

Aash, handicrafts take center stage at Zanzan festival

Iranica Desk

The 19th National Iranian Aash Festival and the 20th National Handicrafts Exhibition opened on Monday, August 24, and will run through August 28 at the Caspian International Exhibition Center in Zanzan, the provincial director-general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said.

Seyyed Mikaeil Mousavi told

ISNA that all the necessary infrastructure for the event had been prepared. "This year, 40 booths have been set up for cooks from 23 provinces, while 155 handicrafts booths have been prepared for artisans from 29 provinces. Some of the participants have already arrived in Zanzan," he said.

Mousavi said billboards and banners promoting the festival had been installed across

the city and that necessary arrangements had been made to welcome tourists.

He also announced the launch of a special tourist train for the event. "This year, a tourist train has been launched from Tehran to Zanzan. Tourists will arrive in Zanzan on Thursday morning, visit the Soltanieh Dome, and then tour the exhibition and Aash festival. Therefore, the exhibition will open one hour earlier on

Thursday," he said.

Travel agencies have also prepared special tourism packages and dedicated tours for the festival to provide services to visitors, he added. Mousavi noted that nomadic communities from different provinces will also participate in the festival by setting up traditional black tents, where they will introduce their culture, customs and local foods to visitors.



● IRNA

Hurand blends ancient history with Arasbaran's natural beauty

Iranica Desk

Nestled among the lush mountains of northern East Azarbaijan Province, Hurand is a quiet, pleasant city that remains relatively unfamiliar to many tourists. Located in the historic and natural Arasbaran region, Hurand borders Parsabad to the north, Germe in Ardabil Province to the east, Meshgin Shahr to the southeast, Kaleybar to the west, and Ahar to the south. The city lies about 172 kilometers from Tabriz, and the road to Hurand winds through scenic mountains, forests and valleys.

Hurand has a long history of human settlement. Historical remains indicate that the area was inhabited even before the advent of Islam. Its mountainous setting, permanent rivers and extensive forest cover played an important role in the development of ancient settlements and civilizations in the region.

One of Hurand's most important features is its location within the Arasbaran forests,

which have been recognized by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve because of their ecological value and biodiversity. The forests are considered one of Iran's most important ecosystems and play a significant role in preserving plant and animal species.

Hurand has about 11,000 hectares of forest and more than 70,000 hectares of rangeland. This natural expanse keeps the region's landscapes green and

scenic for much of the year. Permanent rivers, springs and deep valleys add to the area's beauty, making it an attractive destination for nature enthusiasts, photographers and wildlife lovers.

One of Hurand's best-known natural attractions is Tombakuluq Forest, located only about one kilometer from the city center. Thanks to its easy access, diverse vegetation and pristine landscapes, the forest

is considered one of the region's popular tourist destinations.

Yew, hornbeam, hazelnut, walnut, sumac and oak trees, along with various native plant species, give the forest a distinctive character. Many environmental experts consider Arasbaran one of the country's richest forest habitats, home to hundreds of plant and animal species.

The forest is also a habitat for valuable wildlife species such as brown bears, foxes, lynxes, wild boars, partridges, golden eagles, falcons and other birds of prey. However, observing these animals is possible only under appropriate conditions and with respect for environmental protection principles. Visitors should avoid approaching wildlife or disturbing its habitat.

Seventeen kilometers from Hurand, in Chinab village, lies a historical and natural area known as Qobul Valley. In addition to its natural beauty, the area is of considerable archaeological importance. Studies in-

dicate that the site is more than 3,000 years old. Qobul Valley lies behind a rocky mountain, with the well-known Hashtsar Mountain visible opposite it. Numerous small and large caves are among the area's most distinctive features.

Local residents believe that some of these caves could accommodate thousands of people. Although such accounts require scientific verification, the scale of the caves and the natural rock formations surrounding them are impressive. The area holds particular appeal for those interested in geology, nature tourism and history.

Twelve kilometers from Hurand, in Pashtab village, stands a historic fortress known locally as Pashtu Castle. The fortress is believed to date back to the Parthian period. Its most notable feature is its location atop rocky heights, with deep cliffs surrounding it that once helped protect the stronghold.

Alongside its pre-Islamic heritage, Hurand is also home to valuable Islamic-era structures. The Jaame Mosque of Hurand,

which is more than 300 years old, is one of the city's most important historic buildings. Built on two levels, the mosque includes sections such as the Shahneshtin, Mojaverkhaneh, Saqqakhaneh, firewood storage and water room.

