

Hamedan's Muharram rituals reflect diversity of Iran's religious culture

Iranica Desk

From a tourism perspective, the month of Muharram — marking the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his 72 companions — along with its associated rituals, offers significant potential for the development of religious and cultural tourism in Iran. The presence of domestic and international visitors at these ceremonies can contribute to a deeper understanding of local cultures and the expansion of cultural exchange.

Tourism experts say such forms of pilgrimage and cultural travel not only generate income for local communities but also help preserve and sustain intangible spiritual heritage, according to chn.ir.

Across Iran, including in Hamedan Province, Muharram mourning practices vary considerably. These differences range from musical styles and ritual performances to clothing, offerings, and the organizational structure of religious gatherings. This diversity reflects the deep connection between local cultural identities and religious beliefs.

The Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Hamedan Province said Mu-



Ta'zieh in Maryanaj
● mehrnews.com

harram rituals in the province are among the most significant cultural and religious traditions in the region.

Mohsen Masoum-Alizadeh noted that Hamedan, as one of Iran's historical and cultural centers, hosts a wide variety of mourning ceremonies during Muharram, rooted in religious belief, social identity, and the cultural heritage of local communities.

He added that several of these rituals have been registered as intangible cultural heritage, while others are eligible for national registration. These traditions, he said, represent not only expressions of devotion to

the events of Karbala but also an important part of Hamedan's cultural identity.

According to Masoum-Alizadeh, eight Muharram-related rituals have so far been registered nationally in the province. Among them, Ta'zieh in the city of Maryanaj is one of the most well-known examples. This traditional dramatic performance narrates the tragic events of Karbala and reflects local styles of staging religious theater.

He said the Ta'zieh in Maryanaj, with a long historical background, is performed with broad public participation and Ta'zieh performers in an atmosphere of spirituality and emo-



Symbolic burial of Karbala martyrs
● farsnews.ir

tional engagement. Over time, it has maintained a structured and distinctive theatrical identity.

The use of traditional symbols, ritual music, specific costumes, and local narrative styles has transformed the Ta'zieh from a purely religious ceremony into a living cultural form. It functions both as a mourning ritual and as a means of transmitting the message of Ashura, the 10th day of Muharram, to younger generations. Its national registration underscores its importance in safeguarding Iran's intangible cultural heritage.

Other notable Muharram rituals in Hamedan include ceremonies

held on the third day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH) at the shrine of Imamzadeh Yahya (PBUH), as well as Ashura ceremonies in the Jowlan neighborhood of Hamedan and migrant chest-beating rituals, each reflecting distinct local traditions and strengthening social cohesion.

Rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Ali Asghar (PBUH), the six-month-old son of Imam Hussein (PBUH), also hold a special place among mourners, symbolizing the tragedy of Karbala. Another significant tradition is the symbolic burial of Karbala martyrs by the Banu Asad tribe, a long-standing rit-

ual registered nationally as part of the region's cultural heritage. Masoum-Alizadeh also highlighted the symbolic reenactment of the arrival of Imam Hussein's (PBUH) caravan to Karbala as one of the most prominent Muharram rituals in Hamedan. Held annually in Maryanaj with strong public participation, the ceremony recreates scenes from the Karbala narrative and preserves the message of the Hussein movement across generations.

He added that the ritual, performed on the second day of Muharram, involves participants on horseback and camels entering the city, followed by mourning gatherings filled with lamentation and religious recitation. The ceremony aims to revive historical memory, promote values of sacrifice and freedom, and strengthen social solidarity.

Overall, Muharram rituals in Hamedan represent a living and dynamic part of Iran's intangible cultural heritage, where religion, culture, and social identity are deeply intertwined. These traditions not only reflect the spiritual beliefs of the region's people but also demonstrate the continuity of customs passed down through generations that remain active in contemporary social life.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad turns to culinary heritage to boost tourism

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For years, the name of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province has been associated with oak forests, roaring waterfalls and nomadic migrations, with most tourism programs in the province focusing on these natural and historical assets. However, a new opportunity appears to be gaining attention: the potential of local cuisine and the culinary heritage of the Zagros region as a tool for attracting tourists.

Officials in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province believe that traditional foods and the region's culinary heritage could become key drivers of tourism development.

