

Zanjan prepares to host national Aash Festival, crafts fair

Iranica Desk

The cauldrons will soon be lit in Zanjan as the province prepares to host two of Iran's major cultural events simultaneously. The 19th National Iranian Aash Festival and the 20th National Crafts and Souvenirs Fair will be held from August 24 to 28. Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Zanjan Province Seyyed Mikaeil Mousavi said extensive preparations are underway for what is considered the province's most important annual tourism event, Mehr News Agency wrote. He said two venues — the Zanjan International Exhibition Center and the Gavazang Recreation Complex — are being evaluated to host the

events, with coordination already carried out with the International Exhibitions Company and Zanjan Municipality. The department's priority, he added, is to hold the festival in an open-air setting. "An outdoor venue offers a more attractive atmosphere for tourists, visitors and local residents," Mousavi said. "Families can enjoy the green spaces and picnic areas while visiting different sections of the festival." He noted that the Gavazang Complex will host the festival if the necessary infrastructure is completed; otherwise, other venues will be considered. Nevertheless, organizers remain committed to staging the event in a public, open-air environment. Mousavi stressed that the National Aash Festival is



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far more than a culinary event, describing it as a celebration deeply rooted in Iranian culture, religious traditions, social customs

and even traditional medicine. He said Aash, the traditional thick Iranian soup, holds a special place in

Iranian culture, from religious votive offerings to medicinal recipes prepared for various illnesses, giving the festival cultural,

religious and social significance. According to Mousavi, organizers had originally planned to hold the festival in spring, when fresh mountain herbs are naturally available for preparing traditional Aash. However, the event was postponed because of the military attacks by Israel and the US to Iran. Despite the delay, he said, the festival could not be cancelled because of its status as a nationally registered event. Organizers therefore decided to schedule it during the final month of the summer holidays to attract a larger number of visitors. He added that efforts will be made to return the festival to its original spring schedule in future years to restore its original concept.

This year's program will extend well beyond cooking competitions. Provinces from across Iran will participate by preparing their regional varieties of Aash while also showcasing nomadic black tents, traditional foods, indigenous customs and cultural performances. Live presentations of regional traditions, exhibitions of local cuisine, displays of provincial souvenirs, introductions to Iran's World Crafts Cities, and showcases by handicraft artists from across the country will also be featured. Mousavi said the festival aims not only to introduce Zanjan's tourism potential but also to encourage longer visitor stays, boost the local tourism economy and support Iran's handicraft artists.

Iran offers diverse destinations for off-road adventures

Iranica Desk

With its remarkable geographical and climatic diversity, Iran offers a wide range of destinations for off-road enthusiasts. From vast desert plains to the lush mountains of the north, each region has its own distinctive character and attractions. Off-road driving is not only an exciting experience but also an opportunity to become familiar with local cultures and the lives of people living in these areas. In recent years, as off-road driving has grown in popularity, facilities and infrastructure related to the activity have also expanded. Off-road tours and dedicated camps have been established in various parts of the country, allowing enthusiasts to embark on adventures safely under the supervision of experienced guides. Off-road competitions held in some areas have also added to the sport's appeal, providing opportunities for healthy competition and showcasing driving skills. In this way, off-road driving has evolved beyond a recreational activity into a culture and lifestyle that is steadily gaining popularity.

Qasr-e Bahrām to Marānjab

The route from Qasr-e Bahrām to the Marānjab Desert is one of Iran's most famous and scenic off-road destinations, offering a unique experience for nature and adventure enthusiasts. With its vast sand dunes and spectacular desert landscapes, the route takes visitors into a world of natural beauty and history. Along the way, visitors can explore historical attractions such as the Qasr-e Bahrām Caravanserai, which reflects Iran's rich cultural heritage and history. Once a resting place for caravans, the caravanserai is now regarded as an important historical landmark for tourists. The journey takes about six hours, and visitors need to obtain a permit from the Department of



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Environment to enter Kavir National Park. The area also offers opportunities to observe native wildlife and distinctive desert vegetation, making it appealing to photographers and nature lovers. The desert's star-filled nights provide another excellent opportunity for stargazing and astrophotography. Ultimately, a trip to this region is not only an exciting off-road adventure but also an opportunity to relax and reconnect with nature.

