

Ardabil turns local festivals into tourism brands

Iranica Desk

Ardabil Province's climate, border location, geographical features, diverse attractions, tourism investments and the popularity of its resorts and scenic destinations have helped turn local traditions and events into distinctive tourism brands across its counties.

The national registration of 15 festivals in the province underscores their importance in showcasing Ardabil's cultural identity and local potential, according to IRNA.

Jalil Jabari, director-general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization in Ardabil Province, said 45 events related to the province had been registered on the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' official events calendar. Most are held as festivals aimed at promoting tourism opportunities, including the national Khalkhal Walnut Festival.

Jabari said the public had warmly welcomed tourism events, particularly festivals, adding that such programs help introduce local attractions and ultimately attract investment, encourage entrepreneurship and develop tourism infrastructure.

He said the establishment of a committee to develop tourism infrastructure in Ardabil was being pursued as a key priority of the ministry. The initiative is expected to help expand tourism facilities and supporting infrastructure.

Jabari also stressed the need to hold a conference focused on generating ideas for tourism development. He said a thorough assessment was needed to determine why some counties, including Khalkhal, had yet to reach their full potential in attracting visitors and expanding tourism, despite their exceptional natural and cultural assets.



Tourism is one of the main drivers of development in Ardabil Province, and demand for investment in the sector has increased in recent years, he said. Sareyn, one of the province's major tourism destinations and investment hubs, has established a strong position in attracting visitors and travelers. According to Jabari, the main aim of the festivals is to stimulate tourism and reduce the province's reliance on seasonal travel. A tourism events calendar has therefore been drawn up to coordinate programs across the province, showcase

local strengths and attract investors.

Beyond promoting investment and entrepreneurship, the festivals also foster social vitality and cohesion. The strong turnout of residents, visitors and tourists reflects their growing popularity.

Jabari said the events were designed to highlight agricultural, natural, historical and religious

attractions while creating opportunities for greater social engagement among different sections of society.

Yahya Najjar-Ghabel said festivals such as the Nir Aash Festival, the Somarin Walnut Festival and the Nemahil Pomegranate Festival provided opportunities to showcase the diverse assets of different counties across the province.

One of the defining features of Ardabil's tourism festivals is the large number of residents and visitors who attend them. Jabari said the crowds at these events demonstrated their widespread

appeal.

The variety of vehicle registration plates, he added, showed that many people from Ardabil and other provinces — sometimes traveling from distant parts of the country — returned to their hometowns to take part in the festivals.

Public participation extends beyond attending the events, he said, with local communities



● IRNA

and private-sector businesses also playing an active role in organizing and running them.

Jabari noted that more than 90 tourism projects were currently under way across Ardabil Province, with private-sector investment. Demand for investment in the sector had doubled compared with previous years, he added.

He attributed the increase to investment returns and the availability of favorable conditions for tourism development. The province's tourism investment committee is working to establish the necessary foundations

and ease the process for economic operators seeking to enter the sector.

Holding festivals at the local level has also strengthened public participation, supported the development of local tourism brands and created opportunities for local artists and cultural organizations.

Ardabil's tourism festivals serve purposes beyond recreation:

they also promote local destinations and generate economic activity. Their impact can be seen in rural livelihoods and the growth of local economies.

Referring to the Pomegranate Festival in Nemahil village, Khalkhal, Jabari said the event had helped farmers sell their produce. This year, some of the pomegranate harvest was sold directly at the orchards.

He added that the festivals offered a platform to showcase the province's lesser-known attractions and capabilities. However, he said, stronger promotion and more accurate information

about tourism destinations were needed to develop the sector and reduce its seasonal nature. The province's festival calendar shows that events are held across the region, each drawing on the distinctive advantages of its host area.

Ardabil Governor Masoud Emami-Yeganeh has also highlighted the province's capacity to host national and international events, pledging support from the provincial administration. He described cultural and tourism festivals as drivers of social vitality and valuable opportunities for investment in tourism.

Emami-Yeganeh said tourism accounted for the largest share of investment in the province and that the authorities welcomed private-sector investors and entrepreneurs by seeking to ease investment conditions and remove obstacles.

He also called for specialized training courses for tourism business operators and managers of tourism facilities and accommodation establishments. Such training, he said, would help improve not only the festivals but also the quality and capacity of services for receiving, accommodating, guiding and catering to visitors, enabling Ardabil to strengthen its position as a tourism destination.

