

Siraf moves closer to UNESCO world status

Bushehr advances heritage projects

Iranica Desk

Iran's bid to have the ancient port of Siraf inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List has cleared its initial review after the site was submitted as the country's final nomination for the 2026 cycle, Bushehr's director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said. Nasrollah Ebrahimi said the nomination was made a provincial priority after 19 years of calls by local residents, civil society organizations and cultural heritage activists. A dossier that would normally take about two years to prepare was completed and submitted in just four months following intensive work by experts, extensive research, the compilation of documentation and field studies, according to IRNA.

The Siraf dossier was reviewed by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage's World Heritage Registration Policy Council, alongside strong competing nominations, including one from Khorasan Razavi Province. It secured the council's approval after officials highlighted the ancient port's historical, cultural and civilizational importance, Ebrahimi said. According to correspondence between UNESCO and Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, UNESCO evaluators are expected to visit Siraf later this summer to assess the site's conservation, management and social conditions. Preparatory work at the historic port has already begun, Ebrahimi said. Meetings have been held with relevant government agencies and technical teams have been deployed to complete conservation, restoration, technical and community-related measures ahead of the UNESCO assessment.

"Siraf's inscription on the World



● bgrows.ir

Heritage List cannot be achieved without public participation," Ebrahimi said, expressing hope that support from the Bushehr provincial governor, the governor of Kangan, government agencies and the local community would help bring the nomination to a successful conclusion. He also congratulated officials involved in the recent inscription of Alamut Castle in Qazvin Province on the World Heritage List and expressed hope that Siraf would become Iran's next World Heritage site, either by the end of this year or in 2027.

Ebrahimi also announced plans to open four new museums in the province by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2027), saying museum development is among the priorities of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage under the Seventh Development Plan.

The Shahid Rais Ali Delvari Museum, which required extensive redevelopment after 17 years, including improvements to its exhibits and structural reinforcement, has been renovated and equipped with modern technology and up-



● wikipedia.org

dated content. It is scheduled to open during Government Week.

Ebrahimi announced that the Jam Museum would open during Government Week or Tourism Week, saying it was established with the participation of Jam Municipality and that the Cultural Heritage Department was currently developing its content. Ebrahimi said archaeological remains dating back more than 12,000 years to the Paleolithic

period had been discovered in Jam. The museum will provide an opportunity to introduce part of the region's ancient history to residents and tourists. Meanwhile, as Siraf is being prepared for the UNESCO assessment, its museum is also undergoing reorganization, including the rearrangement of artifacts and display cases, ahead of reopening. The Alavi Printing Museum in Bushehr's historic district is scheduled to open by Febru-

ary, following restoration work and changes to its exhibits. The Bushehr Anthropology Museum, meanwhile, is 80 percent through its restoration and is expected to be ready for visitors by the same time.

Restoration is continuing at the historic Khormoj Bathhouse, located within the Mohammad Khan Dashti Castle complex, with the participation of Khormoj Municipality.

Plans are also being pursued to establish a sports museum in Bushehr in cooperation with the provincial Department of Sports and Youth Affairs and sports-sector activists. The province has a particularly strong sporting heritage, especially in football.

Ebrahimi also said efforts were continuing to develop the Dashtestan Museum at the Moshir Caravanserai in Borazjan. The site contains valuable historical remains dating from the Achaemenid period through the Islamic era and was also used during the Pahlavi era as a place of exile for several prominent national figures. It therefore has the potential to become a museum of

resistance, he said.

Other major restoration projects include the Moshir Bridge in Borazjan, Kalat Ahram Castle and the bathhouse at Mohammad Khan Dashti Castle.

Ebrahimi said the regeneration of Bushehr's historic district, supported by private-sector investment and the conversion of historic houses into traditional guesthouses and boutique hotels, had helped transform the area into a hub for sustainable tourism.

Cultural events, including Sharveh-Khani, Ta'zieh performances and ethnic festivals, have also helped demonstrate the vitality of the historic district, he said.

Ebrahimi also addressed the state of tourism in the province in recent months, saying that from December 2025, when Bushehr's peak tourism season began, through August 2026, the province's tourism sector suffered serious setbacks.

He added that tourism facilities bore the brunt of the impact in terms of visitor numbers, revenue and employment, with losses in some cases exceeding those suffered by industrial and petrochemical companies.

"Bushehr currently has 27 hotels and hotel-apartments, 11 guesthouses, 41 eco-lodges, 53 travel agencies, 13 private guesthouses, six coastal and marine tourism centers, eight traditional accommodation facilities, 14 traditional restaurants and eight roadside restaurants."

