



# Government incentives spur new wave of tourism investment in Iran

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri announced Tuesday that a new wave of private investment is gathering pace in the country's tourism sector, saying government incentives, tax relief and easier hotel equipment imports are accelerating hospitality projects. Speaking during a visit to a hotel project in central Tehran that is about 80% complete, Salehi-Amiri said the government had rolled out a package of incentives to remove barriers for investors and expand tourism infrastructure, CHTN reported. "A fresh wave of investment has

taken shape in the tourism industry," he said, adding that authorities have opened dedicated case files for investors to resolve project-specific obstacles across government agencies. The minister said Tehran needs more internationally rated hotels to match its role as Iran's political, economic and cultural hub. Of the capital's 144 operating hotels, only a limited number are five-star properties, a capacity he said falls short of growing demand from business travelers, international visitors, exhibitions and major conferences. He said the government has approved five key incentives to encourage private-sector investment, including allowing



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri chairs a meeting with officials and staff of the Tehran provincial office of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts in Tehran, Iran, July 21, 2026. ● CHTN

mixed-use tourism complexes, granting exemptions of up to 80% on certain municipal construction fees, deferring remaining charges for five years after projects begin operating,

and permitting duty-free imports of 200 categories of hotel equipment. "The development of accommodation infrastructure is a prerequisite for strengthening

Iran's international tourism standing," Salehi-Amiri said, inviting investors to capitalize on the new support measures. Highlighting the private sector's expanding role, he said more than 3,000 tourism projects are currently under development across the country, all financed by private investors. He described the trend as evidence of growing confidence in the industry's long-term potential.

Salehi-Amiri also called Tehran "the gateway" for many domestic and international travelers, saying visitors often form their first impression of Iran in the capital. Improving hotels, tourism services and visitor facilities, he said, will help showcase the country's historical and cultural attractions more effectively.

The minister added that the hotel under construction, expected to open before the end of the current Iranian year (March 20), incorporates architectural and artistic elements inspired by different parts of the Islamic world, creating what he described as "a distinctive cultural identity" for domestic and international guests.

## Tabriz opens door to Kazakh tourism partnership

### Arts & Culture Desk

Tabriz is ready to host specialized tourism delegations from Kazakhstan as the two countries seek to deepen cultural cooperation, Ahmad Hamzehzadeh, director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for East Azerbaijan Province, said on Tuesday. He made the remarks during a meeting with Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran, Ontalap Onalbayev, according to Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. Highlighting Tabriz's historic role as one of Iran's leading commercial and cultural hubs, Hamzehzadeh said the city is well positioned to open a new chapter in cultural relations between the two countries. "The historical and cultural bonds between Iran and Kazakhstan provide a solid foundation for defining joint tourism projects," he said. He announced the province's readiness to receive Kazakh tourism officials, travel agency representatives, and tour guides for on-site visits aimed at designing joint travel packages and increasing two-way tourist exchanges. Hamzehzadeh also proposed establishing a sister-city partnership between Tabriz and a Kazakh city, saying such a link could strengthen long-term cooperation in culture, tourism, and economic affairs. Underscoring East Azarbaijan's rich heritage, he said the province is home to more than 4,800 identified historical sites, including over 2,200 nationally registered monuments and six UNESCO World Heritage sites, making it one of Iran's foremost tourism destinations. The provincial official also called for closer museum collaboration. He said the Azarbaijan Museum in Tabriz, Iran's second-largest archaeological museum, is prepared to host joint exhibitions featuring Kazakh artifacts and participate in cultural exchange programs, particularly those reflecting the two nations' shared Timurid heritage. Turning to traditional arts, Hamzehzadeh pointed to similarities between Kazakh handwoven crafts and Tabriz carpets. As a UNESCO-recognized World City of Carpet Weaving, Tabriz is well equipped to stage joint exhibitions, exchange expertise, and broaden professional cooperation in the handicrafts sector, he said. "The best use of these shared cultural assets can boost people-to-people exchanges, expand tourism flows, and reinforce lasting cultural cooperation between East Azarbaijan and Kazakhstan," Hamzehzadeh said.

## Women's motorcycle licenses set for August rollout in Iran



### Social Desk

Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Zahra Behrouz-Azar said on Tuesday that women are expected to receive motorcycle licenses in August after legal procedures are finalized, as part of a government effort to improve road safety, insurance coverage and access to formal rider training.

Behrouz-Azar said the government pursued the measure to ensure women who already use motorcycles are not left without legal licenses, certified training or insurance protection, IRNA reported. "Women should have motorcycle licenses so they are not exposed to additional harm because they lack a license and insurance coverage," she told reporters. She said consultations with lawmakers and religious scholars concluded that there are no legal or religious barriers to issuing motorcycle licenses for women. "Motorcycles are a means of transportation used by everyone," she said, noting that Iranian women already work as pilots and heavy-vehicle drivers. According to Behrouz-Azar, preparations have largely been completed, although the rollout was delayed by the recent conflict, which diverted the attention of relevant authorities.

