Mehregan highlights Iran's rich heritage of harvest, friendship



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Mehregan, one of Iran's oldest festivals and a symbol of friendship, loyalty and gratitude for nature's blessings and agricultural produce, was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2024. The decision was made by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage during its 19th session, held in Asunción, Paraguay, from December 2 to 6, 2024, as part of efforts to introduce one of Iran's long-standing cultural traditions to the world.

Mehregan has deep roots in Iran's history and culture. Historical accounts point to elaborate celebrations during the Sassanid era, while the origins of the festival are also associated with the Achaemenid period. In Iranian mythology, the festival is linked to Fereydun's victory over Zahhak. The name Mehregan is derived from "Mehr," a concept associated in Iranian culture with covenant, loyalty and love, according to chtn.ir.



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The festival is celebrated from October 2 to November 2, coinciding with the autumn harvest season. It is an occasion to give thanks for the bounty of the land and divine blessings. From this perspective, Mehregan is more than a seasonal celebration; it is a tradition that recalls the bond between human beings and nature, bringing together the joy of the harvest, gratitude and social solidarity.

Mehregan is also associated with peace, friendship and social cohesion. Exchanging gifts and generosity are among the festival's traditions, helping strengthen social ties and promote kindness among people. Sometimes referred to as the "autumn Nowruz," the festival provides an opportunity for people from different communities to gather and foster unity.

One expression of this solidarity is the participation of Muslims and Zoroastrians in shared celebrations. During the festival, people gather around a common table and enjoy seasonal produce, including pomegranates, grapes, apples and wheat. Music and singing, gift-giving, and sporting competitions, including traditional wrestling, are also among the activities associated with Mehregan. Despite the passage of centuries, the festival continues to be observed in different parts of Iran. Its customs, from communal gatherings and hospitality to music and gift-giving, help preserve and pass on this cultural heritage. The inscription of Mehregan on UNESCO's list offers an opportunity to introduce a tradition shaped by the relationship between nature, gratitude, friendship and social coexistence, and sustained throughout Iranian culture.

UNESCO's official record identifies Mehregan as a joint nomination by Iran and Tajikistan. It describes the celebration as an autumn harvest festival observed annually from 2 October to 2 November, when communities give thanks for their crops and livestock. The rituals and foods associated with the celebration vary according to local customs and religious beliefs.

According to UNESCO, Zoroastrian communities may recite passages from their holy book, while Muslim participants recite special prayers. Both communities share the custom of setting a table with seasonal produce and food items. UNESCO's description mentions pomegranates, watermelons, pears, citrus fruits, grapes, apples, rice and wheat, as well as prepared dishes, nuts, sweets and special drinks.

The UNESCO record also notes that Mehregan celebrations can include theatre, local sports, flower exhibitions and the display or sale of handicrafts and related products. The knowledge and skills associated with the festival are passed down through storytelling and participation in organizing and carrying out the celebrations; schools and higher education institutions also contribute to this process.

Experience history, culture of Kahneh in Fars Province

Iranica Desk

The historical heritage and tourist attractions of Fars Province are by no means limited to a few well-known destinations and cities. For those passionate about historical tourism and fascinated by exploring the surviving monuments of ancient times, Kahneh is an excellent choice.

Evaz, a small town in southern Fars Province, lies near Lar, approximately 340 kilometers from Shiraz. The journey takes around four to five hours, according to IRNA.

Kahneh is located just 16 kilometers from the town of Evaz. In less than 20 minutes, visitors can reach this historic village, where several remarkable heritage sites await them.

A visit to Kahneh offers an opportunity to explore a historic caravanserai, see an ancient bathhouse and water reservoir, stroll through the traditional village quarter and visit an archaeological mound. This one-day excursion is sure to be a memorable experience for anyone interested in historical tourism.

Amid the palm groves of Evaz, the echoes of Safavid-era caravans seem to linger around an old caravanserai in Kahneh. Visitors interested in historical tourism can spend several hours exploring the site and imagining the journeys of the caravans that once passed through it.

