



Iran taps arid regions for sustainable tourism push

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's deserts are being positioned as focal points for tourism and cultural preservation, cultural, Heritage, tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said, emphasizing the role of arid regions in national tourism governance. His commentary, reported by IRIB News, highlighted Khur and Biabanak in Isfahan, Tabas, and the village of Esfahak in South Khorasan as areas where heritage, local society, and environmental adaptation intersect. Salehi-Amiri described recent visits to these regions as part of a deliberate effort to reassess the relationship between land, heritage, and policy. "When development disconnects from its historical and territorial context, it becomes externally imposed, unbalanced, and unsustainable," he wrote, stressing that Iran's deserts function as living systems that historically sustain social structures, cultural creativity, and ecological resilience. The minister outlined a framework emphasizing oversight over direct management, aiming to empower private invest-

ment while maintaining policy stability and institutional trust. He underscored the importance of collaboration with local communities, noting that tourism development thrives on predictable governance rather than subsidies. Khur and Biabanak exemplify the convergence of history, culture, and local society. Sites such as the Sassanid-era Bayazeh Castle in Isfahan illustrate the concept of "living heritage," where preservation depends on integrating social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Similarly, the village of Mesr in Isfahan demonstrates how community-led, experience-based desert tourism can strengthen local livelihoods, social identity, and cultural capital. Amiri also highlighted global heritage registration as a means to bolster local governance and international connectivity rather than as a symbolic accolade. He pointed to Tabas's Golshan Historical Garden, with its complex irrigation systems and biodiversity, as a potential center for educational, scientific, and eco-tourism, while noting that spiritual tourism, exemplified by the shrine of



Khur and Biabanak in Isfahan
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Imamzadeh Hossein ibn Musa al-Kazim, reinforces Iran's cultural-diplomatic profile. Meetings with officials and investors across Tabas, Ferdows, Boshruyeh, Sarayan, and Eshqabad indicated that

the institutional and infrastructural foundations for tourism growth are increasingly established. Salehi-Amiri concluded that sustainable development requires coordinated governance, administrative efficiency, and

grounded knowledge of local realities. "Iran's desert is not merely a development challenge; it is a solution," he wrote, advocating a shift from peripheral policy thinking to a central strategic vision.

How producers shape Iran's musical taste

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PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

In examining the current state of music in Iran, especially what is prevalent among the younger generation, the prominent role of producers and concert organizers cannot be overlooked. Contrary to the common perception that musical taste is entirely individual and spontaneous, society's auditory preferences, particularly among urban youth, are largely shaped by a guided economic-cultural mechanism. Within this mechanism, the producer is not merely a financial backer, but the primary decision-maker regarding "what should be heard" and "what should be pushed to the margins."

Music as a commodity, not an artwork

In recent years, music in Iran has been viewed less as an independent art form and more as a commodity for rapid consumption and short-term profitability. The decline in album sales, the gradual shutdown of the physical music market, and the expansion of virtual spaces have turned concerts into the main source of income for the music industry. Under such conditions, the criterion for selecting music is not artistic quality, but "marketability." Producers naturally gravitate toward works that carry lower risk: Pieces with fast tempos, simple lyrics, familiar melodies, and arrangements that have al-

ready proven successful. While these patterns may attract audiences in the short term, in the long run they lead to creative poverty, tedious repetition, and the superficialization of the musical landscape.

Concerts as core criterion

In today's Iran, concerts are not merely live performances; they are the beating heart of the music economy. This has led many works to be conceived from the outset with "live performance" in mind, rather than as deep listening experiences. A piece must be designed to excite the crowd, allow for sing-alongs, and create a high-energy, rhythmic atmosphere. In such an environment, music that requires concentration, silence, or contemplation such as Iranian classical music, regional music, contemporary music, or even artistic pop effectively loses its chance to enter the main concert cycle. This gradual exclusion occurs not because of a lack of potential audience, but due to the absence of "immediate economic viability."

Trivial lyrics, repetition driven by market

When the measure of success for a piece is the number of tickets sold, content inevitably becomes a casualty. In recent years, we have witnessed the spread of lyrics that lack literary depth, imagery, or even linguistic coherence. Romantic clichés, simplistic phrases, and repetitive concepts have replaced personal expression and lived experience. On the other hand, arrangements have also become trapped in a closed loop: Similar rhyth-

mic patterns, identical instrumentation, and excessive use of electronic effects instead of the pursuit of new sounds. This uniformity is neither accidental nor the result of technical inability; rather, it is the direct consequence of market pressure and producers' demand for "guaranteed sales."

No systematic support for serious music

One of the most significant problems in Iran's music scene is the absence of sustained support for serious music across all genres. Serious music does not necessarily mean traditional or classical music; rather, it includes any form of music that seeks experimentation, innovation, or independent artistic expression. Such music is neither visible in official media, nor taken seriously by concert organizers, nor able to compete economically with commercial projects. The result of this situation is the gradual migration of independent artists toward underground spaces, limited private performances, or the release of works on platforms with small audiences.

Young people: Consumers or victims?

It is not possible to place all responsibility for the current situation on young audiences. Today's youth are not exposed to genuinely diverse choices; instead, what they mostly see and hear is the product of targeted investment. When advertisements, venues, billboards, and social media are saturated with one particular type of music, it is natural for that type to become the "dominant taste."

Taste, contrary to popular belief, is not static or innate; it is constructed, taught, and shaped through repetition. The removal of serious music from public space gradually diminishes society's listening capacity as well.

Closed cycle of producer, singer, and concert

In many cases, the relationship between producer and singer is structured in such a way that the artist becomes effectively trapped within a pre-defined framework. A singer who wishes to try a different path risks losing financial support and performance opportunities. This closed cycle not only limits individual creativity, but also pushes the musical environment toward uniformity, an environment in which difference is considered a risk and repetition a competitive advantage.

An issue beyond taste

What we see today in Iran's mainstream music is not the result of free collective choice, but the outcome of a combination of economic pressures, a concert-centered structure, the absence of institutional support, and the conservative decisions of producers. If any change is to occur in the musical taste of society, it will not come from blaming the audience, but through reforming production structures, providing genuine support for serious music, diversifying performance spaces, and redefining the role of the producer. Otherwise, music will continue to revolve around sales loud, bright, and flashy, yet empty of depth and lasting impact.

Iran's 'Sparrow' set for Georgian cinema release



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An Iranian feature film, 'Sparrow' directed by Soheil Karimi, will open in cinemas across Georgia on January 20, distributor Minerva Film said on Sunday, marking a rare commercial release for an Iranian independent title in the South Caucasus market. The rollout underscores a cautious widening of regional exhibition channels for Iranian cinema at a time when domestic filmmakers are increasingly looking abroad to offset tight financing and limited screening windows at home, while Georgian theatres continue to diversify programming beyond Hollywood and European fare, ILNA wrote. The film previously won Best Film and Best Actor

at the 34th Girona Film Festival in Spain. It also earned the Best Actor award for Abbas Ghazali and received nominations for Best Leading Actress for Nahal Dashti and Sheida Khaligh at the Love Film Festival in the United States. Also, it was honored for Best Music and Best Sound Design at the FICINDIE International Film Festival in the Canary Islands, Spain. The film has been screened at festivals in the Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, and Germany. Produced by Minerva Film in partnership with Lance Film, 'Sparrow' brings together a mixed ensemble cast led by Abbas Ghazali and Sheida Khaligh, alongside Nahal Dashti, Soheil Saei, Sanaz Aghaei and Arash Azizi.