

Gomrok Caravanserai reborn as hub for Shiraz handicrafts



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To mark World Handicrafts Day, the Gomrok Handicrafts House in Shiraz, the capital of Fars Province, has officially begun operations with the aim of creating a space for production, exhibition, and a direct connection between artisans and the art market.

Located in the historic fabric of Shiraz, the center is housed in the Gomrok Caravanserai, one of the city's largest historical caravan-

serais. According to the deputy head of Fars Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, the site had previously been semi-abandoned, with its chambers used mainly as storage areas, IRNA reported. Majid Salimi said the historic building was recently purchased through the efforts of two dedicated handicraft masters and veteran artisans — renowned Khatam Kari (inlay) artist Gholam Fallahpour and Mortaza Salim. He added that the upper floor of

the caravanserai has now entered the restoration process.

Highlighting the important role of the private sector and artists in revitalizing historic buildings and expanding the Zand-era tourism route, Salimi said that, in the first phase, part of the former workshop space was transformed into a handicraft house. Five prominent artists are currently based there, most of whom specialize in Khatam craftsmanship. He added that two specialized

galleries — a Khatam Kari gallery and a gallery dedicated to fine wooden products — have also been established at the complex.

"The ultimate goal is to turn the entire upper floor of Gomrok Caravanserai into an integrated center for the production, training, and promotion of authentic Shirazi handicrafts," Salimi said. He noted that the project would significantly contribute to the tourism development programs of the Cultural Heritage Organi-

zation and Shiraz Municipality in the heart of the UNESCO-listed Zand historical complex.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Director General of Fars Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Behzad Moridi said that a few months earlier, the caravanserai had been nothing more than an abandoned and empty space.

"Today, through the dedication and commitment of officials and artisans, this neglected place has come back to life and has been revitalized," Moridi said.

He expressed hope that soon the sound of artisans' work

the true caretakers of this house," Gholam Fallahpour, a recipient of Iran's First Grade Artistic Certificate in Khatam craftsmanship, is among Shiraz's most recognized artists. His works include highly valued and rare creations, and he has received numerous international awards.

Many credit his dedication and efforts as a key factor in transforming Gomrok Caravanserai into a handicrafts center inside Shiraz's historic bazaar area.

Speaking at the inauguration, Fallahpour said the connection between "authentic art" and "the tourism industry" is essential for



would fill all the chambers and corridors of the beautiful Gomrok Caravanserai.

Moridi described the center as a new step toward strengthening Shiraz's artistic identity and emphasized the need to take the handicrafts economy seriously to ensure the continuation of the city's cultural and artistic heritage.

Addressing handicraft artists, he said, "You are not guests at Gomrok Caravanserai; this place belongs to you, and you will be

the vitality of Shiraz's economy. As the manager of Gomrok Caravanserai, he said the site was once an abandoned and inactive space, but with the involvement of its trustees and the cooperation of artists, it has now become a cultural, artistic, and recreational venue.

"We took the risk and, with passion, brought tourists back to the upper floors of this caravanserai," Fallahpour said. "We proved that art can breathe new life into forgotten spaces."

Yakh Morad Cave facing uncertain future

Iranica Desk

On a road cutting through the heart of the Alborz Mountains, somewhere between the endless bends of the Chalus Road and slopes that sometimes seemed to separate the sky from the earth, a narrow side road branched off toward Kohneh Deh village. The route was quieter than one might have expected for a destination leading to one of Iran's most remarkable limestone caves. Yet this silence was exactly what had surrounded Yakh Morad Cave for decades.

At the end of the short path, after around a 10-minute walk, a rocky entrance emerged from the mountain. It carried no signs of its former glory and offered no promise of the future. The only thing that remained was air rising from deep underground — cold, fresh, and at the same time, a warning. This was Yakh Morad Cave, one of the country's most notable limestone caves, according to chn.ir. From the very beginning of the journey into the cave, the name of Javad Nezamdoost, one of Iran's most experienced cavers and a member of the National Cave Studies Working Group, became closely connected with the story of Yakh Morad. He had spent more than four decades exploring caves and spoke about Yakh Morad with a mixture of experience and concern. Nezamdoost began his account from a point where science and local beliefs became intertwined. He explained that more than 3,000 caves had been identified across Iran, with

more than 25 located in Alborz Province. Yet Yakh Morad had always held a special position. He said that Yakh Morad Cave was part of the cultural memory of the local people. Residents of Kohneh Deh village had long believed that the ice formations inside the cave could fulfill wishes.

