

# Aras Free Trade Zone secures key membership in UN Tourism

**Iranica Desk**

At the 26th Session of the UN Tourism General Assembly held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the Aras Free Trade Zone Organization has been officially accepted as an Affiliate Member of this prestigious international body. Hadi Moqadamzadeh, Chairman of the Board and Director General of the Aras Free Trade Zone Organization, described the achievement as a pivotal milestone in showcasing Iran's tourism potential on the global stage, chn.ir reported.

"With this approval, the Aras Free Trade Zone joins the ranks of the world's most respected tourism institutions as a destination management organization within the Affiliate Members category," he said. "This membership enables us to formally collaborate with UN Tourism, the highest in-

ternational authority in the tourism sector." Moqadamzadeh highlighted that UN Tourism plays a central role in elevating tourism standards and services, particularly in developing countries. He noted that the membership grants access to the latest scientific advancements, innovations, and global best practices in strategic planning, international marketing, workforce training, and promotional activities.

He also pointed to a wide range of future opportunities, including access to technical and advisory assistance, participation in international platforms, direct engagement with global tourism leaders, and use of UN Tourism's comprehensive digital library. Additional benefits include organizing joint global events, enhancing visibility for licensed travel agencies,

facilitating foreign tourist arrivals in the region, and accessing up-to-date tourism data and reports. Aras Free Trade Zone will also be able to join UN Tourism's specialized networks and working groups.

Moqadamzadeh emphasized that this membership allows the Aras region to actively participate in global conferences and exchange expertise with over 500 leading institutions from the private sector, academia, and local governments.

UN Tourism comprises 160 member states, 6 associate members, and over 500 affiliate members from academic, private sector, and civil society organizations worldwide. Moqadamzadeh expressed pride in Aras's inclusion in this distinguished group.

The Aras Free Trade Zone had previously secured affiliate membership in 2019,



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but the affiliation was inactive for several years. Following recent efforts, the organization's membership

has now been formally reinstated. Initially established to support and enhance commer-

cial and industrial activities, Iran's free trade and industrial zones are uniquely positioned in some of the

country's most stunning and distinctive regions. From the serene beaches of Ziba Kenar in the Anzali Free Zone, to the pristine shores of Darak village in the Chababhar Free Zone, and from the lush Arasbaran forests in the Aras Free Zone, to the evergreen mangrove forests of Qeshm, these zones encompass natural wonders that are truly unparalleled on a global scale.

In addition to their scenic landscapes, the zones boast rich cultural, historical, social, and religious attractions, offering significant potential for tourism development. Complemented by growing health, agricultural, and cultural infrastructures, these zones stand as vibrant hubs that not only foster economic growth but also enrich Iran's tourism landscape with their distinctive and diverse offerings.

## Nomadism, pastoralism are dynamic parts of West and Central Asia's cultural heritage



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**By Fumiko Ohinata**  
UNESCO Secretary-General for Intangible Cultural Heritage

**OPINION**

Cultural heritage related to nomadism and pastoralism — whether expressed through skills, music, or handicrafts — represents a rich and dynamic part of the cultural heritage of West and Central Asia, a region that has long served as a crossroads of civilizations. On behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is a pleasure and an honor to participate in the expert meeting entitled "Developing Entrepreneurial Skills of Women Bearers of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Settled Nomadic Communities", organized in the context of sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment.

Even in a world rapidly moving toward urbanization, the traditions of nomadism continue to inspire our imagination and admiration. This longstanding heritage serves as a source of solidarity and national pride for the countries across this vast region. Moreover, we recognize that the knowledge and traditions of pastoral and nomadic life play a fundamental role in addressing the challenges of sustainable development — including livelihoods and food security. To underscore this, the United Nations has

designated 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. Yet, as is true for all forms of living heritage, the bearers and practitioners of this heritage face challenges, particularly in adapting their methods of knowledge and skill transmission to contemporary lifestyles.



