

Quri Qaleh Cave in Kermanshah draws global attention

Iranica Desk

Kermanshah Province has long been recognized as one of Iran's major hubs for natural and historical tourism. Among the region's most remarkable attractions, Quri Qaleh Cave stands out as a geological masterpiece with global significance.

Located approximately 90 kilometers northwest of Kermanshah and near the city of Paveh, Quri Qaleh Cave is considered one of the oldest geological phenomena in western Iran. Known as the world's largest water cave and Asia's longest aquatic cave, the site is estimated to be around 65 million years old. The cave was formed from limestone deposits dating back to the Cretaceous and Triassic periods. The name Quri Qaleh is derived from a nearby fortress believed to date back to the Sassanid era. Local Kurdish residents originally referred to the structure as Gowreh Qaleh, meaning "Great Fortress," a name that gradually evolved into Quri Qaleh. Historical records indicate that



the cave was first explored in the 1970s by a joint team of British and French speleologists. The expedition managed to survey approximately 620 meters of the cave before being forced to stop when rising water levels reached the ceiling. Although the cave's total length is estimated at around 12 kilometers, only 1.5 kilometers are currently accessible to the public. The remaining sections require

specialized diving equipment and advanced caving expertise. In addition to its natural beauty, Quri Qaleh Cave is also archaeologically significant. Excavations in the area have uncovered valuable artifacts, including coins, plates, and pottery fragments from the Sassanid period (224-651 CE). Human skulls and decorated ceramic vessels featuring animal motifs, floral patterns, and traditional designs



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have also been discovered in the ruins of the nearby fortress. The cave is also home to rare mouse-eared bat species, adding ecological importance to the site. These bats are seldom found elsewhere in Iran. Temperatures inside the cave remain between 7 and 11 degrees Celsius year-round, with extremely high humidity levels. In some areas, water depth reaches up to 14 meters, while

an underground river flows through the cave's chambers. Massive halls decorated with naturally formed stalactites and stalagmites create a striking subterranean landscape. According to tourism statistics, Quri Qaleh Cave is among the most visited attractions in western Iran, drawing more than 500,000 visitors annually. The influx of tourists has significantly contributed to rural

development in the surrounding area and created full-time employment opportunities for more than 200 local residents. The nearby village of Quri Qaleh has become a major destination for domestic travelers as well as visitors from neighboring Iraq. Recognized as one of Iran's valuable natural heritage sites, Quri Qaleh Cave has been officially registered on the country's National Heritage List. Together with Porow Cave, it is considered one of the two major national natural landmarks of Kermanshah Province. One enduring local legend claims that the cave extends beneath the city of Paveh. Although this theory has not been scientifically confirmed, it continues to add to the cave's mystique and appeal. Situated in the scenic Haft Maran Valley, about 10 kilometers from Paveh, Quri Qaleh Cave is accessible via the Kermanshah-Paveh road. After traveling roughly 84 kilometers, visitors arrive at a destination that has attracted growing attention from tourism media. More than just a geological phenomenon, Quri Qaleh Cave symbolizes the immense tourism potential of Kermanshah Province — a region also home to iconic landmarks such as Taq-e Bostan and Bisotun, making it a lasting destination for lovers of history and nature alike.

Ancient cypress in Bam set for national registration

Iranica Desk

Kerman Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization has announced the start of the documentation and registration process for an ancient cypress tree located in Dehbakri District of Bam, Kerman Province.

Rezvan Tajpour, an expert on the registration of natural heritage sites at the Organization, emphasized the importance of register-

ing the province's ancient trees as historical and environmental treasures. She said that documentation and preparations for the inclusion of the ancient cypress tree in Suluiyeh village on Iran's Natural Heritage List have officially commenced. Tajpour noted that the national registration of Kerman's ancient trees is far more than a ceremonial measure; it is an essential step toward safeguarding the living records of the region's history and

civilization, according to chtn.ir. She explained that these centuries-old silent witnesses possess unique genetic, botanical and ecological value while also serving as a vital link between local communities and their cultural traditions, myths and indigenous beliefs. The trees, she added, preserve the collective memories of successive generations. She further stated that listing these irreplaceable natural assets as national heritage sites will pro-

vide legal protection against damage or felling, encourage public participation in conservation efforts, promote sustainable ecotourism and strengthen the identity of surrounding communities. According to Tajpour, the national registration of ancient trees will help ensure the long-term preservation of an important part of Kerman's natural and cultural heritage, while guaranteeing that this valuable legacy is passed on to future generations.



