

Iranica Desk

The director of the Chehel Sotoun World Heritage Site in Isfahan has announced plans to assess the potential for restoring the historic garden of the complex in cooperation with the city's Parks and Green Space Organization, using historical documentation and a scientific approach. Mostafa Hadipour said the management of the garden's green spaces is shifting from an "experimental" approach to one based on scientific research and historical documentation, IRNA wrote.

"Our main goal is to restore the authenticity and historical identity of Chehel Sotoun Garden by studying historical documents and incorporating the findings into the restoration plan," he said. Hadipour noted that maintenance of Chehel Sotoun

Garden in the past was largely based on experience, but said efforts are now underway to adopt a more scientific approach by drawing on historical documents and working with specialists.

Regarding efforts to restore the garden's original characteristics as a Persian garden, he said one issue under review is the possible replacement of lawns with flower beds.

"We are looking for historical evidence to determine what types of vegetation were used around the pools and in the garden's green spaces in earlier periods," he said. Based on preliminary findings, some sections appear to have been covered with lawns rather than flower beds, which may not fully correspond with the garden's historical identity. "We have raised the issue with the restoration project's consultants so that,

Scientific restoration planned for Chehel Sotoun Garden

after the documents are reviewed and the proposal is approved by the strategic council, these elements can be restored to their original form during the restoration phase," Hadipour said. He described the garden as a prominent feature of Iranian architecture that flourished during the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods and continued in Safavid gardens. Chehel Sotoun, he added, is an example of this art, combining elements such as water, architecture, greenery and ornamentation in an integrated garden design.

The Chehel Sotoun Palace Museum was built in Isfahan during the Safavid period, in the 11th century AH. One of the complex's notable features is its collection of paintings by Reza Abbasi, a prominent Safavid-era artist whose works in the Persian miniature style decorate the palace's halls. Iran has nine gardens inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List as part of the Persian Garden serial property, which was registered in July 2011. Two of the nine gardens — Chehel Sotoun in Isfahan and Fin Garden in Kashan — are located in Isfahan Province.



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Ardabil Province tops Iran in foreign tourism development

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The director general of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Ardabil Province has announced that the province has ranked first nationally in an evaluation of foreign tourism development for the second consecutive year.

Jalil Jabbari said the achievement was based on the results announced by the Foreign Tourism Evaluation and Development Department of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts in the area of foreign tourism marketing and devel-



Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble
● IRNA

opment for the past Iranian year (ended March 20, 2026), according to IRNA.

Ardabil Province also

ranked first in foreign tourism marketing and development two years ago, and maintaining the

position demonstrates the department's continued efforts to promote the province's tourism potential beyond Iran's borders, he said.

Jabbari added that Ardabil's tourism attractions and potential have been promoted nationally to a considerable extent in recent years, with the results reflected in the growing number of domestic tourists visiting the province. However, more efforts are still needed to develop foreign tourism so that, as conditions in Iran and the region improve, the province can attract more international visitors.

He said national and international events and festivals have been held in recent years, bringing greater attention to tourism in the province among residents and travelers than in previous years.

Meanwhile, Moslem Shojaei, director general of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development Department, announced the results of the evaluation of provincial departments' performance in foreign tourism marketing and development.

He said Ardabil maintained its strong performance, ranking first nationally among provincial departments for the second consecutive year, while Qazvin and East Azarbaijan ranked second and third, respectively. Shojaei said the results of last year's evaluation showed the continued implementation of targeted approaches by provinces active in the international tourism sector and the extent to which their measures were aligned with policies and guidelines issued by the ministry's tourism deputy.

He added that Ardabil's first-place ranking and its continuation from the past year demonstrated the province's ongoing capac-

ity-building, planning and follow-up efforts in foreign tourism marketing and development.

With a rich heritage of historical and cultural attractions, including the UNESCO-listed Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Shrine Ensemble and Saein Stone Caravanserai, as well as more than 900 registered immovable historical sites on Iran's National Heritage List, Ardabil Province is considered one of the country's major destinations for domestic and international tourists.

Located in northwestern Iran, Ardabil Province comprises 12 counties and is one of the country's main destinations for domestic and foreign tourists.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad qanats preserve ancient wisdom

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For centuries, people living in the rugged Zagros Mountains have relied on a remarkable method of bringing water from deep underground to the surface. Known as the qanat, or Kariz, the system was developed without energy-intensive pumps or costly modern technology. Instead, it was based on a sophisticated understanding of geology, groundwater behavior and gradients, combined with knowledge passed down from one generation to the next.