She said the planned unveiling of the first licenses had been postponed but expressed confidence that issuance would begin in August. Rejecting suggestions that parliamentary amendments are required, Behrouz-Azar said the existing legal framework already allows implementation. "There is no legal gap. The issue can be resolved through the existing regulations and executive procedures," she said. The vice president added that women who have won national and international motorcycle sports medals will be invited to become the first certified instructors, helping train new applicants through formal licensing programs. Separately, Behrouz-Azar called for stronger digital literacy following a recent cyber extortion case involving girls in Iran's western Lorestan Province. She said a criminal network used ma-

nipulated personal images to blackmail victims before being identified and arrested through coordinated action by intelligence, judicial and law enforcement authorities. "The issue is no longer limited to extortion or unauthorized access to personal information," she said. "Artificial intelligence has many positive applications, but it can also be misused through deepfake technologies." Meanwhile, Brigadier General Teymour Hosseini, head of Iran's Traffic Police, said the licensing plan remains on its legal track and that the force will issue licenses only after all legal procedures are completed and formal authorization is received. He added that any future motorcycle license issued to women will follow the same national design and technical standards as licenses issued to men.

## Uzbek artist brings hidden world to Iran virtual exhibition

### Arts & Culture Desk



Uzbek artist Akmal Nuriddinov is inviting Iranian audiences beyond the visible through a virtual exhibition of 27 paintings hosted by Iran's Academy of Arts until July 28, where the internationally acclaimed painter explores the intersection of physical reality, memory and the inner spiritual world. The online exhibition, launched on July 20, reflects growing cultural cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan, countries linked by centuries of shared civilizational heritage. Hosted on the Academy of Arts' website, the program seeks to broaden scholarly collaboration, introduce contemporary Uzbek art to Iranian audiences, and deepen cultural engagement across Central Asia, IRNA reported. Nuriddinov said his artistic language emerges "between the visible and the hidden," where the physical presence of the human body converg-

es with its inner and spiritual reality. "What occupies me more than depicting the external world is revealing states that exist beyond outward form, such as silence, longing, love, solitude, memory and the human yearning for the absolute," he said. The Uzbek artist said his paintings are rooted in the philosophical and cultural traditions of the East, particularly the Sufi understanding of love as a path to self-knowledge. Recurring symbols including apples, pomegranates, birds, trees, gardens and the female figure are revisited not as historical motifs but as living forms that continue to speak to contemporary audiences. "The human figure in my paintings often exists be-

yond a specific time and place," Nuriddinov said. "It is no longer merely the portrait of an individual, but the embodiment of an inner condition." He added that color functions as a bearer of meaning rather than decoration. Red evokes life, passion, sacrifice and memory, while white suggests silence, purification and unattainable wholeness. Gold, he said, points to a light beyond the material world. "I do not offer definitive interpretations," Nuriddinov said. "I want a painting not to explain, but to awaken, restoring our ability to pause, to look, and to listen to what usually remains unspoken." A leading figure in Uzbekistan's contemporary art scene, Nuriddinov's works are housed in major collections, including the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan, the Samarkand State Museum of History and Architecture, Seattle's Davidson Gallery and the Credit Suisse art collection.

## International lullaby festival to commemorate 168 Minab schoolchildren

### Social Desk

Iran's organizers announced that the first Minab International Festival of Awakening Lullabies will be held with the participation of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), inviting mothers and artists from around the world to submit works in tribute to children killed in Minab during the opening day of the US-Israeli war of aggression. The festival commemorates the 168 schoolchildren who were killed on February 28, the first day of the US-Israeli war of aggression, when their school in the southern city of Minab came under attack. Organizers said the event aims to preserve the memory of the children through art, presenting lullabies as a universal expression of maternal love that transcends borders, languages, and cultures. Festival Secretary Maziar Rezakhani said the inaugural edition will feature both domestic and international sections, reflecting what he described as the shared emotional bond between mothers worldwide. "A lullaby for children is the common language of all mothers," he said, calling on women and artists



across the globe to contribute original works. Rezakhani said the festival's official call for submissions will be released soon, outlining participation rules and artistic categories. He added that preparations have been underway for two months in coordination with ICRO and that the festival secretariat will be formally established shortly. Describing the event as a cultural response to the tragedy, Rezakhani said the festival seeks to keep alive the memory of the Minab schoolchildren through music, poetry, film, theater, and other artistic expressions. "The true narrative of the Minab tragedy must endure," he said, adding that the initiative offers artists around the world an opportunity to honor the victims through creative works.