

Hormozgan's women preserve a centuries-old embroidery art

Iranica Desk

Hormozgan Province, with its long history of seafaring and trade with the lands surrounding the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, has always been a meeting point of diverse cultures and artistic traditions. This cultural exchange, combined with the creativity and talent of local women, has given rise to a collection of unique handicrafts, among which traditional embroidery holds a prominent place. Among these arts, Khos Bafi and Shak Bafi (also known as Khos Duzi and Shak Duzi) occupy a special position; crafts that, despite changes in lifestyle, have remained alive in many parts of Hormozgan and continue to be an inseparable part of the region's traditional women's clothing.

In fact, in corners of old houses across Hormozgan, the gentle sound of spools of thread and the shimmer of silver and gold ribbons still tell the story of an art that has survived for generations in the hands of the women of this land. An art shaped not by machines, but by memory, experience, patience, and creativity, it is now recognized as one of the most valuable forms of traditional embroidery in southern Iran.



Khos Bafi and Shak Bafi are not merely methods of decorating garments; they are part of the cultural memory and identity of women along the shores of the Persian Gulf. Woven into every strand of these crafts are traces of history, maritime trade, local aesthetics, and women's artistry. "Khos" refers to thin, delicate, and shiny metallic strips, usually produced in gold, silver, and sometimes other colors. These strips form the main element in creating dazzling patterns on fabric and give local garments a distinctive appearance. What makes this craft valuable is not only the material itself, but also

the embroiderer's skill in transforming simple strips into orderly, delicate, and eye-catching designs. Although the terms Khos Bafi and Shak Bafi are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday speech, they are in fact two different techniques with distinct applications. In Khos Bafi, the final product is a very fine and narrow strip, mainly used to decorate Bandari trousers and parts of women's garments. Shak Bafi, on the other hand, produces wider, denser, and more durable strips that are used to decorate trouser edges, collars, cuffs, and other sections of clothing. This

structural difference has given each of these two arts a special place in the traditional dress of southern Iran.

One of the unique features of these crafts is the simplicity of their tools alongside the complexity of the skills required to create them. Unlike many contemporary arts that depend on industrial equipment, Khos Bafi and Shak Bafi are carried out using only a few traditional tools, which have been passed down from one generation to the next with little fundamental change. Yet, more important than the tools is the skill preserved in the mind and hands of the artist. Unlike many weaving techniques, Khos Bafi does not rely on paper designs or printed patterns. The motifs are created from a memory developed through years of learning passed down orally from one generation to another. Before beginning the work, the artist visualizes the design in her mind and then creates it on the fabric through the precise movement of threads and spools.

In the past, the use of these arts was largely limited to traditional women's clothing in Hormozgan. Bandari trousers, local dresses, and ceremonial garments were

the main areas where Khos and Shak were used. The shine of these strips, alongside the vibrant colors of southern clothing, gave women's attire in the region a distinctive beauty and helped shape an important part of Hormozgan's visual cultural identity.

In recent years, however, these crafts have moved beyond the boundaries of traditional clothing. Fashion designers and handicraft artists have adopted new approaches, using Khos and Shak strips in the design of elegant coats, formal dresses, handbags, shoes, belts, jewelry, and modern accessories. This combination of traditional art and contemporary design has created new opportunities for introducing Hormozgan's handicrafts to wider markets.

The presence of these arts in interior decoration is also expanding. Today, Shak strips are used to decorate cushions, table-

cloths, curtains, textile artworks, and decorative products. These modern applications show that an authentic traditional craft can maintain its identity while gaining a meaningful presence in contemporary life through adaptation to today's needs.

Khos Bafi and Shak Bafi are more than the weaving of threads and strips; they are a living narrative of the history and daily life of women living along the Persian Gulf coast. Every knot is a memory of generations of artists who, without books or written patterns and relying only on their knowledge and memory, passed on a remarkable skill to their children. These crafts represent the connection between tradition and beauty, labor and creativity, and identity and life — a heritage that continues to shine in the warmth of the south, preserved by the artistic hands of Hormozgan's women.



