

# Tourism train to highlight rosewater tradition in Kashan

## Iranica Desk

A special tourism train dedicated to the rosewater distillation season is set to be launched to Kashan, with the aim of strengthening Isfahan Province's position as "Iran's Desert Tourism Capital," the deputy head of tourism at Isfahan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said. Davoud Abian said the first tourism train for Kashan's traditional rosewater distillation ceremony has been planned and will be operated as part of efforts to realize the provincial tourism slogan, "Isfahan, the Desert Tourism Capital of Iran." He added that the initiative is intended to promote rail-based tourism, introduce the cultural and ritual capacities of the province, and facilitate easier

travel for tourists, according to chn.ir. Referring to the growing popularity of experience-based tourism, Abian said the Kashan rosewater tourism train provides a valuable opportunity to showcase the unique attractions of Iran's desert regions as well as the province's traditional ceremonies. He noted that the program could play an important role in boosting domestic tourism, enhancing travel experiences, and increasing the average length of stay for visitors.

Abian further stated that passengers on this tourism train will enjoy a safe and attractive rail journey, during which they will visit the traditional rosewater distillation ceremonies held in Kashan and Qamsar. He added that tourists will also become familiar with the

cultural, historical, and handicraft capacities of the region.

Emphasizing the importance of inter-agency cooperation in tourism development, he said the project has been implemented in coordination with the Isfahan Railway Organization, travel agencies, and municipal management bodies. He added that efforts are underway to operate this route on a regular basis and to develop it into a set of diverse tourism packages.

He noted that the first departure of the tourism train will take place in the coming days. He stressed that the development of rail tourism is one of the key priorities in the province's tourism planning and expressed hope that such initiatives would further consolidate Isfahan's position as "Iran's Desert Tourism Capital."



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## Markazi Province struggles to save centuries-old qanats

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Ancient qanats — Iran's centuries-old underground water channels and one of the country's greatest engineering achievements — are facing an escalating crisis as over-extraction of groundwater, recurring droughts, and the spread of deep wells push many of them toward extinction.

For centuries, qanats sustained life in Iran's arid and semi-arid regions by transporting water from underground aquifers to farms and settlements. They played a central role in the development of rural communities, agriculture, and sustainable water management across the country, according to ISNA. However, experts warn that decades of uncontrolled drilling of legal and illegal deep wells, falling groundwater levels, climate-driven droughts, and changing water consumption patterns have severely weakened this historic system. Many qanats have already dried up, while others now operate only seasonally.

The crisis is particularly evident in Iran's Markazi Province, historically one of the country's major qanat regions. Once home to around 3,600 active qanats, the province now has only 2,388 remaining, according to Ali Arabi, head of the Qanat Department of Markazi Province's Agricultural Jihad Organization and a member of Iran's National Qanat Technical Committee.

ply have disappeared due to neglect, structural collapse, blocked shafts, flooding, and most importantly, declining groundwater reserves.

He noted that the rapid expansion of deep wells over recent decades has significantly lowered underground water tables, depriving qanats of the natural pressure and balance required for water flow.

Arabi said, adding that this has already occurred in many parts of Markazi Province.

He pointed to areas around Arak — including Motabad, Malekabad, and Ebrahimabad — where numerous wells drilled to supply urban drinking water have led to the destruction of many historic qanats.

Despite the decline, approximately 14 percent of agricultural land in Markazi Province is still irrigated through qanats. Arabi described the system as one of the most sustainable and low-cost methods of water extraction in Iran's dry climate because, unlike deep wells, qanats operate within the natural recharge capacity of aquifers. He added that Iranian communities had relied on this indigenous technology for centuries to sustain agriculture in harsh environments without depleting groundwater reserves.

Among the hardest-hit systems is the Kheirabad Qanat, which once delivered around 60 liters of water per second and irrigated large areas of farmland, but has now nearly dried up due

to nearby well drilling in its recharge zone.

Arabi also highlighted the globally registered Ebrahimabad Qanat, a 12-kilometer-long system regarded as one of Iran's most significant examples of historic hydraulic engineering.

Although national and provincial budgets are allocated annually for qanat restoration, Arabi said the high costs of dredging, repairs, and rehabilitation have made recovery efforts difficult, especially in areas where deep wells remain active nearby.

Experts warn that the disappearance of qanats represents more than the loss of traditional water channels. The decline threatens rural livelihoods, increases dependence on groundwater extraction, accelerates land subsidence, and undermines Iran's long-term water security.

