

Sorkheh reveals history, culture and hidden treasures

Iranica Desk

The diverse and astonishing nature of Semnan Province, its rich historical heritage, scenic roads that seem to pass through the sky, and star-filled nights that illuminate the heavens combine to create a region brimming with unforgettable experiences for travelers. Sorkheh, located along the historic Silk Road and on the route of tourists traveling westward, remains relatively unknown despite its abundant tourism potential, historical landmarks, and religious monuments scattered throughout the city. Situated near the provincial capital, Sorkheh has long shared in the region's natural and cultural wonders. The village lies on Iran's central plateau and exhibits a climate similar to other areas of the plateau. Much of the city experiences a hot desert climate, characterized by scorching, dry summers and cold, dry winters. Residents speak Persian, though each district retains its own dialect, reflecting the region's rich linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Handicrafts

Sorkheh's traditional handicrafts include carpet weaving, kilim weaving, Jajim (a type of floor covering) weaving, fabric weaving, Khorjin (saddlebag) making, pottery, marquetry, and wood carving. Among these, Sorkheh's kilims are particularly renowned, enjoying high acclaim in both domestic and international markets.

Tourist attractions

• **Heshmat-ol-Lashkar House:**



Heshmat-ol-Lashkar House
● chtn.ir

This Qajar-era mansion, a symbol of desert architecture, is located in the city center. Originally owned by Haj Mohamad Ebrahim Khan Peyvandi, known as Heshmat-ol-Lashkar (the local ruler at the time), the complex spanned over 150 years and included four residential units, a governor's office, gardens, bathhouses, and a school. Much of the historical governance section, especially its grand portal, was demolished in 1991 to accommodate urban development. The remaining windcatchers on the house, adorned with intricate decorations, exemplify the beauty of desert architectural artistry. The building was registered as a national heritage site on February 6, 2011.

• **Grand Ab Anbar:** Located in the Biroun Dezh neighborhood along one of the old streets, this large water reservoir dates back to the Qajar period. Built



Chehel Sotoun Mosque
● IRNA

of bricks with lime and gypsum mortar, the structure features a small windcatcher atop its dome to cool the water. Registered as a national heritage site in 2001, it is widely recognized as a symbol of Sorkheh.

• **Biroun Dezh Bathhouse:** Believed to date back to the late Zand period and early Qajar era, this bathhouse is adjacent to the



Biroun Dezh Bathhouse
● IRNA

Chehel Sotoun Mosque. Rebuilt by Heydar Beyk Peyvandi, it includes traditional sections such as a changing room, vestibule, hot room, water reservoir, and furnace. The bathhouse was registered as a national heritage site in December 2001.

• **Jaame and Chehel Sotoun mosques:** Chehel Sotoun Mosque dates to the 1st century

AH and is attached to Sorkheh's Jaame Mosque, located in the old city near Moharram Street. The mosque consists of two adjacent northern and southern halls, approximately two meters below street level. Notable features include slender octagonal brick columns and pointed archways reminiscent of Zand-era architecture. Of the original 40 columns, 32 remain today. Since 2014, the mosque has been designated for use as a permanent ethnographic museum or for temporary exhibitions by the city's Cultural Heritage Organization.

• **Historical castles:** Sorkheh's strategic location along east-west trade routes historically exposed it to periodic invasions. Consequently, residents constructed both small and large fortresses, including the notable Jahanabad Castle. In recent years, the city's Cultural Heritage Department has taken

steps to register several of these castles as historical sites.

Travel recommendations

Tourists passing through Sorkheh should know that hidden treasures await along its streets and surrounding villages — worth seeing, tasting, or purchasing. For memorable experiences, it is recommended to engage with locals, who are known for their warmth, hospitality, and friendliness. Visitors are advised to avoid buying bread or groceries from random shops. Instead, ask residents to guide you to the local baking centers for authentic "Sorkheh bread". In summer, travelers can purchase fresh melons and cucumbers from the fields, as well as pomegranates and seedless figs from nearby orchards. For lasting souvenirs, Sorkheh's traditional handicrafts should not be overlooked.

Khorashad nurtures talent, tradition in eastern Iran

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South Khorasan Province, located in eastern Iran, is one of the country's historically rich yet less industrialized regions, where handicrafts have long played a central role in local livelihoods and cultural expression. Shaped by desert geography, cross-regional trade routes, and deeply rooted traditions, the province is known for a wide range of indigenous crafts, including handwoven textiles, embroidery, carpet weaving, pottery, stone carving, and traditional woodwork. In many rural areas, these crafts continue to function not only as cultural symbols but also as essential sources of income, particularly for women and small family-based workshops. Handicrafts in South Khorasan Province reflect the province's cultural diversity and long-standing adaptation to its natural environment. Traditional skills such as handwoven textiles, embroidery, pottery, felt-making, stone carving, and woodcraft have been passed down through generations, often within family-based or community workshops. These crafts not only preserve local aesthetics and techniques but also play



a practical role in sustaining rural economies and reinforcing social ties. Across different cities and villages of the province, variations in materials, patterns, and production methods highlight the close relationship between handicrafts and local lifestyles. From textile and embroidery traditions in Birjand and Qaen to pottery and stone-based crafts in other parts of the province, South Khorasan's handicrafts continue to represent a living heritage that remains closely connected to

everyday life. The experience of provinces such as South Khorasan highlights the broader significance of handicrafts within Iran's cultural and creative economy, as well as the structural challenges faced by producers across different regions. Khorashad is a small village in eastern Iran, located in South Khorasan Province. Nestled in Nasr Abad Valley, its unique name — meaning "The Place of Sunrise" in the Pahlavi language — derives from the breathtaking natural scenery



that greets the dawn. Dating back to a period even before Islam, Khorashad is a rare example of a village that attracts people rather than losing them to migration. One of its most remarkable characteristics is the production of numerous successful and elite individuals in scientific, cultural, and economic fields — an achievement extraordinary for a village with a population of just around 1,000. Due to these distinctions, the region has been officially recognized as an elite village in Iran, according to visitiran.ir.

In addition to agriculture, the residents of Khorashad are renowned for their handicrafts. In 2018, the village gained international recognition for its hand-woven fabrics, known locally as Tow-Bafi. Tow-Bafi refers to the traditional skill of producing a variety of cotton or silk fabrics, a craft that continues to be practiced today using traditional devices and simple tools, just as it was in the past. The final products are unique, whether made from linen or silk, and the raw materials include silk, cotton, wool,

and viscose yarn (processed cotton and stick wood). Among the products of Tow-Bafi, towels are the most common, valued for their softness, delicacy, and high moisture absorbency. A cotton weft is used between the wraps of this weave and forms the primary material of the textile. The weaving process is completed by carefully packing the weave with a comb. All steps of the manufacturing process for Tow-Bafi are performed entirely by hand and foot using the traditional textile machine known as Chahar Verdi. In addition to its rich handicraft heritage, Khorashad has been increasingly attracting tourists and researchers interested in cultural preservation and sustainable village development. Visitors can witness firsthand the meticulous process of Tow-Bafi and engage with local artisans, gaining insight into a craft that has been passed down through generations. The village also hosts seasonal festivals celebrating its textiles, agricultural products, and historical heritage, making Khorashad not only a center of artistic excellence but also a vibrant hub for cultural tourism in eastern Iran.