

Shiraz accessible tourism plan highlighted at Taste of Hope Festival

Iranica Desk

The Director-General for Domestic Tourism Development at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has announced plans to designate Shiraz as one of the country's accessible tourism cities, saying the initiative aims to advance the broader concept of an "accessible tourism city," going beyond conventional urban accessibility measures. Mostafa Fatemi Firouzabadi made the remarks at the closing ceremony of the Taste of Hope Festival held in Shiraz, stating that the project involves fully standardizing an entire tourism corridor, including facilities, shops, and pedestrian routes, to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, according to IRNA.

He called on the provincial governor's office, the Fars Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, and the Shiraz Municipality to work with the national accessibility task force to create the necessary conditions for Shiraz to be recognized in this field, following a previous pause in the initiative. Fatemi Firouzabadi also praised the prominent role of experts from Fars Province in national food and herbal beverage working groups, noting that many of Iran's leading figures in the culinary sector originate from the province. He emphasized that the goal of the tourism working groups is to transfer responsibilities to the public and the private sector, adding that the participation of specialized food teams and dis-

ability-focused organizations in the festival reflects progress toward the socialization of tourism development.

At the conclusion of the event, winners of the regional stage of the "Taste of Hope" Festival were introduced and advanced to the national competition.

Meanwhile, the coordinator of the Accessible Tourism Desk also addressed the ceremony, highlighting the event as the result of strong synergy between government institutions and the private sector.

Mohammad Esmail Sheikhqaraei said the initiative, which began as a simple proposal, has now become so institutionalized that it is irreversible.

He added that even if government officials face fatigue or budget



● ISNA

constraints, the movement must continue through public participation and civic organizations. Sheikhqaraei further noted the

close cooperation between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the State Welfare Organization, and the private sector, saying the festi-

val's outcomes will help promote a culture of respect and redefine the status of persons with disabilities nationwide.

Zaleh-Zard; key wildlife refuge in Zagros region

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Kermanshah Province, covering an area of 2.499 million hectares, is one of Iran's regions with remarkable climatic and ecological diversity. Approximately 70 percent of the province consists of natural resource areas, including more than 527,000 hectares of forests and 1.192 million hectares of rangelands. Among the protected areas managed by the Provincial Department of Environment, the Zaleh-Zard Wildlife Refuge holds a special status. Located in southwestern Kermanshah Province, within the counties of Gilan-e Gharb and Sarpol-e

Zahab, the refuge covers more than 40,000 hectares and has been under protection since 1991, according to IRNA.

Environmental experts state that its border location, distinctive topography, rugged mountains, and diverse vegetation have made Zaleh-Zard one of the most important wildlife habitats in western Iran. Its numerous highlands, valleys, seasonal streams, and forest and rangeland ecosystems provide suitable habitats for a wide range of animal species.

The refuge is part of the network of protected areas managed by Iran's Department of Environment in Kermanshah

Province.

Thanks to its diverse habitats, Kermanshah is home to notable species such as the Persian leopard, brown bear, roe deer, gazelle, wild goat, and wild sheep, as well as dozens of other mammal, bird, and reptile species. Due to its location along the natural ecological corridors of the Zagros Mountains, Zaleh-Zard serves as a vital habitat and movement corridor for many of these species.

Birds of prey are among the most important wildlife groups in the region. Eagles, buzzards, and other raptors play an essential role in regulating rodent populations

and maintaining ecological balance, forming a key component of this valuable ecosystem.

Experts emphasize that protecting Zaleh-Zard means more than preserving a geographic area; it represents the conservation of part of Iran's natural capital and the biological heritage of the Zagros Mountains. In addition to its ecological importance, the area has considerable potential for nature-based tourism, birdwatching, environmental education, and scientific research.

With more than 240,000 hectares of protected areas under environmental management,

Kermanshah is considered one of Iran's most important habitats for brown bears, and the Zaleh-Zard Wildlife Refuge plays a significant role in maintaining this status.

Today, increasing human pressures, overgrazing, habitat degradation, wildfires (both natural and human-caused),

and climate change are among the major threats facing natural ecosystems. Continued conservation efforts, stronger ranger patrols, local community participation, and increased environmental awareness can play a decisive role in protecting this valuable natural heritage.



● IRNA

Women building new future for Shaneh Tarash village

Iranica Desk

Women in northern Iran, particularly in villages located between the Alborz Mountains and the Caspian Sea, have historically played a significant role in the local economy.

The continuous and influential participation of rural women in traditional occupations such as agriculture, livestock farming, and handicraft production has made them essential contributors to local livelihoods and household economies across the northern provinces, particularly Mazandaran Province.