For ancient communities, qanats were far more than simple water-conveyance structures. They formed the backbone of a complex engineering and social system that supported settlement, agriculture and sustainable living. Wherever qanat water reached the surface, it helped create the conditions for cultivation and development. In many parts of Iran, the emergence of villages and the growth of historic settlements were closely linked to these underground water channels.

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, despite its rugged mountainous ter-

rain, steep slopes and deep valleys, is also home to this ancient water-management heritage. Qanats once supplied a significant share of the water needed by local communities and farmland across the province, and remarkably, some have continued to flow centuries after they were built.

Today, however, these largely silent engineering masterpieces face serious threats from both environmental and human pressures, including prolonged droughts, sharp declines in groundwater levels, uncontrolled drilling of deep and semi-deep wells, encroachment on legally protected qanat corridors, construction projects and, most critically, the loss of traditional qanat-building knowledge. As a result, a significant number of the province's qanats have either completely dried up, suffered devastating collapses or require urgent restoration and rehabilitation.

Ali-Asghar Atashfaraz, deputy head of tourism at the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said Iran has a long and distinguished history of intelligent water management.

He noted that the Iranian Plateau, particularly its arid central regions, has faced water scarcity since ancient times, prompting Iranians to develop innovative and exceptional methods to support settlement, agriculture and sustainable water supplies.

"One of the most important and strategic measures taken by Iranians throughout history was the safe transfer of groundwater to areas where it was needed," Atashfaraz said, adding that qanats were certainly among the most important and effective inventions for this purpose.

He explained that constructing a qanat required a highly precise understanding of water engineering, hydrology, soil science and geology, as well as an in-depth knowledge of groundwater behavior.

Determining where an underground aquifer flowed, where it offered the greatest yield and pressure, and how its water could be brought to the surface with minimal evaporation required a sophisticated body of specialized local knowledge, he said.

Pointing to the importance of Iran's historic qanats internationally, Atashfaraz

said the central Iranian plateau contains numerous major qanats that demonstrate the ingenuity of Iranians in mastering the technique. Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, he added, also has a long history of using this traditional method.

He identified the qanat of Tombi village in Charam as one of the province's important, strategic and ancient qanats. More than 50 shafts have been identified along its route, and firm evidence dating to the Parthian period has also been found there, indicating its remarkable antiquity.

Numerous qanats have been identified across the province, Atashfaraz said, adding that architectural remains and other evidence of these structures can clearly be seen in the Dehdasht Plain and various tropical parts of the province.

Unfortunately, he said, many of these qanats have disappeared or collapsed because of neglect, while the life-giving flow of water through others has been permanently cut off.

The surviving qanats demonstrate the evolution and advancement of qanat-building techniques in the province, he said.



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While their construction methods are in many respects similar to those found elsewhere in Iran, the province's difficult mountainous environment has given them distinctive and particularly resilient characteristics.

In mountainous areas, groundwater is generally found deep in valleys, making access difficult. Under such conditions, constructing qanats was one of the most ingenious ways to access underground water and convey it by gravity to places where it was needed, including fields and settlements, Atashfaraz explained.

He also pointed to an important ancient qanat in

the historic Dehdasht Plain, saying a major qanat system there supplied a substantial portion of the water required by the city and the historic fabric of Belad Shapur during periods of prosperity under the Ilkhanid and Safavid dynasties. The remarkable qanat passes through a gypsum formation, but thanks to its precise engineering, its original water was fresh, palatable and suitable for drinking, he said. Despite being more than 500 years old, the qanat still has the potential to supply water to the area.

Atashfaraz described the loss and interruption of traditional qanat-building knowledge as one of the

most important and painful concerns surrounding the future of the systems.

"Unfortunately, very few people today have the expertise to professionally excavate and dredge qanats using traditional methods," he said, adding that this valuable knowledge has not been adequately passed on to younger generations and engineers.

He stressed that, given declining precipitation, successive droughts and the complex water challenges facing the Iranian Plateau, the rehabilitation of qanats as sustainable water resources should receive far greater attention from the government and relevant agencies.