According to Arabi, many villages in Iran were originally established around qanat systems, meaning their collapse could intensify rural migration, reduce agricultural production, and contribute to the abandon-

ment of rural settlements.

He also warned that continued reliance on deep wells risks further groundwater depletion and irreversible damage to aquifers, potentially worsening future water shortages for both agriculture and drinking supplies.

Beyond their environmental and economic importance, qanats are also considered part of Iran's historical and cultural heritage — a symbol of indigenous knowledge and sustainable water management developed over centuries.

As droughts and declining rainfall continue to place mounting pressure on Iran's water resources, experts say protecting and restoring qanats, alongside stricter groundwater management, has become increasingly urgent.

The gradual disappearance of active qanats in Markazi Province is not merely an agricultural issue, but a broader sign of growing stress on Iran's groundwater resources and the weakening of the country's traditional water management systems.



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Speaking to ISNA, Arabi said many qanats that once served as the primary source of irrigation and rural water sup-

ply have disappeared due to neglect, structural collapse, blocked shafts, flooding, and most importantly, declining groundwater reserves. He noted that the rapid expansion of deep wells over recent decades has significantly lowered underground water tables, depriving qanats of the natural pressure and balance required for water flow.

## Coordinated tourism development needed in Khorasan Razavi

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Khorasan Razavi Province, home to the holy city of Mashhad and the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the Muslim world, receives millions of pilgrims annually. Alongside pilgrimage tourism centered in Mashhad, provincial officials are increasingly seeking to promote lesser-known destinations across Khorasan Razavi in order to expand tourism opportunities and distribute travel more evenly throughout the province.

The deputy head of tourism at Khorasan Razavi's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization has said that domestic travel trends within the province are increasingly shifting toward lesser-known destinations, while emphasizing the urgent need for stronger tourism promotion, coordinated planning, and improved content production. Speaking to ISNA, Mohammad

Rokni said the largest share of intra-provincial travel in Khorasan Razavi is currently directed toward the cities of Dargaz, Quchan, Gonabad, Torbat-e Jam, and Khaf. He noted, however, that some regions, including the historic Torshiz area, still lack organized tours and structured travel programs.

Rokni stressed the importance of increasing advocacy efforts and strengthening cooperation among tourism stakeholders in order to achieve broader development goals. He added that producing high-quality content and providing comprehensive introductions to tourist attractions are essential, particularly given the accommodation capacity and handicraft potential across the province's cities and counties.

He noted that demands and initiatives from those active in the tourism sector in some cities remain limited and insufficient. Emphasizing the need for practical action rather than passive discussion, Rokni said cultural figures and tourism profession-

als in different sectors should actively pursue their demands in order to create meaningful and lasting change. "If we simply sit and do nothing, nothing will happen," he said.

Rokni also underlined the importance of adopting an integrated and province-wide approach to tourism development.

"If we want to create a strong tourism flow in Khorasan Razavi Province, we cannot focus only on our own city, because tourism is a chain that must move forward in coordination," he said.

He suggested that tourists visiting one destination should also be introduced to nearby regions and attractions, adding that such interactions and cooperation between cities could help create a more cohesive and sustainable tourism network throughout the province.

Referring to the accommodation infrastructure and handicraft capacities that already exist in many counties, Rokni

said the current priority should be making better use of existing opportunities and unlocking untapped potential rather than waiting for entirely new resources.

"We need to work much more seriously on content production," he said.

Rokni stated that attracting tourists requires effective and professional promotional content, adding that some cities currently lack even basic monolingual or bilingual materials that could help travel agencies and tour operators introduce those destinations to visitors.

He stressed the need for high-quality content related to pilgrimage tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, handicrafts, and other tourism sectors, expressing hope that stronger cooperation and collective efforts would lead to greater tourism growth across the province.

Rokni also pointed to the lack of suitable digital content for online promotion and regional



Dargaz  
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marketing, saying many destinations in the province still do not have adequate materials to present themselves effectively on social media platforms.

"We do not have content that we can properly present in virtual spaces," he said.

He concluded by emphasizing the importance of continued content production, stronger

advocacy efforts, investment attraction, and securing financial support and facilities for the tourism sector. Rokni expressed hope that, through collective determination and coordinated action, tourism across Khorasan Razavi Province would experience broader growth and long-term prosperity.