

# Sanandaj mosques under review for UNESCO world heritage nomination

## Iranica Desk

Sanandaj, known as the “City of Mosques and Minarets” and regarded as a center of mysticism and religious heritage, has once again come into focus within Iran’s cultural heritage agenda. The city’s historic mosques are not only examples of Islamic and Kurdish architectural artistry but also reflect centuries of coexistence, religious devotion, and the rich cultural identity of the region.

The review of three historic mosques in Kurdistan Province for possible inclusion in Iran’s world heritage nomination for historic mosques offers an opportunity to present a significant part of this heritage on the global stage, ISNA reported.

A recent visit by the manager of the world heritage dossier for Iranian mosques, accompanied by a team of experts, to three historic sites —

Dar al-Ehsan Mosque in Sanandaj, Khosrowabad Gerrus Mosque, and Avihang Mosque — was described as more than a technical inspection. It is considered an important step in assessing the province’s potential contribution to one of Iran’s major cultural heritage nominations.

According to Pouya Talebnia, Director-General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Kurdistan Province, the three mosques have been assessed based on their architectural features, authenticity, historical value, state of conservation, and compliance with UNESCO criteria. If they meet the required standards, they may be included in Iran’s world heritage nomination for historic mosques.

Sanandaj is one of the few Iranian cities where a significant part of its historical identity is closely tied to mosque architecture.



Dar al-Ehsan Mosque  
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The Dar al-Ehsan Mosque (Sanandaj Grand Mosque), Dar al-Aman Mosque, Vakili Mosque, and dozens of other historic mosques form part of the city’s cultural identity.

These buildings represent a fusion of Iranian architectural traditions, local Kurdish design, and Islam-

ic artistic elements — a combination that could be considered a strong asset in international heritage evaluations.

This rich architectural ensemble has earned Sanandaj the title of the “City of Mosques” in recent years, a designation closely linked to the region’s

scholarly, religious, and mystical traditions, further highlighting its cultural importance.

Experts emphasize that world heritage inscription is not merely the addition of a site to the UNESCO list. It can lead to enhanced scientific protection, increased access to national

and international funding, growth in cultural tourism, greater academic engagement, and broader global recognition of Kurdistan’s history and culture.

In a province where tourism potential remains underrecognized relative to its cultural assets, even the inscription of a single mosque could become a turning point for cultural tourism development and pave the way for greater visibility of other historic and religious sites.

Alongside the opportunities offered by international registration, the responsibility of preserving these monuments becomes even more critical. Architectural authenticity, scientific restoration, prevention of incompatible construction within heritage buffer zones, and the preparation of precise documentation are among the key requirements emphasized in UNESCO’s evaluation process.

The Kurdistan Provincial

Cultural Heritage Organization has announced that, in cooperation with Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the dossier preparation team, it will continue technical work and documentation efforts to complete the evaluation process for the three mosques.

Kurdistan Province is described as a cultural treasure of architecture, mysticism, and religious coexistence rather than merely a region known for its natural attractions.

If these three historic mosques are successfully included in Iran’s world heritage nomination for historic mosques, it would represent not only a heritage achievement but also an important opportunity to present the region’s historical and cultural identity on the global stage — an identity in which Sanandaj, as the City of Mosques and the spiritual capital of Iran, stands as one of its most prominent symbols.

## Traditional pottery painting requires passion, research

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A pottery artist and painter stressed that the continuity of traditional arts depends primarily on passion and a strong research foundation, saying that sustained activity in the field is shaped by dedication to art, continuous learning, and an academic approach, without which the craft would struggle to survive.

Mahboubeh Kamalnejad, who has more than two decades of experience in pottery painting, said she has been active in the field since 2003, noting that many artists in her group also began their work out of personal interest and passion. In the early years, she added, projects were often carried out without payment, driven solely by a desire to learn and preserve the craft, according to chtn.ir.