Kashan to Zolamat Canyon

The route from Kashan to Zolamat Canyon is one of Iran's most scenic and fascinating off-road routes. Beginning north of Kashan and ending at Zolamat Canyon in Kavir National Park, the one-day journey involves about four hours of driving and passes through spectacular natural landscapes. Along the way, visitors encounter sand dunes, vast plains and striking rock formations, each with its own distinctive beauty. The area is protected and requires a permit for entry. As a result, many visitors prefer to explore it through organized tours, allowing them to enjoy a safer and more comfortable experience. With its towering rock walls and remarkable natural scenery, Zolamat Canyon is an ideal place for photography and exploring the landscape. In addition to off-road driving, the area provides oppor-



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tunities for hiking and observing native wildlife. Visitors can also complement their trip by exploring historical and cultural attractions around Kashan, including Fin Garden and the city's historic houses. The route is therefore not only an exciting adventure but also an opportunity to discover aspects of Iran's history and culture.

Marivan to Baneh

The route from Marivan to Baneh in Kurdistan Province is among Iran's most scenic off-road destinations, passing through lush oak forests. The journey offers more than an opportunity for off-road driving, taking visitors into a world of natural beauty and cultural heritage. Road 46, which leads to Lake Zarivar, is surrounded by spectacular landscapes and traditional villages, each with its own stories and traditions. Along the route,



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visitors can enjoy the beauty of the oak forests while becoming acquainted with local culture. Off-road driving in the region is not only exciting but also provides an opportunity to explore pristine landscapes and observe native wildlife. Lake Zarivar, with its clear waters and surrounding scenery, is an excellent place to stop and rest. A visit to the traditional villages of Kurdistan and an opportunity to learn about the lives of local residents can also make the journey a memorable experience. The trip is not simply an adventure but also an opportunity to connect with nature and experience Iran's rich cultural heritage.

Chalus to Kelardasht

The route from Chalus to Kelardasht is one of the best off-road destinations in northern Iran. With spectacular natural scenery and winding roads, it offers

an unforgettable experience for adventure enthusiasts. The region's forests, rivers and lush plains create an ideal setting for off-road driving. Visitors can enjoy beautiful mountain landscapes along the way and stop at various points to take photographs. The area's geographical setting gives it a distinctive appeal throughout the year. In summer, visitors are drawn to the pleasant weather and lush forests, while autumn brings warm foliage colors and striking scenery. In winter, snow-covered mountains create a dreamlike landscape that is particularly attractive to off-road enthusiasts. The route is therefore not only an exciting adventure but also an opportunity to relax and enjoy the natural beauty of northern Iran.

Stars Valley

Stars Valley on Qeshm Island is one of Iran's unique off-road destinations. Its rocky terrain and unusual landscapes offer a different experience for off-road enthusiasts. The area is renowned for its extraordinary geological formations, allowing visitors to admire striking rock formations and natural shapes. Qeshm Island also has numerous other natural attractions worth visiting. The Khorbas Caves, with their fascinating history, and the Qeshm mangrove forests, known for their rich biodiversity, offer excellent opportunities for exploring nature.

The island's local culture and delicious cuisine can further enrich the experience. A trip to Stars Valley is therefore not only an exciting adventure but also an opportunity to become familiar with the rich history and culture of Qeshm Island.

Chalus Road to Karaj

The Chalus Road to Karaj route is one of Iran's most famous and scenic off-road destinations. With spectacular natural landscapes and winding roads, it offers a unique experience for nature and adventure enthusiasts. The road passes through dense forests and lush mountains, while small lakes, waterfalls and flower-filled plains provide spectacular views along the way. Stopping at various points allows visitors to photograph the scenery and spend time amid nature. The region has a distinctive appeal in every season. Summer brings pleasant, cool weather, while autumn transforms the landscape with warm foliage colors. In winter, snow-covered mountains create a dreamlike setting that is particularly attractive to off-road enthusiasts.

Marānjab Desert

The Marānjab Desert is one of Iran's unique off-road destinations. Its vast sand dunes, spectacular desert landscapes and star-filled skies offer an unforgettable experience for adventure enthusiasts. The area is known for attractions such as the historic Marānjab Caravanserai, which has a rich history. Off-road driving in the desert allows visitors to enjoy its natural beauty and distinctive tranquility. During a trip to Marānjab, visitors can watch the sunset and sunrise over the sand dunes and enjoy moments of peace and relaxation. The desert's starry nights also provide excellent opportunities for astrophotography. Visitors may additionally encounter native wildlife and distinctive desert vegetation, making the area appealing to nature lovers.