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OPINION

War, as a bitter and undesirable means of interaction among different societies and nations, has various dimensions. Yet issues receiving attention during war and in the post-war period often pay less regard to cultural matters.

Unfortunately, the traces of the recent war have not yet been completely removed. Therefore, a pressing concern for every compassionate Iranian is this: How can we leave a meaningful and lasting account for future generations of the pain, suffering and losses inflicted upon the

lives, property and heritage of this society? What plans can be developed for tourism and cultural heritage sector in the post-war environment with regard to cultural heritage affected by war?

In every post-war setting, dealing with cultural heritage goes far beyond a purely economic or architectural issue; it is a matter with identity-related, political and psychological dimensions. Wars not only destroy physical structures, but also target the collective memory of a nation.

Beyond targeting collective memory, they damage a nation's aspirations, emotions, affections and the diverse human expressions that characterize its historical experience. In analyzing this situation, there

Tourism culture in post-war period

are two powerful approaches in the humanities that can be used for managing cultural heritage in the post-war era: the anthropology of heritage approach and the theory of collective memory.

Developed by theorists such as Maurice Halbwachs and later Pierre Nora, these perspectives hold that cultural heritage is not merely stone and architecture; rather, it is a means of connecting individuals to the past and defining their identity in the present. According to these theorists, the destruction of buildings in wartime is not simply the loss of property; it is regarded as an attempt to erase the identity of a nation. Each structure carries implicit messages embedded in the factors that shaped its creation and construction.

Even imagining how architecture, the art of mirror work, the colors of paintings and other artistic expressions were created with a sense of beauty to convey messages to future generations reveals what has been lost through such destruction. Within this perspective, tourism serves a restorative role. Tourism should not be solely for viewing beauty; it can also be a tool for rebuilding mean-

ing. The reconstruction of a destroyed monument can symbolize the restoration of identity and the triumph of the will to live.

At the same time, heritage tourism can contribute to peace by introducing shared heritage in disputed regions. Rather than emphasizing differences, it can highlight common historical points in order to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Another approach emerges from social psychology and the theory of community resilience. This perspective focuses on how a society rebuilds itself after experiencing trauma or the shock of war. How does a society connect the pains and sufferings of the past and present? From this viewpoint, damage assessment and analysis are essential and worthy of attention. War creates collective trauma. Damaged cultural heritage serves as a constant reminder of suffering, which may hinder a society's forward movement. Whenever individuals or tourists encounter these damaged sites, this collective trauma is, in some way, made visible. Yet messages of endurance and resistance must also be communicated alongside it.

In this framework, tourism takes the form of trauma-informed tourism. Tourism management in such settings must be highly sensitive. Tourism should not transform people's suffering into a spectacle of suffering. Instead, tourism should play a role in psychological recovery through what may be called therapeutic tourism. The return of tourists and global attention to a region's heritage sends a message to local communities that "you have not been forgotten" and that "your intrinsic value still exists." Such recognition restores a sense of self-worth to the community and contributes to the process of resilience.

With the hope that war has moved beyond its hard phase, preserving the identity-related message of this nation becomes necessary and essential in its softer phase.

In light of the two approaches discussed above, a management strategy can be proposed by combining their insights. If we wish to design a tourism management strategy for the post-war environment, we should adopt a model of "identity-reconstruction tourism" based on three pillars:

1. Authenticity in reconstruction: Reconstruction should not merely involve creating an attractive replica. It must be historically and culturally accurate in order to repair collective memory.

2. Ethical tourism: Tourists should be encouraged to view destinations not through a curious fascination with ruins, but through a respectful engagement with history. This prevents suffering from becoming a recreational commodity and promotes empathy, solidarity and shared human understanding.

3. Community-led narrative: Local people should tell the story of their own heritage — both the parts that remain intact and those that have been damaged — for visitors. This transforms cultural heritage from a subject to be observed into a source of power and identity for the community. Such an approach creates a living, genuine and mutually beneficial interaction: for those who narrate their stories, it can be a form of healing; for visitors, it offers a warm, meaningful and lasting experience. Simply put, in the post-war environment, the goal of tourism should not be merely to attract money; rather, it should be to attract attention to the reconstruction of meaning.