



# Iran targets 2m medical tourists, €6b revenue by 2028

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri, announced on Wednesday the country plans to double its annual number of health tourists to two million and generate 6 billion euros in revenue by the end of its Seventh Development Plan (2028). Salehi-Amiri spoke to reporters in Tehran, outlining a comprehensive health-tourism system developed with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the Social Security Organization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and all relevant agencies, which will

be unveiled in the near future, IRNA reported.

"We are organizing to get past the current disunity," he said, pointing to efforts in Khuzestan and Khorasan provinces that have streamlined regional coordination.

Currently, Iran attracts some 1.02 million medical tourists per year, with some sources estimating closer to 1.2 million, bringing in around \$2 billion. Salehi-Amiri said the ministry's plan aims not only to boost visitor numbers but also to position Iran as a regional hub for health services.

"The goal is expansion to all countries in the region," Sale-



hi-Amiri added. He cited recent figures from Oman, where the Omani tourism ministry report-

edly paid \$100 million last year for Iranian health services. The minister stressed that Tehran

intends to deepen cross-border medical ties and integrate services across neighboring markets.

The ministry's strategy relies on leveraging Iran's skilled medical workforce, competitive treatment costs, and advanced hospital infrastructure.

Salehi-Amiri said the system will coordinate licensing, standards, and patient services across multiple agencies, a response to long-standing fragmentation that has slowed growth in the sector.

Salehi-Amiri recently visited Riyadh, meeting with tourism ministers from ten countries. The

trip underscored Iran's intention to market itself as a cost-efficient, high-quality alternative to regional competitors such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

If targets are met, health tourism could become a major source of foreign exchange and an important driver of Iran's economic diplomacy.

The sector is already considered one of three pillars of the national tourism industry, alongside cultural and religious travel. However, implementing the planned institutional reforms and scaling inter-agency coordination remain crucial hurdles.

## Iran presses cultural diplomacy at UNESCO's Samarkand gathering



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Iranian officials drove a packed diplomatic agenda in Samarkand as the 43rd UNESCO General Conference wrapped up, pushing cultural, scientific and educational initiatives that Tehran framed as part of a broader bid to "shape" global norms.

Seyed Mohammad Sadati Nejad, Director General for International Affairs on Environment and Sustainable Development, said the two-week session gave Iranian diplomats a platform to table new initiatives, revive older cultural files, and negotiate sensitive scientific-security proposals.

He added the conference allowed Iran to blend soft-power projection with targeted institutional engagement. The event ran from October 30 to November 13, IRNA reported.

The Iranian delegation spotlighted a trio of files that officials had prepared for months. Delegates secured recognition for the Cyrus Cylinder, described by Tehran as an early expression of justice and "cultural tolerance", through a resolution co-sponsored with Tajikistan and Iraq. Sadati Nejad said the text obliges UNESCO to weave its principles into education and human-rights programs and called the decision a rare moment when a historic artefact carried contemporary political weight, underscoring the "civilizational depth" Iran aims to leverage in multilateral fora.

Iran also secured endorsements for two major commemorations. UNESCO approved the 1150th anniversary of the death of Bayazid Bastami and the centenary of Allameh Tabatabaei's scholarly work in its 2026-2027 global observances, backed by regional partners from Armenia to Pakistan. Tehran further co-spon-

sored files on Rabe'eh Balkhi, Ayatollah Mohammad-Baqir Sadr, and the Turkic poet Baki, inserting itself into a wider cultural-heritage map across West and Central Asia.

A separate track centered on science diplomacy. Iran's science minister raised security threats facing academics, including the killing of Iranian researchers, urging delegates to consider "international mechanisms" to guard scientific activity. Sadati Nejad said the approach shifted Iran from a critic to an active contributor in shaping global norms.

The Samarkand meeting also brought a domestic win as UNESCO accepted Kashan into its Creative Cities Network as a "creative city of architecture," marking the first time architecture has been recognized as an independent field in the network.

He described the decision as a channel for urban diplomacy and a way to showcase the city's Iranian-Islamic design heritage to global audiences.

Sadati Nejad said Iran, nominated for multiple executive and scientific bodies, was elected with consensus by member states to four key committees, including the Legal Committee, the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), the International Committee on the Return of Cultural Property (ICPRCP) and the Committee on Social Transformation (MOST).

He added that the election reinforced Tehran's role in shaping legal, ethical, cultural and social-policy discussions internationally.