The province has 8,993 accommodation beds, with occupancy reaching 94 percent during peak tourism periods. Ebrahimi said 715 handicraft licenses had so far been issued in the province, while 34 national seals of quality had been awarded to Bushehr artisans.

Visit Katalah Khor Cave for wonders of underground world

Iranica Desk

Hidden beneath the limestone mountains of northwestern Iran, Katalah Khor Cave stands as one of the country's most remarkable geological formations, offering visitors a rare glimpse into millions of years of natural history while serving as one of Zanjan Province's leading tourist attractions. Located near the town of Garmab in Khodabandeh, the cave is renowned for its vast chambers, intricate limestone formations, mysterious underground passages and consistently cool temperature. Beyond its scenic appeal, the site is valued for its geological, scientific and environmental significance, attracting tourists, researchers and nature enthusiasts alike.

The journey to the cave takes visitors through the mountainous landscapes of the region, adding to its appeal as a destination for nature tourism, according to chn.ir. The name "Katalah Khor" has several interpretations in the local dialect, with one common meaning translated as "Mountain of the Sun."

Although local residents had long been familiar with the cave's entrance, it was officially identified in 1952 by a group of mountaineers. Since then, geological surveys and speleological studies



have continued to highlight the cave's scientific importance and tourism potential.

Katalah Khor Cave was formed through the gradual dissolution of limestone over extended geological periods. Groundwater seeped into fractures in the rock, slowly carving out an extensive network of underground passages, chambers and cavities over millions of years.

Mineral-rich water has continued to shape the cave's interior through the deposition of limestone, creating an array of spectacular formations. These include stalactites, stalagmites, columns, flowstones, draperies and cauliflower-like calcite formations, each formed drop by drop over countless centuries.

Geologists believe the cave's primary structure dates back to ancient geological eras, although the growth of its limestone for-

mations remains an ongoing process. Every drop of mineral-rich water that falls from the cave's ceiling deposits a microscopic layer of calcite, gradually creating new formations over time. One of Katalah Khor's defining characteristics is its complex, multi-level structure. Studies indicate that the cave consists of several interconnected underground levels, commonly described as a seven-level cave system.

These levels developed as underground waterways expanded through different layers of limestone. Some passages run horizontally while others descend vertically, creating an intricate network of tunnels and chambers.

Much of the cave remains unexplored. Many corridors and lower levels are still inaccessible because of difficult terrain, technical challenges and conservation



● arasbaran.org

requirements. Access to these areas is generally limited to professional caving teams equipped with specialized gear.

The sections open to visitors feature spacious halls, narrow corridors, deep fissures and winding passageways. The varying dimensions and elevations of these spaces create a striking underground landscape.

Among the cave's most distinctive features are its stalactites, which grow downward from the ceiling, and stalagmites, which rise upward from the floor. When these formations eventually meet, they form towering limestone columns.

The color and appearance of the cave's formations depend on the mineral composition of the water and surrounding rock. Iron oxides and copper compounds, for example, produce shades ranging from white and cream to yellow,

orange and red.

Carefully designed lighting along the visitor route enhances the cave's natural beauty while remaining compatible with environmental and conservation standards.

Several chambers have acquired names inspired by the appearance of their natural formations. Among the best known are the Hall of Columns, distinguished by its massive limestone pillars; the Bridal Hall, noted for its delicate, light-colored formations; the Lion and Sun Square, where rock formations resemble the historic Lion and Sun emblem; and corridors lined with limestone draperies and flowstone formations. These names are descriptive rather than scientific, reflecting visitors' interpretations of the cave's natural features.

Katalah Khor is considered one of Iran's premier geotourism desti-

nations. Developed visitor routes, walkways, lighting systems and other facilities enable the public to safely explore parts of the cave while minimizing impacts on its fragile environment.

The cave maintains a relatively stable and cool temperature throughout most of the year, making it an attractive destination in every season. Its silence, humidity, dramatic rock formations and distinctive underground atmosphere provide an experience unlike conventional sightseeing attractions.

The cave appeals to a wide range of visitors, including families, students, geology enthusiasts, nature lovers, photographers, researchers and experienced cavers. However, authorities emphasize that the site remains a fragile natural environment, and visitors are expected to follow conservation regulations designed to protect its geological heritage.

Often described as a "natural museum," Katalah Khor preserves a geological record created not by human hands but through millions of years of natural processes. Every wall, ceiling and floor of the cave provides scientists with valuable evidence about the Earth's geological history, the movement of groundwater and long-term environmental and climatic changes.