West Azarbaijan to expand tourism infrastructure

IRNA

Iranica Desk

The director general of West Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization has announced that a preliminary plan has been prepared for the construction of a marine tourism complex near Lake Urmia.

Speaking at the first meeting of West Azarbaijan's Nature Tourism Committee, Morteza Safari said the project is currently under review. He noted that the department appointed a consultant about one and a half months ago and submitted the initial written proposal to the provincial Department of Environment, which is responsible for managing the Lake Urmia National Park, IRNA wrote.

"We are now awaiting the department's assessment of the proposal," he said.

Safari also announced plans to develop a service and recreational complex near Mount Zanbil along the extension of the Urmia-Tabriz highway.

Emphasizing tourism's importance to the province's economic development, he said the provincial administration is pursuing an investment-driven strategy aimed at attracting investors to key sectors, including agriculture, industry, mining, and tourism.

He highlighted West Azarbaijan Province's tourism potential, citing its six UNESCO World Heritage sites, 1,885 nationally registered heritage sites, unspoiled natural landscapes, and active border terminals.

Safari noted that the province has become one of Iran's leading destinations during the autumn and summer seasons, adding that a significant share of its tourism capacity has already been utilized, while further planning is needed to unlock its remaining potential.

Referring to the improved condition of Lake Urmia and the increase in its water level this year, he stressed the need to strengthen tourism infrastructure, describing it as one of the provincial government's priorities.

He also called for expanding recreational facilities around the Golmarz Wetland, one of the province's most-visited natural attractions.

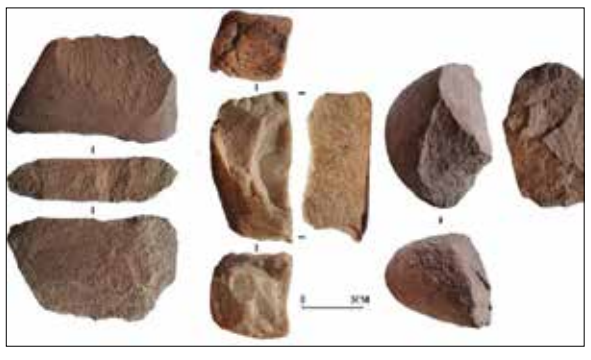
At the same meeting, Hojat Jabbari, director general of the West Azarbaijan Province's Department of Environment, stressed that tourism development must be balanced with environmental protection.

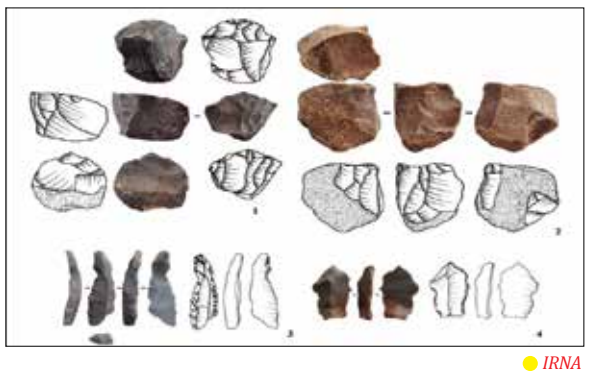
He said ecotourism projects can be implemented in the organization's four categories of protected areas, provided that environmental regulations are fully observed.

Jabbari added that four locations along the Lake Urmia causeway have been identified for potential private investment. He also stressed that any tourism complex proposed near Golmarz Wetland must strictly comply with regulations protecting the site's natural buffer zone.

West Azarbaijan is one of Iran's most diverse tourism destinations, offering a unique blend of natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and ethnic diversity. From the volcanic landscapes of Takht-e Soleyman and the scenic valleys of the Zagros Mountains to border markets, traditional villages, and seasonal wetlands, the province provides opportunities for nature-based, cultural, historical, and adventure tourism throughout the year. Its location at the crossroads of Iran, Turkey, and Iraq also gives it strategic potential to attract both domestic and international visitors.

Ancient finds rewrite early human migration





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Archaeologists have identified 24 Paleolithic archaeological sites in the Esfarayen Plain of North Khorasan Province, a discovery that researchers say could reshape current theories about the migration of early humans across Asia.

