

Iranica Desk

Villages with natural, historical, cultural, and local traditions — valued for their authenticity and scenic beauty — have increasingly become key tourism destinations in Iran, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

According to IRNA, 120 villages across the country have been designated as official tourism-target villages based on specific criteria and indicators. The initiative aims to develop the necessary infrastructure to harness their tourism potential, support sustainable local development, and empower rural communities.

In Zanjan Province — home to more than 900 villages featuring pristine natural landscapes, diverse historical monuments, and numerous tourist attractions — 43 villages with valuable traditional structures have been identified as tourism-target sites. These villages are expected to contribute significantly to the expansion of the local tourism industry and the growth of the regional economy.

Among Zanjan's designated tourism villages, Golabar stands out like a jewel in the heart of Ijrud, offering breathtaking scenery and historic landmarks that evoke a sense of freshness, vitality, and natural charm. Golabar village is now fully prepared to welcome tourists, nature enthusiasts, and history lovers. The village's inauguration was attended by Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts,

Historic Golabar village offering adventure, culture, relaxation

during his mid-November visit to Zanjan.

Seyyed Mikaeil Mousavi, Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Zanjan Province, provided further details to IRNA regarding Golabar's rich natural and historical attractions.

The Golabar recreational and tourism complex spans 976 hectares, with 16 hectares dedicated to built facilities, located beside the scenic Golabar Dam. The complex includes 40 accommodation units with a total floor area of 3,200 square meters, while the overall area of the village's tourism facilities reaches 6,500 square meters.

As one of the largest tourism projects in Zanjan Province, the Golabar complex is expected to play a pivotal role in expanding lodging services and attracting tourists to the region. In addition to strengthening tourism capacity in the province and across western Iran, the project aims to generate job opportunities and stimulate local economic growth.

Golabar village itself is a lush, terraced settlement combining pristine natural landscapes with historic sites. The complex is fully equipped to host tourists year-round, in both summer and winter, and was developed with



the goal of establishing standard tourism infrastructure, promoting economic activity, and supporting the expansion of accommodation and recreational services in the area.

The complex has a capacity for 80 guests and includes a dining hall that can host 200 people, expandable to accommodate up to 400 visitors.

The Golabar Dam and the village's tourism facilities — developed in line with a balanced tourism development policy — play an important role in promoting sustainable employment and driving economic activity in the region. The dam is also considered a key site for the devel-

opment of water sports such as rowing, jet skiing, fishing, and swimming, offering significant growth potential. Efforts are underway to develop these opportunities effectively, providing a source of income for the residents of Ijrud.

Plans for constructing standard four- and five-star hotels are also being pursued in the province to attract more visitors and increase their length of stay.

Historic Golabar village is located 52 kilometers south of Zanjan and dates back to the Sassanid era. Its dam, historic mosque, pristine natural landscapes, and other unique attractions make it an exceptional destination. Like



all tourism-target villages, Golabar has undergone strategic tourism studies to guide its development.

Although the village now features both traditional and modern architecture, it remains primarily a lush, terraced settlement. One notable area, known as Chehel Pelleh (Forty Steps), includes a mountain with dense rock formations. To facilitate hiking for nature enthusiasts, the mountain has been terraced with stone steps — a structure dating back more than 4,000 years.

Situated on the mountain slopes, Golabar village enjoys a pleasant, cool climate. While many

local men work as bakers, women play an active role in the local economy through pottery production, crafting jars, ovens, and other clay products distributed across the country.

The village currently has a population of over 2,400 residents. It is also home to the country's first carved mosque, which has stood since the Seljuk era and now requires extensive restoration. The Golabar Mosque is unique in the province for its stone mihrab and inscriptions featuring Kufic script and Quranic motifs dating back to the Seljuk period. A similar plaster mihrab can be seen in the Jameh Mosques of Qorveh and Sojas.

Naderi Hill tells story of Shirvan through millennia



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In the heart of Shirvan, North Khorasan Province, alongside the Atrak River, rises a historic hill that has witnessed thousands of years of human settlement and culture. Today, it is known as Naderi Hill or Naderi Citadel Hill. Archaeological studies indicate that, due to its strategic natural location, this site has been continuously occupied from the mid-fourth millennium BCE

through the Islamic period.

Ali Akbar Vahdati, a researcher and archaeologist with North Khorasan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, wrote that Naderi Hill elevates more than 20 meters above the surrounding terrain and spans three hectares in the city center. Evidence suggests that during the Safavid and Qajar periods, a fortress and strong ramparts were erected atop the hill. Historical photographs taken by Naser al-Din

Shah's official photographer, along with the memoirs of Etemad al-Saltaneh in Matla' al-Shams, reveal that the fortress and ramparts once constituted a central part of Shirvan's old urban fabric, according to chn.ir.

