

Qaleh Bala hosts Iran's second national ecotourism festival

Iranica Desk

The Second National Ecotourism Festival was held in the tourist village of Qaleh Bala, located in the Beyarjomand district of Shahrud, Semnan Province. The event featured a variety of cultural programs, including local music performances, ethnic folk music, and traditional ceremonies, highlighting the cultural diversity and heritage of different regions of the country.

A number of tourism officials, members of parliament, provincial authorities, and those involved in the activities related to tourism attended the national gathering, according to [chtn.ir](#). Qaleh Bala village, situated near Touran Biosphere Reserve and

in recent years emerged as one of Iran's leading ecotourism destinations. The village is now being presented as Iran's primary candidate for recognition under the UNWTO's Best Tourism Villages initiative.

During the ceremony, speakers emphasized the village's exceptional natural, cultural, and social capacities, describing Qaleh Bala as being on the verge of an international breakthrough in rural tourism. Officials announced that the process of securing global registration for the village has entered its final stages.

Authorities attending the event described ecotourism development as one of the most important tools for economic growth, preservation of cultural identity,

and creation of sustainable employment opportunities in rural areas. They also stressed the importance of supporting local communities and strengthening tourism infrastructure.

The festival additionally showcased the diverse tourism potential of Semnan Province in areas such as nature tourism, rural tourism, handicrafts, and cultural tourism. Those involved in the ecotourism sector from across the country exchanged experiences and discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

The Second National Ecotourism Festival was held from May 19 to 21, 2026, with the aim of fostering dialogue between policymakers and operators of eco-lodges,



● [chtn.ir](#)

sharing successful experiences, examining tourism capacities, and strengthening cooperation among stakeholders in the field. Organizers said hosting the

national event in Qaleh Bala village not only further introduced the tourism capacities of eastern Semnan Province, but also marked an important

step toward the village's potential global recognition and the strengthening of Iran's position in rural and ecotourism on the international stage.

Lesser-known monuments of Shiraz step into spotlight

Iranica Desk

Coinciding with Cultural Heritage Week, several lesser-known monuments and mausoleums in Shiraz have once again drawn public attention. From the Haft-Tanan Garden Museum, which houses historical stone inscriptions, to the tombs of Abesh-Khatun and Sibawayh, each narrating a distinct chapter of the city's historical and intellectual identity, these sites collectively reveal that Shiraz's history extends far beyond its most famous landmarks within the old urban fabric.

Cultural Heritage Week (May 18-24) serves as an opportunity to look beyond well-known monuments and re-examine memorials that remain quietly embedded within the historic texture of Shiraz — each preserving a fragment of the city's collective memory, according to [ISNA](#).

Haft-Tanan Garden Museum

The Haft-Tanan Garden Museum, also known as the "Stone Museum," is more than a historical site; it represents a vital part of Shiraz's cultural memory. With origins predating the Zand era, the complex houses a grand structure that reached its peak during the reign of Karim Khan Zand. The narrative of seven anonymous mystics buried within the garden is tied to a unique tradition — ascetics who, even in death, avoided fame, leaving their graves unmarked and unnamed. Registered as a national heritage site in 1931 under number 4, the complex has since evolved into a museum of stone artifacts, bringing together valuable inscriptions and gravestones. Its veranda, adorned with Zand-era paintings, stands as a notable example of the artistic expression of that period.

Bagh-e Nazar

At the heart of Shiraz's his-



● [Haft-Tanan Garden Museum](#)
● [pegahekhavar.ir](#)

toric district, on Zand Street, lies a structure that contains the tomb of Karim Khan Zand, founder of the Zand dynasty. Known as "Bagh-e Nazar" or the "Pars Museum," the building is a fine example of Iranian-European hybrid architecture in the form of a Koushik (pavilion-style mansion). Once far more extensive than its current boundaries, Bagh-e Nazar today remains adjacent to Arg-e Karim Khan and the Vakil complex, forming one of Shiraz's key historical nodes — a place that continues to bridge the city's urban fabric with its Zand-era heritage.



● [Bagh-e Nazar](#)
● [saadatrent.com](#)

The tomb of Abesh-Khatun, also known as "Rabat-e Abesh," is one of the most significant historical reminders of women's role in the governance of Fars. This three-story structure, registered as a national heritage site in January 1931 under number 76, serves as the resting place of Abesh-Khatun, the last ruler of the Atabegs of Fars in the 7th century AH. In addition to managing state affairs, Abesh-Khatun played a role in constructing schools, caravanserais, and pub-

lic-benefit buildings. Although parts of the intricate tilework have deteriorated over time, the mausoleum continues to reflect an essential layer of Shiraz's historical identity.

Tomb of Sibawayh

In Shiraz's historic district and the Sang-e Siah neighborhood lies the tomb of Abu Bishr Amr ibn Uthman, known as Sibawayh — a scholar regarded as one of the greatest grammarians of the Islamic world, whose works hold a distinguished place in Arabic linguistics.