Ardabil Province, home to more than 1.28 million people across 12 counties, is located in northwestern Iran. Its natural, historical, religious and economic attractions make it one of the country's major tourism destinations.



● chntn.ir

Ilam seeks to expand handicrafts market in Iraq

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The director-general of Ilam Province's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has announced the holding of the province's 73rd handicrafts exhibition in Wasit, Iraq, emphasizing the importance of developing target markets and showcasing the province's artistic capabilities in the neighboring country.

Farzad Sharifi said the contin-

ued presence of local artisans and Ilam handicraft products in the Iraqi market offers a valuable opportunity to introduce traditional local arts, expand cultural exchanges and create new sales opportunities for the province's craftspeople, according to chntn.ir.

He added that handicrafts, beyond their cultural significance and role in preserving local identity, represent an important economic asset for the province.

With proper planning and expanded sales markets, the sector can contribute to boosting production, creating sustainable jobs and increasing artisans' incomes.

Referring to the cultural ties between Ilam Province and Iraq, as well as their shared border, Sharifi said making use of these connections and pursuing a targeted presence in markets across neighboring Iraqi provinces could help showcase the

capabilities of Ilam's craftspeople and expand commercial opportunities in the handicrafts sector.

He noted that supporting artisans, providing suitable platforms for displaying their products and expanding the presence of the province's handicrafts in regional markets are among the department's key priorities. These efforts aim to strengthen the cultural economy and support local producers.

Persian Gulf's traditional boatbuilding skills at risk of disappearing

Iranica Desk

The traditional knowledge of Lenj boatbuilding and seafaring in the Persian Gulf tells the story of communities that learned to navigate the sea by observing nature and passing practical knowledge from one generation to the next. Today, this maritime heritage faces the challenge of remaining a living tradition rather than becoming a memory preserved only in historical records.

Ali Pouzan, project manager of the Guran Living Boatbuilding Museum on Qeshm Island, has highlighted the importance of preserving traditional Lenj boatbuilding and navigation, which UNESCO inscribed in 2011 on its List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. He has also pointed to efforts to revive the craft on Qeshm Island and warned that greater attention is needed to prevent the loss of this indigenous knowledge,

ISNA wrote.

Qeshm Island, where the sea has long shaped livelihoods and community life, remains closely connected to this tradition. The skills involved extend well beyond the construction of wooden vessels, encompassing navigation, weather forecasting, maritime terminology, oral traditions, music and customs associated with life at sea.

According to UNESCO, traditional Iranian Lenj boats have been used for sea journeys, trade, fishing and pearl diving. Before modern navigation systems became widespread, sailors relied on observations of the sun, moon and stars to determine their position. They also interpreted wind patterns, wave heights and changes in water color to anticipate weather conditions. This knowledge, developed through experience and transmitted orally, enabled sailors to navigate the waters of the Persian Gulf without relying on modern instruments.

The tradition also has a strong

cultural dimension. Work songs, stories, ceremonies and specialized maritime vocabulary form part of the knowledge associated with Lenj boats. These practices reflect how seafaring shaped not only the economy of coastal communities but also their social relationships and cultural identity.

The UNESCO nomination dossier refers to the Persian Gulf more than 100 times. It also mentions the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa. The inscription recognizes the cultural importance of traditional boatbuilding and navigation and their contribution to the identity of the communities that sustain them.

However, the tradition faces significant practical challenges. UNESCO has identified the declining number of practitioners, the ageing of experienced boatbuilders and sailors, and the replacement of wooden vessels with cheaper fiberglass alternatives as major threats. The spread of modern navigation



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technology has also reduced the everyday use of some traditional skills.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to preserve old boats, but to ensure that the knowledge required to build, maintain and sail them continues to be practiced and passed on. In its assessments of Iran's safeguarding efforts, UNESCO has highlighted the importance of docu-

mentation, training, educational initiatives and opportunities for experienced practitioners to teach younger generations.

The ports of Guran on Qeshm Island and Kong remain important centers associated with traditional wooden boatbuilding and seafaring. Their future depends on whether the craft can retain a practical role in coastal communities while adapting to

changing economic and technological conditions.

Preserving this heritage requires more than recording its history. It means supporting the people who possess the knowledge, creating opportunities for apprentices to learn the craft and safeguarding the maritime traditions that connect generations of Persian Gulf communities to the sea.