

Iranian tourism on display at Istanbul's EMITT 2026

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is displaying a range of tourism destinations and cultural themes at the 29th East Mediterranean International Tourism and Travel Exhibition (EMITT) 2026 in Istanbul, which concluded on February 7, according to the Touring and Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian pavilion, organized by the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran on behalf of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, has been operating since February 5 at the Istanbul Expo Center, one of Eurasia's most influential tourism marketplaces, IRNA reported.

On Friday, Iran's Consul General in Istanbul Ahmad Mohammadi visited the national pavilion, holding talks with exhibitors, provincial representatives, tourism companies and private-sector stakeholders. Iran's presence features 10 private-sector companies spanning travel services, traditional accommodation and hotel reservation platforms from East Azarbaijan, Kho-

rasan Razavi, Kurdistan, Fars and Tehran provinces. The delegation represents a broad geographic and product mix aimed at reviving inbound flows and expanding regional market share. The pavilion has focused on promoting Iran's cultural, historical and natural assets, alongside health, pilgrimage and eco-tourism offerings, sectors that Iranian officials view as commercially resilient despite external constraints. During his visit, Mohammadi described EMITT as one of the region's most important platforms for strengthening public diplomacy, countering negative perceptions of Iran and showcasing the country's tourism capabilities, underlining the role of tourism diplomacy in enhancing cultural interaction and expanding economic relations with other countries. Beyond destination branding, the pavilion has hosted business-to-business meetings, commercial negotiations and briefings on investment opportunities, targeting tour operators and travel intermediaries from across Eurasia. Public- and private-sector representatives have

been present throughout the exhibition to pursue partnerships and cross-border cooperation. The consul general also praised the coordinated participation of public and private sectors in organizing the pavilion, calling it a key strength of Iran's presence at EMITT and an effective opportunity to introduce the country's diverse tourism attractions to global audiences. The Touring and Automobile Club said the scale of participation marked Iran's strongest showing at EMITT in recent years, reflecting a coordinated push to re-engage with international tourism circuits through regional hubs. EMITT is widely regarded as the leading tourism exhibition in the Eurasian market, attracting tour operators, destination marketers and hospitality firms from dozens of countries each year. The Iranian pavilion was formally inaugurated earlier this week by Hossein Alaei, chairman of the board and chief executive of the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran, accompanied by Iran's Cultural Attaché in Istanbul Bahram Kian.



Visitors engage with representatives at Iran's pavilion during the 29th EMITT 2026 tourism and travel exhibition in Istanbul.
● IRNA

Fajr Film Festival spotlights first-time directors in 44th edition



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Iran's flagship Fajr Film Festival has become a showcase for first-time filmmakers and young directors, signaling a generational shift in the country's cinema, Mehdi Shafiei, Iran's deputy culture minister for artistic affairs, told state news agency IRNA during a visit to the festival headquarters in Tehran.

Speaking during a visit to the festival headquarters in Tehran, the main venue hosting the 44th edition, Shafiei said the current line-up stands out for the number and caliber of debut features, calling the trend "a strong indicator" for the future of Iranian cinema, IRNA reported. He said he had watched three

to four competition titles so far and judged this year's program among the strongest of recent editions. "The quality of first films is striking," Shafiei said, adding that the visibility granted to emerging directors at Fajr provides a solid pipeline for the national industry. "These talented filmmakers are being seen here. They form a reliable backbone for Iranian cinema, and we will see much more from them in the coming years." The annual festival, Iran's most prominent cinematic event, has long faced criticism over limited access for debut directors. Shafiei acknowledged that many first-time filmmakers had previously been excluded but said this year's selection marked a de-

cisive change, with young directors enjoying a "prominent presence" and a higher overall standard compared with recent cycles. He also said the breadth of strong titles across the program underscored renewed momentum in domestic film production, despite persistent financial and regulatory pressures on the sector. Beyond cinema, Shafiei described the Fajr Film Festival, alongside the Fajr Theater Festival, as one of the region's most enduring cultural brands after 44 editions, calling its continuity a strategic asset for Iran's cultural diplomacy. The 44th National Fajr Film Festival is running from February 1 to 11, features screenings and industry events across Tehran.

Iran-US military confrontation ...

The Chinese are certainly opposed to Washington's plans for Iran materializing and to the emergence of a pro-Western government in Tehran. They do not want a country like Iran, which has very close relations with China, to fall into the Western camp. From this perspective, China is willing to act at the diplomatic and political level. This is evident in the joint letters issued with Iran and Russia, warning the European side that the "snapback" or reimposition of sanctions would only worsen the situation, as well as in the joint letter sent to the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors stating that Iran's file should now be considered normal. China is prepared to take diplomatic steps in Iran's favor, but it is not seeking to side with Iran in the event of a military confrontation with the US.