In their view, traditional meals are not merely part of local culture, but also a resource capable of creating jobs, increasing income and strengthening the local economy, according to IRNA. Yadollah Rahmani, Governor of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, has emphasized the need to connect tradition with industry, saying that the economic potential of local foods requires professional planning and strategic development. According to him, many tourists today travel to experience different cultures, and food is one of the most important gateways to such experiences.

He has highlighted the untapped potential of local cuisine in boosting tourism and called for greater use of this capacity to attract visitors and generate income.

The concept of "food tourism" has become one of the fastest-growing branches of the tourism industry over the past two decades. Under this approach, food is no longer con-



sidered merely an additional service for travelers but can itself become a primary motivation for travel.

Experts say food has become an inseparable part of the tourism experience and can play a decisive role in visitor satisfaction. Global trends also reflect this reality, with many cities and regions now becoming known not only for historical monuments or natural attractions but also for their local dishes. Tourists increasingly travel to new destinations to taste different flavors, learn traditional cooking methods and experience local cultures.

In this context, provinces with diverse culinary traditions can use food as a tool for branding and economic development. However, the gap between "having potential" and "using potential" remains a major development challenge, and this issue requires attention in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. Mojtaba Amirhosseini, Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, consid-

ers the national registration of these foods as evidence of their cultural value. However, he says their importance goes beyond their age or taste.

Each of these dishes reflects a part of the history of Zagros communities — a history connected to livestock farming, agriculture, nomadic life and the use of native plants. For example, acorn bread is not only a traditional food but also a reminder of how local communities adapted to the region's natural conditions.

He added that the province's climatic and cultural diversity provides suitable opportunities for producing, promoting and developing local food tourism. Contrary to common perceptions, food tourism is not limited to eating a meal at a restaurant. It includes a wider chain of activities, from producing raw materials and agriculture to eco-lodges, handicrafts, festivals and local training programs.

Studies show that this type of tourism can create numerous employment opportunities for rural women and young people, increase the added value of lo-



● rasekhoon.net

cal products and strengthen the economies of less-developed areas.

Experts describe food tourism as a "driver of regional development" because it keeps tourism revenue circulating within local communities.

For a province like Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, where many attractions are located in rural and nomadic areas, this issue has particular importance. The development of food tourism could help reduce migration, preserve rural populations and increase household incomes. However, achieving this goal requires actions beyond holding occasional events.

In recent years, several food festivals have been held in the province. Officials consider these events opportunities to introduce local capacities and emphasize their continuation. However, experts warn that festivals are only a first step. International experiences show that food tourism becomes a competitive advantage only when it is pursued through long-term planning.

Food tourism routes, workforce

training, product standardization, the inclusion of local dishes on hotel and restaurant menus, digital marketing and professional branding are among the measures that could transform this potential from a promotional activity into a sustainable economic sector. Otherwise, local foods may remain merely a subject for festivals without creating a lasting impact on the provincial economy.

One of the less-recognized aspects of tourism and the food industry is its social role. An example of this approach was seen at the "Taste of Hope 6" festival, held in Yasuj with the participation of people with disabilities, providing a platform to showcase their abilities.

According to Mehran Keshavarz, Director General of the province's Welfare Organization in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, participants in the festival demonstrated their cooking skills and some were selected for further stages of competitions.

Plans to establish a specialized cooking training center for peo-

ple with disabilities also show that the food industry can serve as a tool for social empowerment and expanding employment opportunities.

According to some reports, Iran has more than 2,500 local and traditional dishes, making it one of the world's richest culinary heritages. However, the contribution of food tourism to the country's economy remains below its potential.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad faces a similar situation: the province has culinary diversity, nomadic culture, unique landscapes and a rich historical identity, yet it still faces major challenges in turning these assets into a sustainable competitive advantage.

Challenges include the fact that many local dishes remain unknown to a large number of domestic tourists, along with infrastructure limitations and weaknesses in promotion and marketing.

The key question today is whether tourism managers, investors and industry stakeholders can transform this scattered potential into a coherent industry. If successful, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad may one day be known not only for its oak forests and waterfalls, but also for the flavors of Zagros culinary heritage as a defining part of its tourism identity. However, achieving that vision remains a long road ahead.

According to IRNA, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province covers an area of about 16,249 square kilometers along the Zagros mountain range.

The province has a population of around 726,000 people, with 54 percent living in urban areas and 46 percent in rural regions.