Caravanserais held an important place in Iranian social life and were among the country's essential public facilities. They were particularly vital in Iran's hot and arid regions, providing shelter for travelers and making journeys through these challenging climates easier.





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Most of the caravanserais in Fars Province were built during the Safavid period, many of them in the southern part of the province. Merbet Caravanserai (known also as Marboot Caravanserai) is among these historic structures.

Caravans travelling from the ports towards Jahrom would pass through several caravanserais along the route, including those in Gerash and Lar, the caravanserai west of Evaz and, eventually, Merbet. From there, the route continued towards Banaruiyeh (also known as Bonaruyeh) through the Bazen and Mansourabad mountain passes.

Built along the historic route connecting the Persian Gulf ports with Iran's central regions, Merbet Caravanserai was part of the wider network of Safavid's Shah Abbas-era caravanserais. It stands at the entrance to the Merbet and Bazen mountain passes and has a rectangular



layout.

The building has only one entrance, a design feature that allowed better control over arrivals and departures and consequently enhanced the security of the complex.

The caravanserai features a rectangular plan centered on an open courtyard, with corridor-like spaces surrounding it. Its central ivan (a vaulted hall open at one end) is flanked by two chambers. Other architectural elements include a domed ceiling, arches, vaulted structures and recessed niches beneath barrel vaults along three sides.

The building is adorned with characteristic elements of Safavid architecture, including squinches and karbandi, a traditional Iranian technique of decorative vault construction.

The eastern and western wings each contain three chambers. The lower sections of these rooms were, at some point, coated with gypsum plaster up to the springing line of the arches. The chambers were generally built several steps above the courtyard level. This arrangement helped prevent rainwater and mud from entering the rooms while also keeping them somewhat protected from dust rising from the courtyard.

The caravanserai's loading and unloading area is located in the center of the courtyard, with a small entrance on its northern side. A well is also situated nearby.

Although parts of this Safavid-style caravanserai have deteriorated, including sections of the eastern roof and three of its domes, the surviving structure still offers visitors an opportunity to imagine travelling alongside the caravans of the Safavid era.

According to local tradition, the building was constructed in the late Safavid period and was primarily used as a Chaparkhaneh, a postal relay station where fresh horses were kept for couriers.

The extensive corridor along the southern side of the caravanserai lends some credibility to this interpretation. The Safavid structure may therefore have served a dual purpose, functioning both as a caravanserai and a postal relay station.

Another major historical attraction of Kahneh is its traditional village fabric, which offers visitors an opportunity to walk through a landscape shaped by centuries of history.

The old quarter is a treasure trove of historic houses, a shrine, mosques and other traditional structures. Together, these buildings form a historically significant architectural ensemble that is being considered for inclusion on Iran's National Heritage List.

Beyond its historic alleyways, visitors can explore the shrine of Imamzadeh Sheikh Abi Ishaq, the Jaame Mosque and traditional houses dating back to the Qajar period. These attractions are sure to capture visitors' attention and encourage them to extend their stay in Evaz by several hours.

With approximately 800 households, Kahneh is situated along a mountainside, while its old quarter stretches across the lower slopes.

Historical evidence suggests that two towers built on the mountain overlooking the village once served as watchtowers, protecting this historic settlement. Indeed, the village's name is also believed to be connected to these structures.

Since the word Kahneh in the Pahlavi language is said to mean a fortress or tower, it appears that the village may have taken its name from the towers standing above its historic quarter.

These historic fortifications have also been documented and are expected to be included in the comprehensive heritage dossier for Kahneh, with the aim of securing their registration on Iran's National Heritage List in the near future.

All these attractions are concentrated within a single village, offering visitors to southern Fars a unique opportunity to explore several historical heritage sites during a one-day excursion. For travelers seeking to discover destinations beyond the province's better-known tourist attractions, Kahneh offers a fascinating journey into the region's history, architecture and traditional way of life.