

Astara Beach Bazaar welcoming visitors to crossroads of heritage, trade

Iranica Desk

Located in the northwest of Gilan Province, the Astara Beach Bazaar sits just a short distance from Iran's border with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Nestled between the Caspian Sea and Estil Wetland, this bustling market has become one of the most important commercial centers in northern Iran, playing a vital role in the local economy and employment.

The Astara Beach Bazaar, consisting of roofed walkways and more than 1,600 active shops, takes its name from its proximity to the sea. While clothing remains the dominant product sold here, the market also offers a wide range of goods, including cosmetics, household appliances, bags, sports equipment, toys, and mobile accessories. The products are both domestic and imported.

Facilities at the bazaar include open-air parking and public restrooms, though finding a space during peak hours can be challenging. Several grocery stalls, food kiosks, and fast-food stands also serve visitors. Beyond shopping, the market gives travelers an opportunity to experience the daily life and culture of Astara's local community.

History

The origins of the Astara Beach Bazaar date back to 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Soon after, the border crossing between Iran and the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan reopened, and the bazaar was established as a hub for trade between the two nations, kojaro.com wrote.

In its early years, the market was known primarily for selling goods imported from Russia and other former Soviet republics, earning it the nickname "the Russians' Bazaar." At that time, many Azerbaijani traders



Astara Beach Bazaar
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Astara National Garden
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Estil Wetland
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were unfamiliar with the true value of their goods and sold high-quality personal items — such as Russian cameras and fine glassware — at remarkably low prices. This simplicity and openness became a defining feature of the market's early days.

As trade between residents on both sides of the border grew, the bazaar evolved into a more structured and official commercial center. Its appeal lay in the combination of high-quality goods and affordable prices, quickly transforming Astara into a popular border shopping destination.

The fame of the bazaar soon

spread beyond the region, attracting visitors from Tehran, Tabriz, Hamedan, and Qazvin. As demand rose, new shopping centers and arcades were built around the market to accommodate the influx of customers.

However, stricter customs and border regulations gradually restricted imports from Azerbaijan. Eventually, low-priced but lower-quality Chinese products filled the shelves. Today, according to local vendors, most goods in the Astara market are shipped directly from Tehran and no longer carry the same distinctive quality once associated with the bazaar.

A destination for all seasons

The best time to visit Astara Beach Bazaar is during spring — particularly in May and June — when the weather is cool and pleasant. Summer also attracts many travelers, though the humidity can be intense for some visitors.

Beyond the market itself, Astara offers a range of nearby attractions that enrich the travel experience:

National Garden

A relic from the Qajar era, this scenic park features statues, playgrounds, a children's library, and an amphitheater. Re-

cently renovated, it provides a refreshing spot for picnics and family gatherings.

Shariati Beach Park

Shariati Beach Park offers green spaces ideal for picnics and walks. Facilities include gazebos, camping areas, and restrooms, with restaurants nearby serving local dishes.

Bird Garden

Opened in 2007, this 10,500-square-meter sanctuary houses around 300 birds from 60 species, including parrots, peacocks, pheasants and quails. Some species are kept in cages, while others

roam in open spaces.

Estil Wetland

Listed since 2005 as one of Gilan's top five tourism zones, the Estil Wetland spans 138 hectares and is home to more than 80 species of plants and animals. Picnic shelters and facilities have been added around the lagoon for visitors' comfort.

From its early beginnings as a modest border marketplace to its current role as a lively coastal destination, the Astara Beach Bazaar continues to reflect the intersection of commerce, culture, and community along Iran's northern frontier.

Introduction to the book:

Vernacular Architecture along the Northern Coastal Regions and Ports of the Persian Gulf

Living with heat and humidity



The book entitled "Vernacular Architecture along the Northern Coastal Regions and Ports of the Persian Gulf" authored by Niloufar Nikqadam has been published by the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia in 2024.

Kazem Mousavi-Bojnourdi, in his foreword, emphasized the importance of studying the Persian Gulf's coasts and highlights the cultural and artistic continuity of the region. He regards the author's research as a significant contribution to uncovering lesser-known aspects of Iranian architecture.

In her preface, the author pointed out the historical significance of Iran's southern coasts. Their strategic geographic location, access to open waters, trade routes, and abundant natural re-

sources made these areas central to merchants and political powers throughout history. Historical buildings in this region have largely suffered from harsh climatic conditions, leaving only a few structures intact. Climate-sensitive architecture has played a key role in local construction, with buildings designed to adapt to the hot and humid conditions of the northern Persian Gulf.

The book is organized into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the elements of vernacular architecture in harmony with the climate, incorporating observations from geographers, travelers, and explorers of the past. The second chapter explores architectural features, including structure, materials,

and design details. Buildings were constructed to provide shade, minimize sunlight penetration, and maximize natural ventilation. Roofs near the coast are flat and light, while those farther inland are heavier and often domed. Key materials include porous sea stones, Sarooj (a traditional water-resistant mortar), mud bricks, and clay, which enhance thermal comfort.

The third chapter delves into the historical background of islands, ports, and cities along the northern Persian Gulf, from ancient times to the Islamic period, highlighting the role of trade, fresh water, security, and agriculture in regional prosperity. Some surviving structures date back to the fourth millennium BCE. Cities such as

Bandar Abbas held strategic importance from the Achaemenid era through the Sassanid period.

The fourth chapter, the core of the book, presents a functional classification of architecture, mosques, religious buildings, palaces and mansions, water reservoirs, hydraulic structures, public buildings, and constructions by foreign powers.

Most mosques are inward-oriented with central courtyards, adapted to the local climate, and some feature wind catchers and minarets. Forts date from the Sassanid to Qajar periods, serving military or administrative purposes, while royal and aristocratic residences were often located within fortifications. Cisterns and hydraulic works

ensured drinking water and supported economic activity. Public buildings include caravanserais, bazaars, bathhouses, and schools. Structures built by foreigners, mainly from the Safavid to Qajar periods, served military and administrative functions.

The buildings are introduced geographically from east to west, covering Hormozgan, Fars, Bushehr, and southern part of Khuzestan provinces. The information is compiled from historians, travelogues, and historical maps, carefully reviewed and illustrated. The author hopes this research will help preserve and promote the understanding of southern Iran's unique vernacular architecture, ensuring this invaluable heritage is passed on to future generations.