Can it be said that one of the main objectives behind the United States' intensified pressure and political cam-

paign against Iran is to target China's imports of Iranian oil, similar to what was done in the case of Venezuela? Overall, the US has deployed all of its capabilities to prevent Iran from exporting oil to the rest of the world, including China. If this issue is framed as being exclusively about China, the analysis becomes sidetracked. For example, Washington has pursued the same approach with regard to India, South Korea, Japan, South Africa, and any other country seeking to establish oil ties with Iran. Nor can it be compared to the case of Venezuela, as the conditions in Venezuela are fundamentally different from those in Iran. The reality is that the United States' overarching policy is to restrict—and ultimately drive to zero—Iran's oil exports, not to pressure China because of its relationship with Iran. China may also come under pressure, and in that context, Washington's proposal has been for China to purchase oil from Venezuela instead.

'The Bridge' carries its hero through narrative of war years

By Neda Mohammad Jalilehvand
Film critic

OPINION

Selecting a specific time frame from an eight-year war and shaping a screenplay around it is a time-tested approach, one that can keep the furnace of war-film production burning. "The Bridge," directed by Mohammad Asgari, is among the latest examples of this approach and is screening in the Competition Section of the 44th Fajr Film Festival. Written by Asgari and Pedram Karimi, "The Bridge" situates its story during the days of Operation Kheibar, with the 14-kilometer Kheibar Bridge, the longest floating military bridge in the world, standing at its very core. The film can be categorized as a character-driven screenplay, beginning and ending with Musa, a high-school student; a familiar type of hero in the canon of Iranian Sacred Defense cinema, one seen before, yet relatively effective in drawing the audience along with him. The film opens with a solid rhythm and promptly introduces its inciting incident:

Musa heads to the southern front in order to resolve his brother Mostafa's loan problem and ease his mother's worries. The archetype of the hero's journey plays a key role in shaping and advancing the narrative, leaving a deep impact on Musa. Most crucially, it grants him agency, an element that defines his identity and plays a decisive role in forming the screenplay's first major turning point. Musa's arrival in a war zone despite having no military training creates challenges that both propel the story forward and trigger the protagonist's inner transformation. A clear example is the very first scene of his arrival, when he finds himself standing on a suspended bridge. The idea of introducing a childhood friend and former neighbor in the combat zone also proves to be a functional narrative device, one that demonstrates its effectiveness again in the final act. Musa's discovery of a months-old infant inside a broken, abandoned boat in the marshlands marks the first major turning point and completes a key piece of the heroic puzzle at the heart of The Bridge. The infant can also be seen as the connective tissue between the main narrative

and the film's subplot, a link that functions seamlessly and brings the protagonist's transformation to completion. Films like "The Bridge," which advance primarily through their central hero, have less need for subplots, though they are by no means dispensable. The story of the deaf Iraqi girl of Iranian origin, her father Abdulhai, and a brother who assists Iranian reconnaissance forces constitutes the film's most significant subplot, one that leaves a profound impact on both the narrative and its protagonist, Musa. The theme of love also enters the screenplay in a subdued manner, casting a faint shadow over this subplot. While serviceable, it could have been developed more effectively to create a stronger contrast with the brutal and terrifying atmosphere of war. Most of "The Bridge" secondary characters are indebted to familiar clichés and add little of substance to the film, from their exchanges of dialogue to their humor, both of which rely heavily on well-worn tropes and lack notable innovation. In contrast, Abdulhai and his daughter are rendered with a minimalist touch that fully commands the viewer's attention.

Abdulhai in particular is given a robust backstory, making him a strong example of a well-crafted supporting character. Despite possessing a screenplay that rises above the average, "The Bridge" is not without flaws, the most significant being its underdeveloped middle act, whose thinness delivers a negative jolt to the film's overall structure. After two prior experiences in Sacred Defense cinema, Asgari demonstrates considerable technical growth in "The Bridge," having clearly moved beyond the initial infatuation with big-budget production. He succeeds in the film's dénouement and makes effective use of the southern geography across multiple shots. "The Bridge" also features striking long shots that gain greater impact on the cinema screen and contribute effectively to the film's atmosphere. Its visually pleasing cinematography and impressive CGI are among its key strengths, significantly enriching its visual texture. Rouhollah Zamani is age-appropriate for the role of Musa, yet the issue of his non-professional background persists. In other words, his performance relies heavily on raw emotion, with little evidence of



technique—a shortcoming that ultimately detracts from the film as a whole. By contrast, an actor like Saeed Aghakhani, in the role of Abdulhai, delivers a fully convincing performance despite heavy make-up, making effective use of body language to inhabit the character.

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