The current structure of Sibawayh's tomb was built in 1974 by the National Heritage Society. Its archway is decorated with mosaic tilework crafted by Khorasani artisans, while the surrounding space offers a tranquil setting for reflecting on the intellectual legacy of one of the most prominent figures in Iranian cultural history.

These memorials — from the stone inscriptions of Haft-Tanan Museum to the tombs of scientific and historical figures — form part of the interconnected cultural identity of Shiraz. Ultimately, Shiraz's history is not confined to a handful of celebrated monuments; rather, it is embedded in its alleys, mausoleums, and architectural remnants, each narrating a distinct layer of the city's cultural memory.

Dashkasan Temple reveals Iran's artistic legacy

Iranica Desk

In the heart of Zanjan Province, near the historic city of Soltaniyeh, stands the remarkable Dashkasan Temple, one of Iran's most striking examples of rock-cut architecture. Often referred to as the "Dragon Temple," Dashkasan is considered among the province's most important historical landmarks. Located about 15 kilometers southeast of Soltaniyeh, the site takes its name from a Turkish term meaning "stone cutter," reflecting its carved stone structure. Registered on Iran's National Heritage List, Dashkasan is regarded as a rare fusion of Iranian artistic traditions and East Asian decorative elements dating back to the Ilkhanid era.

Carved directly into the mountainside, the temple is surrounded by a dramatic natural landscape that enhances both its historical significance and tourism appeal. During the reign of Oljeitu (Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh), the region gained major political and religious importance as a nearby Soltaniyeh flourished as the capital of the Ilkhanids. Dashkasan's distinctive features, particularly its monumental dragon reliefs, provide valuable insight into the cultural exchanges between Iran and East Asia during the Mongol period. Set among limestone mountains, the site reflects the essence of rock-cut architecture while offering a striking natural setting. Its proximity to Soltaniyeh, the grand Ilkhanid capital, underscores the historical and strategic importance of the complex during that era. The surrounding rocky terrain and moun-

tain scenery further enhance its appeal, creating a unique cultural and natural experience for visitors.

Researchers believe the complex may originally have been intended as a Buddhist-inspired temple, part of a larger ceremonial complex, or even an unfinished royal palace or sanctuary. Some historians attribute the dragon motifs to the presence of Chinese artists at the Ilkhanid court, whose

structure suggests that construction may have been halted abruptly. The main layout consists of a large central ivan flanked by two smaller side ivans. The defining masterpieces of the complex are the two massive dragon reliefs carved symmetrically into the walls of the main ivan. Featuring elongated serpentine bodies, open jaws with visible teeth, horns, and powerful claws, the dragons display a style strongly



● [razebaghaa.ir](#)

artistic influence shaped parts of the site's decorative program.

Archaeological studies date Dashkasan to the Ilkhanid period, particularly the reign of Oljeitu in the 14th century — a time marked by the flourishing of Persian art and architecture, exemplified by monumental structures such as the Soltaniyeh, Dome. Although the exact purpose of Dashkasan remains uncertain, scholars generally agree that the site reflects the broader cultural and artistic transformations that took place in Iran following the Mongol conquest. The most striking aspect of Dashkasan is its rock-cut design. Rather than being constructed with conventional building materials, the complex was carved directly into the mountainside. The unfinished nature of the

influenced by Chinese art. They are considered among the rarest examples of dragon imagery in both ancient and Islamic Iranian architecture. Dashkasan stands as a vivid symbol of the cultural interactions between Iran and East Asia during the Ilkhanid period. The Mongol rulers maintained extensive political and cultural ties with China, resulting in the introduction of new artistic motifs and decorative styles into Iran. Dashkasan is a remarkable example of how foreign artistic influences, particularly Chinese visual traditions, were absorbed and adapted within Iranian architecture. The temple was carved primarily from the mountain's limestone using traditional stone-cutting techniques and metal carving tools. However, large portions of the com-

plex remain incomplete, reinforcing theories that construction was halted midway. Today, despite its registration as a national heritage site, Dashkasan faces natural erosion caused by wind, rain, and temperature fluctuations, making ongoing conservation and restoration efforts essential.

As one of Zanjan Province's major tourism attractions, Dashkasan is frequently visited alongside the UNESCO-listed Soltaniyeh Dome. Its dramatic rock-cut architecture and dragon carvings offer visitors a memorable experience that combines history, art, and nature.

Beyond its architectural significance, Dashkasan is valued as a rare example of Islamic-era rock-cut architecture and as a symbol of cultural fusion between Iran and East Asia. Historians regard the site as a living document of a transformative period in Iranian history, when indigenous traditions merged with imported artistic influences to create new artistic forms.

The mountainous landscape surrounding the temple also offers opportunities for hiking and nature tourism, broadening its appeal beyond history enthusiasts to nature lovers and adventure travelers. Tourism officials and cultural experts believe that promoting Dashkasan through cultural tours, digital media, and heritage programs could significantly contribute to the economic and cultural development of the Soltaniyeh region and Zanjan Province.

Experts emphasize that fully realizing Dashkasan's tourism potential will require improved visitor infrastructure, including better access roads, accommodation facilities, and informational services, while ensuring the long-term preservation of this unique heritage site for future generations.