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Masouleh heritage officials have announced the continuation of specialized, conservation and preparatory measures to prepare the area covered by the “Cultural Landscape of Masouleh and Its Ancient Ironworking Sites” nomination dossier as the visit of a UNESCO evaluator to Gilan Province approaches. Rasoul Foroughi, director of the Masouleh Cultural Heritage Site and head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Fuman, said the dossier presents particular technical and operational challenges due to its broad geographical scope and the exceptional diversity of its historical, archaeological and cultural components, according to ctn.ir.

Located in the mountainous southwest of Gilan Province, Masouleh is one of northern Iran's best-known historic settlements. The town is renowned for its distinctive

stepped layout, in which the roofs and courtyards of lower buildings forming pathways and public spaces for the buildings above them. The settlement is built along a steep mountain slope, creating a close relationship between its traditional architecture and the surrounding natural landscape. UNESCO's Tentative List describes Masouleh as a historic settlement with a history of about 800 to 1,000 years. Foroughi said that, within this framework, organizing and preparing archaeological sites associated with the dossier, particularly the Ironworking sites, has been prioritized alongside efforts to maintain the overall quality of the Ma-



souleh cultural landscape. He noted that Masouleh's value is not limited to the historic fabric of the town, adding that the strong

connection between its stepped architecture, Hyrcanian ecosystem, historic routes, indigenous knowl-

dence of ancient Ironworking has shaped the unique identity of the cultural landscape. Therefore, he said, all components of the

dossier must be properly presented and made visible during the field evaluation. He added that, alongside specialized and conservation measures, efforts are also underway to improve environmental conditions, access routes, surrounding areas and visitor points so that the UNESCO evaluator can observe the historical, archaeological, cultural and landscape values of the site in a real, coherent and assessable setting. Emphasizing the decisive role of the people of Masouleh in safeguarding this valuable heritage, Foroughi said local community participation is a fundamental pillar of the sustainable protection of the Masouleh cultur-

al landscape. Efforts are being made to strengthen this cooperation and further activate community-based capacities for protecting, presenting and passing on the heritage values of the area. Masouleh was added to Iran's National Heritage List in 1975, while its historic city was placed on UNESCO's Tentative List in 2007. The current nomination expands the focus beyond the historic settlement itself to encompass the wider cultural landscape and associated Ironworking sites. Foroughi said the UNESCO evaluator will visit Gilan Province in October to inspect the area covered by the “Cultural Landscape of Masouleh and Its Ancient Ironworking Sites” dossier and conduct field assessments. He described the visit as a key stage in the World Heritage inscription process that could play an important role in introducing Masouleh's civilizational, cultural and natural potential to the world.

Gorgan Grand Mosque preserves legacy of Seljuk architecture



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Among the alleys and passageways of Gorgan's historic district, the Grand (Jaame) Mosque stands as one of the city's most prominent monuments, with a history dating back to the Seljuk period. Located within the historic Na'lbandan Bazaar, the mosque has served not only as a place of worship but also as an important social center of the city over the centuries. Covering an area of about 1,000 square meters, Gorgan Grand Mosque features a central courtyard surrounded by four prayer halls. Two ivans, on the eastern and western sides, are also incorporated into the structure, placing the mosque among Iran's two-ivan mosques. Unlike many historic mosques in Iran, the building has no dome. Its pitched roof reflects the climatic conditions and architectural traditions of northern Iran. One of the mosque's most valuable features is its brick minaret, which rises above the mosque's southern entrance. The minaret can be regarded as the most distinctive surviving example of Seljuk architecture within the complex and has retained much of

its historic structure. A Kufic inscription and delicate brickwork decorate the minaret, adding to its historical and artistic significance. A platform for the muezzin was provided at the top, while part of the shaft was designed to allow light to enter the interior. Reaching the muezzin's platform requires climbing 47 spiral steps, beginning at the base of the minaret and continuing to its upper section. These details have made the minaret one of the most notable elements of Gorgan's historic architecture. Another valuable feature associated with Gorgan Grand Mosque is its historic wooden pulpit, which is now kept inside a glass enclosure for better protection. The eight-step pulpit is decorated with floral motifs, arabesques and other artistic ornamentation, while the names of the 12 Imams are inscribed on parts of it. Three inscriptions on the pulpit provide researchers with valuable information about the mosque's historical changes over different periods. The date 859 AH is also inscribed on part of the piece, while traces associated with the Timurid and Afsharid periods can be seen in its decoration. The mosque's western ivan