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It is therefore deeply gratifying to see that the Tehran Intangible Heritage Center has taken a significant step toward safeguarding this invaluable heritage by organizing this meeting and specialized workshop.

This initiative aligns fully with the activities of the Secretariat of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. As you may recall, in 2023 we presented the Guiding Note on the Economic Dimensions of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage to the intergovernmental committee of the convention. This document addresses the challenges

communities face in balancing the avoidance of excessive commercialization and cultural exploitation on one hand, with achieving fair and sustainable benefits from heritage-related activities on the other. Accordingly, the note emphasizes the necessity of a flexible, heritage-centered, and community-rights-based approach to planning and managing the economic dimensions of safeguarding.

This issue has long been central to the convention, as at its core are local communities, among which women play a pivotal role. In many communities, women not only provide for their families' livelihoods but also transmit knowledge, skills, and cultural practices to future genera-

tions. Undoubtedly, organizing workshops like this offers an opportunity to explore innovative ways of engaging with communities, especially women bearers of heritage, to enhance their social and economic status — a factor that contributes directly to inclusive and sustainable social development.

Such efforts are a true embodiment of the spirit of the 2003 Convention — a spirit grounded in empowering communities, ensuring intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and leveraging living heritage to build an inclusive and sustainable future.

## Aba weaving boosts local economy in Dashti

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Aba, a traditional Middle Eastern cloak worn over clothes, is a symbol of cultural heritage and artisanal skill. Currently, 26 active workshops in Kordovan, Ziarat and Boheiri (also known as Bowheyr) villages, and the town of Khormoj in Dashti, Bushehr Province, produce these precious cloaks using camel wool and the traditional skills of local weavers.

Beyond the domestic market, these handwoven textiles are exported to countries such as Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and even the United Kingdom, where they are recognized as symbols of Iranian authenticity and quality, according to chn.ir.

Dashti Aba (Aba-ye Dashti), is regarded as one of the most exquisite and authentic handwoven textiles. Today, it shines not only in the southern regions of Iran but also in international markets.

Aba weaving in Dashti has a history spanning several centuries and has long been an inseparable part of the region's culture and economy. This traditional craft has often been passed down through generations within families, with rural women playing a crucial role in preserving and expanding it. Depending on workshop capacity and available labor, a single workshop can produce, given sufficient raw materials — especially camel wool — a roll of fabric measuring 7.5 meters in length and 85 centimeters in width within two weeks.

The price of these cloaks varies depending on density, color, type of yarn, and weaving finesse. In international markets, particularly in European countries such as the UK, Dashti Aba sometimes commands high prices, reflecting the significant economic value of this local craft.

Globally, Aba weaving is recognized in three main types: Dashti Aba (Aba-ye Dashti) from Iran, Najafi Aba from Iraq, and Hejazi Aba from Saudi Arabia. Among these, Dashti Aba is considered



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the finest due to the softness of its fibers, natural color, and dense, delicate weaving. Handcraft experts regard Dashti Aba as the highest-quality and most durable type of Aba in the Middle East and even worldwide.

The secret of this exceptional quality lies in Dashti camel wool, a breed genetically native to Bushehr Province and one of Iran's valuable biological resources. These camels are raised in Dashtestan, Tangestan, Bushehr, Ganaveh, and Dashti, but the purest breeds are still found in the natural pastures of Dashti.



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Due to the region's specific climate, native forage, and the warm, dry southern weather, Dashti camels produce wool that is naturally soft and lustrous. The camels' unique fat composition makes their wool both lighter and more durable. However, experts warn that in recent years, the genetic purity of these camels has been under threat, which could negatively affect wool quality and, consequently, the excellence of Dashti Aba.

heritage of the culture, history, and ecosystem of Bushehr's people — a blend of skill, patience, and beauty woven into every thread. Preserving and promoting this authentic craft requires careful planning, governmental support, and education for the next generation, ensuring that this ancient industry continues to enrich Iran's economy and culture, and keeps Dashti recognized as the beating heart of Aba weaving in the world.