However, Nezamdoost emphasized that, contrary to popular belief, the cave was not actually an ice cave. Rather, it was a limestone cave where ice had formed in certain areas due to specific climatic conditions and the penetration of cold air. This distinction was essential to understanding the cave's fragile condition, as any changes in temperature, airflow, and environmental conditions could permanently alter its icy formations.

He explained that during the 1960s, the first and second levels of the cave had been filled during winter and early spring with ice stalactites, ice columns, and even frozen waterfalls. In some sections, several-meter-high ice masses had existed — formations that had now disappeared.

Recalling his first visit to the cave in 1986, Nezamdoost said that at the time, ice formations longer than one meter could be seen in the cave's chambers. In deeper sections, massive ice columns had been large enough for technical climbing. However, over time, everything had changed.

One of the most important factors behind the destruction of the cave, he said, had been the illegal removal of ice forma-



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tions. These actions had often been driven by superstitious beliefs, as people had removed the ice, considering it a form of "Yakh Morad" — a wish-granting ice. Some had even carved into the cave structure in attempts to reach deeper areas. "These changes had allowed warmer air to enter the inner sections of the cave and had accelerated the melting of thousands-year-old ice formations," Nezamdoost said.

He added that these ancient ice formations could have provided valuable information about Earth's past climate because they functioned as a natural archive. The ice preserved records of climate change, water vapor movements, and even the geological history of the region. Studying these formations could reveal the origins of moisture and the paths it had traveled.

Referring to similar experiences, including Alisadr Cave, Nezamdoost warned that tourism development without scientific planning could destroy natural

cave systems. In some caves, the construction of tourism infrastructure such as stairs and stone pathways had altered natural water and air flows and had even affected underground water systems.

He explained that, fortunately, in recent years the Department of Environment of Alborz Province had conducted comprehensive studies on Yakh Morad Cave with the help of a specialized team. The studies had included complete mapping of the cave and had produced valuable information about its structure. These studies were among the most comprehensive examinations conducted on a cave in Iran, and their findings had been reviewed by the National Cave Studies Working Group.

Regarding new conservation decisions, Nezamdoost said

that experts had classified Yakh Morad Cave into two protection levels. The initial section of the cave had been classified as Level Two, while deeper sections beyond the descent shaft had been categorized as Level One. Level One caves were accessible only to researchers and specialists, and public entry was pro-

hibited. Level Two caves could only be visited with permission and under expert supervision. Experts had also proposed that, in order to restore the cave's natural conditions, access should be completely suspended for 20 to 30 years, allowing the environment to gradually recover. Discussing the current condition of the cave, Nezamdoost said that the first 25 to 30 meters of the cave contained a rocky, slippery path prone to collapse and represented one of the most dangerous sections. Multiple earthquakes in the

region had also contributed to instability around the entrance. After passing this area, visitors reached the main chamber, where the cave's most notable feature was the cool air and the breeze moving from the deeper levels toward the entrance. He also pointed to ongoing efforts to strengthen cave protection nationwide, saying that the National Cave Studies Working Group was working to transform existing regulations into law. If approved by the Parliament, stronger legal tools would become available to protect these national natural treasures.

Nezamdoost stressed that Iran could no longer afford to repeat experiences such as Alisadr Cave and that a scientific and conservation-based approach had to replace purely tourism-oriented views. Only then could these valuable natural heritages be preserved for future generations. Nezamdoost said that the fate of Yakh Morad Cave no longer depended only on nature, but also on human awareness and responsibility. "Although the giant ice formations of this cave have largely disappeared, there is still a possibility of preserving its overall structure — provided that human intervention is minimized and scientific approaches replace uncontrolled tourism and emotional exploitation." What remained of Yakh Morad Cave was a reminder that nature was not an endless and completely renewable resource. Even small changes could silence parts of this natural archive forever.