Sadati Nejad said that securing one of UNESCO's influential committee seats provides Iran a platform to translate conference outcomes into actionable programs and expand its engagement in science, culture, and education.

## Where music meets Persian legends

### INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

By Neda Sijani  
Guest contributor

Tehran's Vahdat Hall hosted two charged evenings on November 18 and 19 as the Mithra Orchestra staged its 'Shahnameh Night', conducted by Mohammad-Reza Safavi and narrated by the distinguished actress and director Golab Adineh. The program drew a diverse crowd eager to watch an orchestra lean into both classical technique and Iran's deep literary heritage. Shakiba Khosravi led the ensemble as concertmaster, and Kaveh Kashkooli oversaw production.

### Founding an orchestra

Safavi recounts that the Mithra Orchestra was founded in 223 with the goal of broadening Iran's orchestral scene and bringing rarely performed works to the stage. Their first concert that autumn set the tone for a project that has remained deliberately wide-ranging ever since.

He explains that each performance from the start included one or two pieces by Iranian composers, a practice that grew into full concerts devoted to Iranian music. Composers entrusted the orchestra with their scores, a gesture Safavi sees as both encouragement and responsibility.

### Strings binding 'Shahnameh Night'

For 'Shahnameh Night,' he anchored the orchestration around a string ensemble, describing the string group as the orchestra's spine even when the instrumentation shifts. The evening featured three works shaped by stories from the Shahnameh: 'Bi-

jan and Manijeh,' the celebrated piece by the late Hossein Dehlavi with text by Taha Afshin; 'Siavash Dance,' composed by Pouria Khadem; and 'Laughter of Gordafarid,' written by British playwright William Nicholson and set to music by Farhad Popal.

Adineh explains that Nicholson's piece was created with narration in mind, so her presence felt intrinsic to its dramatic logic. For Dehlavi's work, the team

### Why music needs literature, literature needs music

Both artists stress that music and Persian literature meet a vital cultural need. Adineh sees these performances as a bridge, especially in a world of fleeting attention and screens, where young audiences rarely engage with epic texts. Musical storytelling, she says, brings classical poetry to life and should be pursued more boldly

### Adineh's lifelong dialogue with music

Adineh, whose career in theater and cinema stretches back to the 1970s, approaches music from another angle. She has studied voice, Setar, Tombak and piano at various stages of her life, believing that any actor may find themselves one day required to sing or play. Even now, at seventy, she speaks of music as something inseparable from her daily rhythm.

### Commercialized music culture

Adineh worries that today's music leans too heavily on commercial gain, a fast-food culture that dilutes both art and taste. Musicians chasing the market, she says, risk losing meaningful content. While modern audiences favor easily digestible tunes, this convenience may estrange future generations from authentic culture. Artists, she insists, can keep pace with the times without surrendering their craft or ideals.

### Living canon

By the end of their conversation, both Adineh and Safavi returned to the theme that defined those nights at Vahdat Hall, the power of a shared artistic language. Their collaboration as conductor and narrator, orchestra and epic poetry, brought Iran's literary canon vividly to life, transforming it from relic to living tradition. On stage and set to music, it became immediate, accessible, and deeply moving. Safavi hopes the orchestra's winter performances will continue this work, while Adineh wishes audiences, especially younger ones, to follow the path from melody to text and discover how profoundly music can lead into the heart of Persian literature.



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sought permission from the composer's family to add a short narrative text, a request they warmly accepted. Khadem's piece stood alone without a narrator, forming a contrasting arc within the program.

### Nicholson's message across oceans

Adineh notes that Nicholson, who enjoys global recognition for stage and screenwriting, recorded a personal message for the orchestra ahead of the premiere. In that video, he spoke of his emotional connection to the 'Shahnameh,' prompting her to reflect on how much more Iran must do if it intends to share its literary heritage with international audiences. To her, these moments show that cultural diplomacy through the arts still has a long path to travel.

with works by Ferdowsi, Nizami, and other masters.

Safavi adds that combining epic verse with orchestral performance opens doors for deeper study, connecting musicians, scholars, and audiences. Without this bridge, many masterpieces remain distant, admired but not truly felt.

### Forging harmony from youth

Safavi echoes on building a young orchestra, many trained at home or abroad, bringing fresh approaches to harmony and orchestration. Ensemble discipline takes time, he admits, but trust, continuity, and shared standards forge a cohesive group. In two years, the orchestra has shown that unity matters far more than individual bravura.