contains 19 historical inscriptions and stone tablets, many of which include royal decrees and endowment deeds. Beyond their artistic value, these documents reflect aspects of the social, economic and religious history of Estarabad, the former name of Gorgan. These features led to the mosque being listed as one of Iran's national heritage sites in 1932. Adjacent to the Grand Mosque is the historic Na'lbandan Bazaar, which was once one of the most important economic and social centers of Estarabad and continues to retain some of its traditional vitality. The architecture of Na'lbandan differs from that of many of Iran's better-known historic bazaars. Unlike the covered bazaars of central Iranian cities, Na'lbandan was built largely as an open-air marketplace, reflecting the climatic conditions of the region. Historically, the bazaar consisted of several commercial rows, with schools, caravanserais and various service facilities operating around it. The Sadat School and Haj Mohammad-Taqi Khan Hazare-Jaribi Caravanserai are among the buildings mentioned in sources discussing the historic structure of the area.

Kerman seeks to expand cultural, historical tourism

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Kerman Province's extensive collection of historical, cultural, and civilizational heritage—including tangible and intangible assets, as well as sites inscribed on national and World Heritage lists—offers unique potential for developing cultural and historical tourism. According to an official, this could position the province as one of Iran's premier tourism destinations. Ali Saranjam, head of the Tourism Department of Kerman Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, emphasized Kerman's prominent standing in cultural and historical tourism, noting that this sector is among the most significant forms of tourism worldwide today.

traditional arts, handicrafts, music, cuisine, and indigenous ways of life. Referring to Kerman's World Heritage properties, Saranjam noted that the province holds a prominent place on Iran's cultural tourism map, thanks to valuable sites such as the historic city of Bam, the Cultural Landscape of Maymand, Shazdeh Garden in Mahan, the Lut Desert, its World Heritage qanats and Ganjali Khan and Chah-Kouran caravanserais. Alongside these World Heritage sites, hundreds of locations registered on Iran's National Heritage List—including historic urban fabrics and buildings, archaeological sites, museums, bazaars, castles, mosques, caravanserais, and architectural complexes—form a diverse chain of

tourism events and experiential activities. He noted that a major advantage of historical and cultural tourism is the distribution of economic benefits among local communities. Increased visitation to historical attractions can directly and indirectly generate economic opportunities for tour guides, ecolodges, handicraft producers, artists, local-product manufacturers, restaurants, shops, and other businesses across the tourism value chain. The official added that developing this type of tourism can also encourage the restoration, revitalization, and sustainable use of historic buildings and urban fabrics. With proper planning, each heritage site can become a tourism destination and economic asset without compromising its



He explained that cultural and historical tourism not only provides visitors with deep and lasting experiences but also contributes to heritage preservation and revitalization, strengthens the cultural identity of local communities, boosts related businesses, and creates sustainable employment. Saranjam added that the province's long civilizational history, vast geographical expanse, and cultural diversity have endowed it with a rich array of historical and cultural assets—from historic monuments and archaeological sites to rituals, customs,

cultural and historical attractions across the province, he said. Saranjam stressed the importance of intangible heritage in developing cultural tourism, pointing out that cultural heritage is not limited to historic buildings and archaeological sites. Rituals and ceremonies, traditional celebrations, local stories and narratives, traditional knowledge and skills, music and ritual arts, local cuisine, and traditional production and lifestyle practices are all vital components of Kerman's cultural identity. These, he said, can be introduced to visitors through

authenticity and cultural values through commercial exploitation. Saranjam stressed the need to move toward sustainable tourism, stating that cultural tourism planning must strike a balance between heritage conservation, the interests of local communities, and visitors' needs. Developing tourism infrastructure, educating local communities, improving service quality, providing professional interpretation, and strategically promoting attractions are among the requirements for making sustainable use of these resources.