According to preliminary findings published in the journal Antiquity, the Esfarayen Plain may have served as a major migration corridor for early humans moving into Central Asia during the Pleistocene epoch. The findings suggest the region played a far more significant role than previously understood in the dispersal of early human populations, IRNA wrote.

Mohammad Reza Qahramanian, deputy director of North Khorasan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, described the area as a "missing piece" in the puzzle of early human migration. He said the discoveries provide new evidence for reconstructing prehistoric migration routes into the heart of Asia.

"The strategic role of the Esfarayen Plain in understanding the movement of early humans toward Central Asia has now become much clearer," he said.

The research was conducted with the support of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization and under a permit issued by Iran's Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism.

Field surveys led to the identification of 24 Paleolithic sites, significantly expanding evidence of early human occupation in the region.

Qahramanian said the discoveries open new opportunities for archaeological research and substantially improve understanding of the antiquity of human presence in northeastern Iran.

"These sites are not merely traces of the past," he said. "They are archives of human history waiting to be studied."

He attributed the lack of previous discoveries in the area to the limited number of specialized Paleolithic archaeological surveys conducted over recent decades.

With the new evidence confirming prehistoric occupation, Qahramanian said North Khorasan Province has emerged as one of the most important regions for Paleolithic research on the Iranian Plateau.

Authorities are now seeking national heritage registration for the newly identified sites while planning further archaeological investigations. Officials also hope the discoveries will strengthen the province's international scientific profile and enhance its potential as a destination for archaeological tourism.

The Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age, marks the earliest period of human prehistory, during which humans first developed and used stone tools.

Esfarayen, with a population of about 120,000, is located approximately 60 kilometers southeast of Bojnord, the capital of North Khorasan Province.

Beyond its newly identified Paleolithic sites, Esfarayen has long been recognized for its historical significance. The region contains numerous archaeological remains from different periods of Iranian history, reflecting thousands of years of continuous human settlement.

Combined with its mountainous scenery and traditional rural communities, these cultural and natural assets make Esfarayen one of North Khorasan Province's notable tourism destinations.

Reading Room

'Iranian Diplomacy in the Post-Polar World' by Zarif out now

Iranica Desk

The former Iranian foreign minister, in his latest book, has stated that the prerequisite for benefiting from all pillars of national capability is a realistic understanding of oneself and the surrounding sphere, and has emphasized: No country can design an effective strategy solely by relying on its idealistic image of the world, or based on wishes and subjective tendencies.

According to IRNA, Mohammad Javad Zarif, who is the director of the Payab Think Tank, announced the publication of his new book on X and wrote: "At the suggestion of many academic colleagues, the textbook 'Iranian Diplomacy in the Post-Polar World,' which encompasses scientific studies and research as well as experiences from about half a century of engagement in diplomacy, has been compiled and published by the efforts of my dear friend and colleague Abbas Shiri through the Mizan Legal Foundation."

In a part of the preface to this book, Zarif has stated, "Diplomacy is one of the fundamental pillars of national power. In a world where power is not defined solely on the battlefield, dialogue, coalition-building, image-making, trust-building, de-escalation, and conflict management are considered part of the mechanisms of power.

A country that views diplomacy only in times of necessity or as a tool to ward off danger has in fact neglected one of the most key pillars of its capability. The prerequisite for benefiting from all pillars of national capability is a realistic understanding of oneself and the surrounding sphere. No country can design an effective strategy solely by relying on its idealistic image of the world, or based on wishes and subjective tendencies. Foreign policy is the place where reality prevails over fantasy and the realm of connection between ideals and possibilities. The greater the distance between these two, the heavier the costs of decision-making will become. Self-belief and confident awareness of one's assets, along with identifying shortcomings and internal and external challenges, are prerequisites for avoiding the trap of extremism and negligence.

The book "Iranian Diplomacy in the Post-Polar World" in six chapters and 334 pages, including the theoretical framework of foreign policy, the post-polar world, types and methods of diplomacy, actors in foreign policy, neighbors and the Global South, and Iran and the great powers, has been adorned with the print of publication by Mizan Publication (mizan-law.ir) and is available to those interested.