slated for November 19 to 30. The festival, which boasts accreditation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscar) and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), offers short-film winners a direct route to both awards, ISNA reported. 'Tadji' portrays the ordeal of a factory worker named Tadji, described as "strong-willed"

and grappling with a critical decision amid personal hardship. The ensemble cast features Fatemeh Neyshabouri, Morteza Khanjani, Shamila Tabesh, Fatemeh Hasani, Rouhieh Mahmoudi, Faezeh Vafaei, Elaheh Mochani, Ali Bagheri, and Ahad Shamloo, with veteran actor Gholamreza Ramezani in a guest appearance and child actor Jani-ar Eskandarian. Borjian said the story is rooted in real-life labor tensions and seeks to capture the "unyielding resolve" of a woman caught between survival and dignity. Festival organizers emphasize that the film sched-



ule will include screenings across the festival's Light in Motion short-film competition, Northern Ireland's only Oscar- and BAFTA-qualifying competition. Festival director Bernie McLaughlin described the selection as a "vital bridge" between Iranian independent cinema and global recognition.