Following the 1929 earthquake and subsequent urban development programs, much of the historic neighborhood surrounding the hill gradually vanished. Today, only the ancient hill itself and remnants of

the Safavid and Qajar fortress remain, including eroded towers and walls, encompassing approximately seven hectares.

Under a collaborative research agreement between Iran's Cultural Heritage Research Institute and Nanjing University in China, joint archaeological excavations were conducted at Naderi Hill in 2016 and 2018. The project, involving Iranian, Chinese, and French archaeologists, aimed to reconstruct the local settlement sequence,

establish a regional chronology, and explore cultural connections between Iran and Central Asia along the Silk Road.

The findings shed new light on the history of North Khorasan. Excavations in the lower layers of the hill uncovered pottery from the early urbanization period (Bronze Age) with similarities to Central Asian ceramics. Upper layers revealed architectural remains and artifacts from the Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanid, and Islamic periods.

Notably, a large mudbrick wall over three meters thick was discovered deep underground, likely a defensive structure from the earliest settlement phases at Naderi Hill. Radiocarbon dating confirms that this wall is over five thousand years old. Excavations also yielded a diverse collection of artifacts, including clay figurines, spindle whorls, grindstones, bronze spearheads, and decorated and polished ceramics. Many of

these items are now preserved at the Bojnord Museum and the Shirvan City Museum.

Interdisciplinary research in archaeometry, zooarchaeology, and archaeobotany has been published in several international journals, providing valuable insights into the livelihood, agriculture, livestock breeding, technology, and trade of ancient inhabitants of the region.

In recent years, given Naderi Hill's location within a deteriorated and underprivileged urban area, challenges such as unauthorized construction and social irregularities have emerged. To address this, a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation and revitalization of the Naderi historic complex is underway, aiming to transform the site into a cultural, historical, and tourist hub. The project is being implemented collaboratively by the Cultural Heritage Organization, Shirvan Municipality, Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization, and the Agriculture Jihad Organization, with active participation from the Shirvan governor's office.

Need for Malayer to join Historical Cities Network of Iran

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The head of the Malayer Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has emphasized the necessity of the city's inclusion in the Historical Cities Network of Iran, noting that Malayer is among the oldest urban centers in western Iran. The city hosts an extensive collection of historical sites, traditional architectural spaces, and significant cultural monuments, many of which date back to pre-Islamic periods.

Ebrahim Jalili highlighted ancient sites and archaeological zones such as the Nushijan Citadel — considered the most important

and best-preserved mud-brick structure of the Median era — as well as the ancient Anuch Castle and the villages of Pari and Gourab, all with histories extending to BCE times. These sites, he said, give Malayer a distinguished historical standing.

Jalili pointed out that Malayer is one of 168 Iranian cities with a registered historic fabric. Numerous cultural and historical monuments within this area have been inscribed on the National Heritage List due to their exceptional value, chn.ir wrote.

Among the notable sites within the city's historic fabric, he listed the Traditional Bazaar of Malayer,

Babak Zurkhaneh, the historic mosques of Haj Ghasem and Ashura, Farhang Caravanserai, Sara-ye Now, Kermanshahi Caravanserai, Sara-ye Lahaf-Dozha, Sara-ye Moghadam-e No, as well as the Ferdowsi and Ketabi guesthouses, and the Safi Mosque.

He underscored that historic urban fabric plays a vital role as an authentic element of urban identity, preserving unique spatial and architectural patterns. It also serves as a foundation for sustainable urban development and tourism growth.

Referring to the significance of the Historical Cities Network of Iran, Jalili explained that the organiza-

tion has an international structure and presidency, and that member cities participate in its global assembly.

Citing Malayer's two international brands — Monabat (woodcarving) and grapes — along with its nationally recognized heritage assets and landmarks such as the Nushijan Citadel, he stressed that the city is well-qualified to join the association. Membership, he added, would enable Malayer to gain global visibility through interaction with other historic cities and strengthen the presentation of its ancient heritage both nationally and internationally.

He noted that with the efforts



of the Malayer City Council, the mayor and municipal bodies, the governor's office, the city's representatives in Parliament, and the Cultural Heritage Organization, Malayer is well-positioned to achieve this milestone, further

highlighting its historical identity. Jalili concluded that the Cultural Heritage Department, as the custodian of historical monuments, can play a decisive role in documenting, promoting, and registering Malayer's historical assets.