

# Iran seeks digital reboot to recount tourism for global audience

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts minister on Sunday called for a sweeping shift toward digital storytelling and smarter media engagement, saying the country's vast historical and cultural assets must be repackaged for younger global audiences and international platforms if they are to remain competitive in the modern tourism economy. Speaking at a Communications and Public Relations Day gathering in Tehran, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said traditional communication models had reached their limits as tourism markets increasingly revolve around visual narratives, social media ecosystems and

digitally driven cultural branding, chtn.ir reported. "Today's tourism is meaningless without compelling content," Salehi-Amiri told ministry media executives and cultural officials, warning that "stagnation" posed the biggest threat to Iran's information and cultural sectors. The minister said Iran, home to more than one million historical sites alongside deserts, forests, waterfalls and mountain landscapes, holds one of the world's richest tourism portfolios but must "speak the language of the new generation" to translate those assets into international visibility. He urged public relations departments to move beyond merely reflecting officials' activities and instead focus on "creating narratives" capable

of engaging younger audiences living in what he described as a predominantly digital and networked environment. Salehi-Amiri also highlighted plans to expand the international reach of Iranian handicrafts through digital marketplaces and online retail platforms. "Iranian handicrafts must gain an effective presence in global markets and international platforms," he said, adding that consumers anywhere in the world should be able to purchase works produced by Iranian artisans. The minister said artificial intelligence, interactive storytelling, animation and short-form digital content were reshaping global media and tourism industries, pushing cultural institutions worldwide to overhaul outdated



Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri attends a gathering in Tehran on May 17, 2026.  
● CHTN

communication structures. In a separate note published to mark the national communications occasion, Salehi-Amiri described the current era as a "battle of narratives," arguing that countries unable to present their own cultural and civilizational image risk being defined by others. He said Iran needed a broader national narrative linking its historical legacy with a modern and future-oriented cultural identity, while strengthening public trust and international cultural outreach through dialogue-driven



communication rather than one-way messaging. Salehi-Amiri added that Iran's cultural heritage would remain

"alive and influential" only if integrated into the daily lives and digital habits of younger generations.

## Tehran vows to pursue accountability for damaged heritage



Debris at the historical monument Golestan Palace in Tehran after it was damaged in an Israeli and US strike on March 3, 2026.  
● REUTERS

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Iran will document and pursue international legal accountability for damage inflicted on its cultural heritage during recent

US and Israeli attacks, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said on May 17 to mark International Museum Day, as UNESCO and other in-

ternational bodies continue to voice concern over threats facing the country's historic sites. In a message posted on X on Sunday, Gharibabadi said this year's International Museum Day (May 18) carried a "different meaning" for Iran, where celebrations honoring the country's civilizational legacy have been overshadowed by damage to museums, historical landmarks and cultural institutions during the February 28 attacks, IRNA reported. "At least 149 historical sites

and museums across 20 provinces sustained damage," he said, adding that the toll included five UNESCO-listed properties, seven historic urban fabrics and 54 museums. He said the incidents had widened concerns beyond civilian casualties and the prohibition on the use of force, arguing that Iran's "historical and civilizational memory" had also come under attack. "Iran's cultural heritage is not merely a national possession," Gharibabadi wrote. "It forms part of the shared memory of humanity." The remarks came after UNESCO expressed concern in March over reported damage to several Iranian heritage sites, including areas sur-

rounding Tehran's Golestan Palace and historical districts in Isfahan. UNESCO officials later said the agency had intensified emergency monitoring efforts and shared coordinates of protected heritage sites with parties to the conflict in a bid to avert further destruction. Citing the 1954 Hague Convention and the core principles of international humanitarian law, Gharibabadi said cultural property must remain protected during armed conflict and "must not fall victim to aggression, military negligence or disregard for international legal obligations." Iranian cultural authorities have since launched extensive damage assessments and

preservation work at affected museums and monuments, while officials have stepped up diplomatic engagement with international heritage organizations. The attacks triggered reactions from archaeologists, museum experts and heritage scholars worldwide, with several international petitions warning that damage to Iran's ancient sites would represent an irreversible loss to world civilization. Gharibabadi said Tehran would continue documenting the incidents through international legal channels, adding that Iran would not allow "the history of the great Iranian nation to become a casualty of today's military and political objectives".

## Ancient Khuttal symposium traces Persian roots linking Iran, Central Asia

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Archaeologists, historians and diplomats from Tajikistan, Iran and Russia gathered across southern Tajikistan to examine how the ancient region of Khuttal helped shape the Persian-Tajik language and broader Central Asian civilization, organizers said at the International Symposium on Ancient Khuttal held from May 10 to 14 in Dushanbe, Bokhtar and Nurek. The cultural forum, organized by Tajikistan's Khatlon regional administration and the state Agency for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage, has turned renewed attention toward the deep historical ties linking



● IRNA

modern Tajikistan and Iran through the Persian language, literature and shared civilizational memory, IRNA reported. Khatlon Governor Davlati Said said the gathering aimed to deepen scholarly understanding of ancient Khuttal's role in regional culture and identity. Tajik presiden-

tial aide Anvar Safarzoda, heritage agency chief Shirali Khojzoda, and representatives from the Iranian and Russian embassies also attended. Iranian and Russian delegates highlighted the contribution of Persian-Tajik civilization to global scholarship,

culture and scientific thought, reflecting what participants described as a cross-border intellectual heritage that predates modern state boundaries. Tajik officials said more than 5,000 tangible and intangible cultural elements have been registered nationwide since the country gained independence. Of Tajikistan's 3,500 nationally and internationally significant historical sites, more than 900 are located in the ancient Khuttal region. Among the region's landmark sites are the Ajina Teppa Buddhist complex, the Hulbuk palace, Takht-i Sangin, Khoja Mashhad and the Stone Age museum of Kulobdara.

## 'Melatonin' lands in Oscar-qualifying Spain film festival

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Iranian short film 'Melatonin,' directed by emerging filmmaker Hannaneh Daliri, was selected for the competition section of the 54th Huesca International Film Festival in Spain, marking the work's first international screening. Written and directed by Daliri and produced by Roozbeh Sajjadi Hosseini, the short will compete at the Oscar- and Goya-qualifying festival, known in European cinema circles for spotlighting independent productions and rising global talent, ILNA reported. Held annually in the northeastern Spanish city of Huesca, the festival has built a reputation as a key launchpad for short filmmakers seeking wider international recognition. This year's edition runs from June 5 to June 13. The Iranian production features a cast including Nazanin Keyvani, Mohammad Asgari, Sepinoud Delbarhassas, Abolfazl Khanpour, Ian Yarabigi and Amirabbas Nourzaei. Daliri's film joins a curated lineup of international shorts competing before industry figures, programmers and global audiences at one of Spain's prominent cinematic gatherings.



'Melatonin' is being introduced to overseas festivals by Tehran-based international sales company Artvision, headed by Ida Tebianian, as Iranian short cinema continues to expand its presence across major cultural events and independent film circuits worldwide.