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Abr Forest where clouds meet wilderness

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The Abr (Cloud) Forest of Shahrud, in Semnan Province, is one of Iran's most mysterious natural landscapes. Situated on the boundary between the country's arid desert climate and the humid climate of the north, it is a place where two contrasting ecosystems meet. This unique climatic transition has created scenery unlike anywhere else in Iran, where desert and forest stand face to face.

The forest forms part of the ancient Hyrcanian Forests, a natural ecosystem dating back more than 40 million years and inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Valuable tree species such as hornbeam, oak, willow, and maple thrive here, reflecting the remarkable resilience of Iran's natural heritage through the ages.

With the arrival of spring, light rainfall, cool temperatures, and rapid plant growth transform the landscape. The forest's ever-present mist becomes thinner and more transparent, while the songs of migratory birds returning for the season fill the woodlands. At this time of year, every step through the forest seems to carry the scent of new life.

Most visitors reach the area via Shahrud and Bastam. The road is paved until the outskirts of the forest, but the final few kilometers are unpaved and winding. Spring rains can make the route slippery, so a four-wheel-drive vehicle or the assistance of a local guide



is strongly recommended. Abr village marks the point where the dramatic climatic transition begins. Within minutes, travelers leave behind a dry plain and enter a lush, humid landscape shrouded in clouds. The village's modest houses, small orchards, and mist creeping into residential courtyards all contribute to its distinctive charm.

On spring evenings, as temperatures begin to fall, clouds descend from the northern mountain peaks into the valleys below. This spectacular phenomenon is the reason the forest is known as the Cloud Forest. During these moments, the landscape appears to float between earth and sky. Broadleaf trees such as hornbeam, alder, and maple dominate the forest canopy, while hawthorn, blackberry, and wild rose flourish beneath them in spring, filling the undergrowth with blossoms and color. Walking beneath branches still wet with morning dew offers an



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immersive experience of Iran's pristine natural beauty. Water is one of the defining features of the forest. Numerous springs flow through the area, nourishing its rich vegetation. Although the water appears crystal clear, visitors are advised to drink bottled water or use a portable water filter to avoid possible contamination. On the lower slopes of the forest, visitors may encounter nomads



and local villagers grazing their livestock. Respectful interaction with local communities and purchasing regional products — such as dairy goods or handicrafts from Abr village — helps support the area's sustainable economy.

Best time to visit

Although the Abr Forest is beautiful throughout the year, the period from early spring

to mid-summer offers the finest conditions. During these months, temperatures are mild, rainfall is generally light, and the cloud formations are more consistent. In autumn and winter, heavier fog and slippery roads can make travel more challenging.

The best times to explore the forest in spring are early morning and shortly before sunset. Soft light filtering through delicate layers of mist creates an almost dreamlike atmosphere, making these hours especially popular among photographers. Sunlight streaming through the drifting clouds lends an ethereal quality to the landscape.

Those who spend the night at one of the forest's authorized campsites are rewarded with the unforgettable sight of clouds rising from the valleys at dawn. Sunset is equally captivating, as silence settles over the forest and the mist gradually returns, creating the impression that time itself has slowed.

Accommodation and equipment

Several eco-lodges and locally operated guesthouses are located around Abr village. As they are often fully booked during spring, advance reservations are recommended. Some tour operators also offer safe camping opportunities near the forest.

For first-time visitors, joining a guided group tour is the safest option. The trails are winding, sometimes confusing, and in certain areas lack clear signage. More experienced hikers, however, can also enjoy independent exploration with careful planning and proper equipment.

Essential gear includes non-slip hiking boots, layered clothing, a waterproof jacket, and a reliable trail map, particularly in spring when temperatures can change rapidly. Carrying spare batteries, a flashlight, and a fully charged mobile phone with a backup power source is also advisable, as mobile network coverage is unavailable in parts of the forest. Spring is both the forest's most vibrant and its most fragile season. Leaving designated trails, lighting fires, or discarding litter can have lasting impacts on this delicate ecosystem. Sustainable tourism means enjoying nature while ensuring it remains unharmed for future generations. The Abr Forest is more than a tourist destination — it is a living and fragile natural heritage. If every visitor leaves nothing behind but memories, its sea of blue-green mist will continue to enchant generations to come.