Twelve kilometers from Hurand is Kujan village, which offers scenic views because of its location in a mountainous valley. Wooded areas and orchards surround the village.

Hurand has a mountainous climate, with cold, snowy winters and relatively cool autumns, so traveling during these seasons can involve some limitations. Spring is the best time to see the lush forests, blossoming trees and swollen rivers. Summer, with cooler temperatures than many other parts of Iran, also provides favorable conditions for nature tourism, mountain climbing and visits to villages and historic sites. If the main purpose of a trip is to enjoy the natural beauty of Arasbaran, late May to early September is considered the best period to visit Hurand.



● MKEHR

Reading Room

Hafezieh Library preserves Shiraz's literary heritage

Iranica Desk

Stepping into the serene grounds of the mausoleum of Shiraz's renowned lyric poet Hafez, a sign for an old library just behind his tomb catches the eye and invites visitors to explore. Above its modest entrance is a sign reading "Hafezieh Library," while a door decorated with the traditional woodcarving artistry of Shiraz opens the way to this repository of books.

Upon entering, a table and several chairs occupy the center of the room, while attractive bookshelves stand beneath a ceiling reflecting the architectural style of Shiraz's Zand period. The library's tranquil silence creates an enchanting atmosphere.

The library has a history spanning eight decades and is regarded as an old pearl nestled within the Hafezieh complex. Generations of book-loving Shiraz residents have fond memories of the library, while

prominent scholars and intellectuals of the city have repeatedly enriched its valuable collection by donating books. To learn more about the history of Hafezieh Library, IRNA spoke with Zeynab Mohebi, a senior librarian and head of the public library.

Mohebi said that evidence indicates that after restoration work was carried out at Hafezieh between 1927 and 1937, the need was felt to establish a library next to the tomb of Hafez. As a result, the mausoleum building of Qasem Khan Vali, one of the structures dating from the reign of Karim Khan Zand, was designated as a library. Referring to handwritten notes found in some of the books in the rich collection, she added that, on the orders of Abolqasem Shokrayi, the then director-general of the provincial Department of Culture, a number of books were transferred from the Fars National Library to Hafezieh Library on December 18, 1950,

forming the initial core of the collection.

Mohebi further noted that, beginning in 1967, Hafezieh Public Library continued its activities under the Office of Libraries of the Ministry of Culture and Arts at the time. Since 2003, following the approval by the Iranian Parliament of legislation establishing the country's Public Libraries Administration and its endorsement by the Guardian Council, Hafezieh Public Library has operated under the Public Libraries Institution and the Fars Province Public Libraries Department.

Over the years, prominent figures in the intellectual and cultural life of Fars have donated their libraries, or portions of their personal book collections, to Hafezieh for public use, thereby ensuring that their names would remain part of the library's history.

According to the head of Hafezieh Library, one such

figure was Lotfali Suratgar, one of the founders of the Faculty of Literature at Shiraz University, who donated 700 books to the library in 1970.

Mohebi added that in 1971, Mohammad Kazemi Shirazi, a noted scholar of his time, donated 5,100 books to Hafezieh Library, many of them printed in Beirut, Cairo, Damascus and Najaf, along with bookshelves and fine furniture. In 1976, Lotfali Moaddel donated 1,020 books to the library. That same year, another 500 books were transferred from the Persepolis Library and Scientific Institution to Hafezieh Library.

She added that in subsequent years, other prominent figures also donated books from their personal collections to the library. With such a history, Hafezieh Library is considered one of the oldest public libraries in southern Iran. Handwritten notes found in some of the books in its collection indi-



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cate that it has been in operation for more than 76 years. Today, Hafezieh Library houses 21,749 books. Its rich collection includes 2,600 Arabic-language books, 276 valuable lithographed books, 503 books printed using letterpress techniques, and 16 books produced through offset printing and other printing methods.

The library also has a rich collection devoted to Hafez studies, including editions

of the Divan of Hafez in 15 languages as well as various commentaries on the works of the celebrated Shirazi poet, making it one of Iran's unique libraries in this field. In addition, its location within one of Iran's most popular heritage and tourist sites has made Hafezieh Library a destination for culture enthusiasts as well as numerous domestic and international visitors. The library has members from across Iran.