From the demanding and physically challenging tasks of farming to livestock care, gardening, silkworm cultivation, and many other traditional activities, rural women in Mazandaran Province have long carried responsibilities that remain part of daily life in many villages and towns across the province. Their partnership with male family members and their contribution to shared economic life can still be observed today.

This culture of cooperation and working side by side to strengthen community life remains visible in the worldview of Mazandaran Province's rural women. One of the clearest examples can be found in Shaneh Tarash village, where strong social participation by women has played a major role in advancing the vil-

lage's development goals.

The inclusion of Shaneh Tarash village among the eight Iranian villages nominated for registration on the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) list of Best Tourism Villages 2026 is the result of collective efforts and cooperation among residents to place the village on a path toward sustainable development. However, the significant role of Shaneh Tarash women in maintaining and advancing these initiatives has been particularly remarkable.

A few hours spent exploring Shaneh Tarash and observing local life clearly reveals how women in this village, alongside their responsibilities at home and within their families, actively contribute to the village's development.

The presence of women can be strongly felt across the village's collective activities. In some cases, women themselves have become the leading forces behind social and economic initiatives centered on rural and cultural tourism.

From Khaleh Mehri (Auntie Mehri), who nearly a decade ago began producing handicrafts and preparing local foods after noticing her daughter's interest in studying tourism and receiving encouragement from one of her teachers, to Khaleh Raveyeh (Auntie Raveyeh), whose homemade dishes have become unforget-



● IRNA

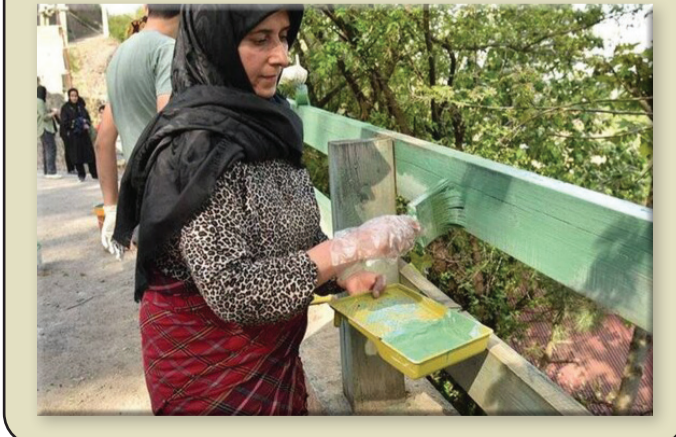


table memories for visitors, and many other women who have each contributed in their own way over the past decade to transforming Shaneh Tarash into a respected rural tourism destination — these women are

all central figures in turning the village into a model of tourism development based on community participation.

The Deputy head of Mazandaran Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organi-

zation said that Shaneh Tarash's growth in tourism is the result of social cohesion among villagers working toward sustainable development.

Speaking to IRNA, Mehdi Es'haghi said, "There is no doubt that a significant part of this social cohesion in Shaneh Tarash has been created through the commitment and active involvement of the village's women."

He added that women's meaningful participation in the village is not limited to direct economic activities related to tourism, such as selling food, local products, and handicrafts. The strong presence of Shaneh Tarash women in social and cultural development initiatives, as well as in efforts carried out by the cooperative, village administration, and village council, demonstrates how influential and decisive their role has become.

Referring to plans for empowering the local community through initiatives led by residents and facilitators, Es'haghi noted that, in support of vulnerable women and youth, and with the aim of economic empowerment and sustainable income generation, the Shaneh Tarash Rural Development Cooperative Unit has allocated part of its creative hub space to these groups through an incentive package. The initiative aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of empowerment programs.

Under this plan, local producers can offer their products directly to customers through the handicrafts store, eliminating intermediaries. Free training workshops in areas such as skill development, marketing, and branding are also being held to strengthen their capabilities.

According to Es'haghi, the initiative supports small businesses, home-based enterprises, rural employment, and local community development, while creating opportunities for producers to access markets and increase their sales.

He added that the Shaneh Tarash Rural Development Cooperative is seeking to strengthen women's and youth participation in economic activities through social innovation, community engagement, and sustainable rural development. The goal is to improve quality of life and increase household incomes in the village. Es'haghi emphasized that the women of Shaneh Tarash not only represent the important role of Mazandaran Province's women in the province's local economy, but also, through their involvement in rural and cultural tourism, are helping introduce and preserve aspects of the region's indigenous culture for visitors. In this way, women in Shaneh Tarash have recognized their cultural role within rural tourism and are actively shaping the future of this sector.