Kamalnejad emphasized that what distinguishes her workshop is the integration of practical experience with a research-oriented perspective, where each artwork is developed through study, analysis, and fresh ideas rather than the repetition of established patterns.

She said innovation in this artistic field emerges from the blending of different historical styles and periods, with practitioners drawing on the rich heritage of traditional arts while



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incorporating their own creative vision to produce works that complement the form and aesthetic qualities of pottery.

The artist identified limited external communication and insufficient public exposure of artworks as key challenges in the field, adding that stronger media engagement and more effective promotion could play an important role in attracting young and aspiring artists.

She noted that in this environment, the artist’s priority is the creation of meticulous,

research-based works rather than commercial considerations. Many pieces require months or even years of continuous effort before being showcased at domestic and international exhibitions.

Kamalnejad concluded by stressing that creating suitable platforms for promoting the art of pottery painting, strengthening research support, and investing in the training of future generations could provide a more dynamic path for preserving and advancing this traditional art form.

## Zavin village; a historic silk weaving hub in northeastern Iran

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Zavin village, located in Kalat, Khorasan Razavi Province, has long been recognized as a notable name in the global textile industry. In 1977 CE, the village gained international recognition when UNESCO awarded its handwoven silk textiles the title of the finest and most delicate handicraft in the world. The honor, presented to the works of a local female artisan, helped establish Iranian traditional silk weaving on the global cultural map.

Today, Zavin village is considered one of the main silk production hubs in Kalat, in northeastern Iran. Supported by abundant mulberry orchards and between 300 and 350 active workshops, the village maintains a complete silk production chain — from silkworm breeding to the weaving of traditional fabrics.

Despite the high quality of its products and their presence in international exhibitions, local artisans say their main challenge is direct access to consumer markets. They emphasize the need for a permanent exhibition center in the region, arguing that such a facility would eliminate intermediaries, increase rural producers’ income, and serve as a cultural and tourism hub showcasing Zavin’s handicraft heritage.

The Head of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Kalat highlighted the national registration of Zavin silk weaving alongside other regional crafts such as



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Layen ribbon weaving and Aqdash kilim. He said a revival of sericulture and the operation of around 300 silk workshops in Zavin, stressing the importance of establishing a permanent exhibition space to connect artisans directly with global markets.

Sh’abanali Farahmand described silk weaving in Zavin as more than an industry, calling it a deeply rooted cultural tradition with historical significance that plays an important role in employment, production, and the preservation of local heritage. He noted that Kalat, thanks to its suitable climate and extensive mulberry groves, is one of the main silk-producing regions in Khorasan Razavi Province.

Zavin, located about 50 kilometers from the city of Kalat, has long been home to families engaged in seri-

culture and silk cocoon production. Historically, daily output from workshops reached 8-9 kilograms. The locally produced silk is known for its softness and quality and is used in garments, scarves, cushions, children’s clothing, and traditional dolls.

While most of the clothing produced in Zavin is consumed locally, some artisans have modernized their work to participate in international exhibitions and global markets. He also emphasized the importance of nationally registering traditional crafts in the region, noting that Zavin silk weaving, Layen ribbon weaving, and Aqdash kilim remain among the most prominent handicrafts of Greater Khorasan.

The weaving technique used in Zavin village relies on simple looms, producing geometrically patterned

fabrics with raised textures. The process is largely manual, with artisans passing threads through warp yarns according to mental designs, leaving excess threads hidden on the reverse side of the fabric.

Zavin silk weaving dates back centuries and has evolved into a significant local industry. Local officials also stressed the importance of developing handicraft tourism. Zavin, now recognized as a national handicraft destination, could attract both domestic and international tourists, further strengthening the silk industry.

Establishing a permanent exhibition center would be a key step toward increasing sales, improving artisans’ income, eliminating intermediaries, and positioning Zavin as a major hub in Iran’s handicrafts sector.