

Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari targets tourism growth via cultural heritage

Iranica Desk

Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced that 27 Iranian elements have been inscribed on the global list of intangible cultural heritage.

Alireza Izadi made the remarks during a meeting with the officials of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, noting that a dossier for the nomadic migration traditions of the province is currently being prepared for global registration, chtn.ir wrote.

He added that property rights for individuals located within the boundaries of historical sites have been addressed in Iran's Seventh Development Plan. According to Izadi, measures — such as allocating alternative land — have been placed on the agenda and approved by the Housing Council.

Malek-Mohammad Qorbanpour,

deputy governor for economic affairs of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, emphasized the importance of the service sector as a key pillar of the provincial economy. He said the province aims to strengthen its tourism sector by leveraging its existing cultural heritage, tourism, and handicraft attractions. Qorbanpour stressed that per capita investment in sectors related to cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts must be increased, adding that the province has the potential to become a hub for knowledge-based exchanges with a tourism-oriented approach.

He further noted that significant infrastructure has been developed to host national and international events in the province. Highlighting the region's economic diversity, he said that while Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari has notable agricultural, industrial, and economic output, its tourism sector offers unique

and virtually unlimited opportunities for new investments.

Qorbanpour also pointed out that the province can promote its cultural heritage, handicrafts, and traditional arts through historical and cultural discourse, helping to transfer its rich legacy to future generations.

Meanwhile, Director General of the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization underlined that preserving historical sites remains a top priority. Heydar Sadeqi emphasized that registering intangible cultural heritage in the province could significantly enhance its appeal among younger generations.

The province is widely recognized for its rich Bakhtiari tribal heritage, traditional music, colorful local attire, and centuries-old nomadic lifestyle, all of which contribute to its growing appeal as a cultural tourism destination.



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Local handicrafts, including carpet weaving, kilim weaving, and felt-making, alongside tra-

ditional festivals and oral storytelling traditions, reflect the deep-rooted cultural identity

of the region and offer valuable opportunities for sustainable tourism development.

Gisum emerging as ecotourism model in northern Iran

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In Gilan Province, where the ancient Hyrcanian forests meet the shores of the Caspian Sea, the Gisum of Talesh has recently come under growing attention. Efforts to introduce Gisum as a potential "World Tourism Village" have entered a new phase, with experts describing the region as more than a tourist destination—rather, a living museum of the intelligent coexistence between humans and nature.

In a note, Pordel Amiri-Nejad, head of the Cultural Heritage Department of Talesh, wrote that within this ecosystem, the connection between the Hyrcanian forests and the Caspian Sea has created a setting in which local culture and livelihoods have not developed in opposition to nature, but rather



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in harmony with its rules and rhythms.

At the heart of this coexistence lies "fishing knowledge" as an intangible heritage, transmit-

ted across generations among Taleshi fishermen. This traditional knowledge is based on a deep understanding of the sea, seasonal timing of fishing

activities, and respect for natural cycles. Native species such as Siakouli, one of the valuable indigenous fish of the Caspian Sea, are harvested within this framework of sustainable traditional practices.

Importantly, Gisum's tourism village is being encouraged to move beyond the concept of a mere recreational destination and be presented globally as a model of responsible ecotourism. In this model, the tourist is not simply a visitor, but part of a broader process that contributes to shaping conservation guidelines for future generations.

The central theme of the note lies in the concept of "coexistence." In a world facing increasing environmental pressure, the Taleshi approach to nature offers a pathway for sustainability. The potential interna-

tional recognition of the region and its embedded traditional knowledge could help amplify the message of environmental protection.

With its rooted fishing traditions and culture of coexistence, Gisum may serve as a model for sustainable development — where humans flourish alongside nature, rather than in opposition to it.

It should be noted that, as environmental concerns become increasingly central to global tourism policies, Gisum stands out as a promising example of how local communities can balance economic development with ecological responsibility. The region's growing reputation reflects not only its natural beauty, but also the awareness among residents and officials that preserving cultural and environmental heritage is es-

essential for long-term sustainability. By promoting traditional fishing practices, protecting forest and coastal ecosystems, and encouraging low-impact tourism, Gisum offers an alternative to mass tourism models that often place heavy pressure on natural resources. Its unique combination of the Hyrcanian forests, the Caspian shoreline, and the living traditions of the Taleshi people provides visitors with an experience rooted in authenticity and environmental respect.

If carefully managed, Gisum could become an international reference point for community-based ecotourism in the region, demonstrating how cultural identity and environmental stewardship can work together to create a sustainable future for both local residents and visitors alike.

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Saj Bread, known also as Saji Bread, is one of the simplest yet most meaningful expressions of nomadic food traditions, reflecting how people have long adapted to nature and difficult living conditions.

According to ISNA, Saj Bread developed through seasonal migration and the mobile lifestyle of nomads, becoming an inseparable part of their livelihood. In environments where resources are limited and access to supplies is unstable, food preparation and preservation techniques are essential for survival.

The bread is not only a response to daily nutritional needs but also the result of accumulated traditional knowledge passed down through generations — knowledge that has continued without reliance on modern tools, yet remains efficient and sustainable.

It is a very thin flatbread baked on a convex metal plate called a Saj, placed directly over a fire. The dough is usually made from flour, water, and a small amount of salt, and it is prepared quickly with minimal steps.

The simplicity of its ingredients reflects

the nomadic way of life, where carrying complex materials and equipment is not practical.

The baking process is more of a shared family activity than an individual task. Nomadic women, who are traditionally responsible for bread-making, skillfully roll out the dough and place it on the hot Saj. The bread cooks within seconds and is quickly removed — requiring experience, speed, and precision.

Its importance goes beyond preparation. Because Saj Bread is thin and dries easily, it is highly portable and long-lasting, making it ideal for a mobile lifestyle. Nomads who move seasonally between summer and winter pastures need food that is light, durable, and nutritious, and Saj Bread fulfills this need effectively.

Beyond its practical function, Saj Bread is also part of cultural memory. Bread-making moments are often accompanied by conversation, storytelling, and local songs. In this setting, it becomes more than food — it serves as a bridge between generations and a way of passing down lived experience. Geographically, it is common among nomadic and rural communities in west-

ern and southwestern Iran. Provinces such as Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Ilam, Lorestan, Khuzestan, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari are key regions where it is still prepared.

Cities such as Eslamabad-e Gharb, Javanrud, Paveh, Marivan, Sarvabad, Ilam, Mehran, Khorramabad, Kuhdasht, Andika, Masjed Soleyman, Kuhrang, and Lordegan are among the places where its preparation continues. This wide distribution shows that Saj bread is shared across different ethnic groups, including Kurds, Lurs, and Bakhtiari communities.

However, like many traditional practices, this heritage is under pressure. Sedentarization, the availability of industrial bread, and lifestyle changes have reduced its role in some communities. Still, in many areas, the bread remains a daily staple and continues to be actively made.

The skill of making Saj Bread was officially registered on Iran's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2012.

How Saj Bread reflects nomadic way of life



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