

# Eco-tourism expansion aims to revive rural economies, preserve cultural identity

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is stepping up investment in rural tourism and eco-lodges as part of a broader strategy to revive village economies, strengthen national unity and safeguard Iranian-Islamic cultural identity, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said on Tuesday. Speaking at the National Ecotourism Day conference in Tehran, Salehi-Amiri said the administration of President Masoud Pezeshkian had mobilized financial, banking and executive resources to remove barriers facing rural communities and eco-tourism operators, positioning village revitalization as a national priority aimed at curbing migration to urban centers and boosting local employment, according to CHTN.

He described eco-tourism as more than a hospitality business, calling it a platform for safeguarding Iran's cultural memory, social capital and indigenous traditions. He added that Iran's ethnic and cultural diversity, spanning Kurdistan, Baluchestan, Khuzestan, Lorestan and Torkaman Sahra, forms a unified national identity rooted in centuries of civilization. "Iran possesses one of the world's richest civilizational treasures," Salehi-Amiri said, citing more than one million historical sites, including 43,000

nationally registered monuments and 29 UNESCO-listed sites. The minister said strong domestic demand during the Nowruz (Persian New Year) holidays, when millions travelled to villages and eco-lodges, highlighted growing public interest in experiencing rural life, traditional crafts, local cuisine and regional customs. Abdolkarim Hosseinzadeh, vice president for rural development and deprivation alleviation, said sustainable development cannot rely solely on infrastructure and construction projects. He said eco-tourism could foster what he described as a "relationship economy" built on social interaction, cultural exchange and community participation, warn-

ing that weakening social ties could threaten rural sustainability and accelerate depopulation. Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey said a specialized rural tourism desk had been established to streamline policy and expand support for local communities, adding that eco-lodges are key to job creation and encouraging reverse migration to rural areas. Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs Zahra Behrouz-Azar said family-run eco-tourism businesses act as custodians of Iran's civilizational heritage and cultural identity, with the government aiming to integrate dispersed rural capacities into a unified development network for balanced growth.



Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri speaks at the National Ecotourism Day conference in Tehran on May 19, 2026. ● CHTN

## Tehran Virtual Book Fair bridges cultural gap with free postage

### Arts & Culture Desk

A top Iranian book fair official said free postal delivery for online purchases, costing as much as the state book subsidy itself, guarantees readers in remote provinces equal access to the country's biggest literary event, calling it a deliberate push toward balanced cultural development. Ebrahim Heydari, deputy director of the 7th Tehran Virtual Book Fair and managing director of Iran Book and Literature House, told state news agency IRNA that the virtual fair's free shipping policy ensures buyers in Sistan and Baluchestan, Kurdistan, North Khorasan, Azarbaijan and other far-flung regions benefit from the same discounts as residents of the capital. 179100 toman convert toman to dollar "The postal subsidy almost matches the book subsidy," Heydari said. He explained that each Iranian national can receive free postal delivery for up to 1,500,000 rials (less than \$1) worth of books, with no weight restrictions on parcels. The first postal package is entirely free for both the buyer and the publisher, while the publisher covers 30



percent of the cost for a second package. Organizers opted for an online format due to what he described as a "semi-ceasefire" situation gripping the country, which made a physical gathering unfeasible. He said the decision followed broad consultations with publishers, booksellers and senior cultural authorities. Heydari framed the virtual fair as a symbol of cultural resilience, arguing that it demonstrates how everyday life continues despite external pressures and wartime conditions. "This event carries the message that contrary to slogans and images sometimes presented by foreign media, Iranians are moving forward with their work properly," he said. The official also detailed the fair's discount structure. Buyers receive a 25-percent reduction on new books published

within the past five years, consisting of a 15-percent publisher discount and a 10-percent state subsidy capped at 20 million rials (almost \$33) per person. He noted that the cultural deputy's budget allocates more than half of its annual funds to the book fair, underscoring the event's priority in Iran's cultural policy. Heydari added that a separate subsidized online sale for booksellers would follow roughly 40 days after the fair wraps up. That scheme will cover all books regardless of publication year, allowing bookshops across the country to clear older stock. He recalled that last year's similar post-fair program generated about 300 billion rials (\$0.5 million) in sales, double the volume of previous years in terms of both revenue and copies sold.

## Golestan Palace draws wide attention on Chinese state TV

### Arts & Culture Desk

Chinese state broadcaster China Global Television Network (CGTN) marked International Museum Day on May 18 by featuring Tehran's Golestan Palace in a global cultural program that drew strong engagement from Chinese audiences, Hossein Khalifi, representative of Iran's Touring and Automobile Centre in China, said. The UNESCO-listed Qajar-era complex emerged as one of the most-watched segments in CGTN's "Bridging the World Through Museums", a multinational showcase spanning museums and cultural institutions from Iran, Greece, Tunisia, Brazil, Argentina and Slovenia, ISNA reported. Khalifi said the Iranian entry stood out for blending Khorasani folk music



with sweeping imagery of the palace's mirror halls, luminous tiles and royal courtyards. The soundtrack, performed by Iranian vocalist Gholamhossein Ghaffari, lent the production a lyrical cadence that resonated with Chinese viewers' longstanding interest in Iran's traditional arts, he said. CGTN described museums as living arenas of cultural exchange that preserve

civilization across generations and geographies. In its portrayal of Golestan Palace, the network highlighted the site as a meeting point between Persian craftsmanship and European architectural influence, where "the echoes of shared heritage" ripple through vaulted chambers and mosaic-lined halls. The program juxtaposed Golestan Palace with landmarks including China's Old Summer Palace and Greece's Acropolis, framing museums as active spaces where history, memory and artistic dialogue continue to converge. Iranian cultural bodies, including the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, and the Owj Arts and Media Organization, collaborated on the production.

## Ferdowsi's enduring legacy resonates with Italian academia

### Arts & Culture Desk

Italian and Iranian studies scholars gathered at the Vivarium Academy in Rome to honor Persian poet Ferdowsi and examine the enduring influence of the 'Shahnameh' (Book of the Kings) on European Iranology and Iran's cultural identity. The event placed 'Shahnameh' at the center of a widening cultural dialogue between Iran and Europe, with academics describing the epic as a living archive of Persian language, justice, mythology and historical memory, IRNA reported on Tuesday. Professor Simone Cristoforetti characterized the work as a vast tapestry interweaving cosmology, ethics, philosophy and heroic narrative, stretching from the



reign of Keyumars, regarded in Iranian tradition as the first king, to the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century. He said the poem's legendary cycle, dominated by the heroic figure of Rostam and

the House of Sam, remained one of the pillars of Persian literary consciousness, while its historical sections chronicled the Parthian and Sassanian eras with sweeping narrative force. Mario Mazzari of the University of Rome traced Italy's scholarly engagement with Ferdowsi back to the Medici Press in the late sixteenth century, highlighting the role of Giovanni Battista Raimondi and the Vecchietti brothers in collecting Persian manuscripts and laying the groundwork for Oriental studies in Europe. Speakers said the 'Shahnameh' had preserved the bond between Persian language, wisdom and historical continuity across centuries, retaining a singular place in global epic literature and intercultural scholarship.

## Bushehr on track to become Iran's maritime tourism hub

### Social Desk

Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, said on Tuesday in Bushehr that the southern coastal province is poised to become one of the country's leading maritime tourism hubs, as the government moves to expand infrastructure and support private-sector investors.

Bandpey said Bushehr's extensive Persian Gulf coastline, strategic geography and rich cultural heritage had positioned the province as a high-potential destination for marine, eco and industrial tourism, according to IRNA. He said the ministry stood ready to deepen cooperation on tourism infrastructure, professional training and the

promotion of Bushehr's attractions at domestic and international exhibitions. Governor General Arsalan Zare' said the province's historical quarters, indigenous music, favorable climate and long seafront had given Bushehr a competitive edge in southern Iran's tourism economy. He said new accommodation projects, coastal redevelopment schemes and improved transport links were being pri-

oritized to stimulate visitor inflows and broaden local employment. Zareh said tourism activity and traveler numbers had weakened during the recent imposed war, squeezing revenues for hospitality operators and eco-lodge owners across the province. He called for government-backed relief measures, including concessional financing, deferred loan repayments and

insurance and tax support, to help revive the sector. He said strengthening tourism would generate sustainable jobs, raise household incomes and restore momentum to one of Bushehr's most promising economic sectors, as the province seeks to reclaim a larger share of Iran's tourism market along the glittering Persian Gulf coast.