

ICHHTO Plans Summer Festivals

Deputy head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said 220 cultural, artistic and recreational programs and festivals are scheduled country-wide during summer.

Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh told a press conference that the summer programs include festivals of music, traditional cuisine, calligraphy, fishing, Tazieh (ritual plays performed to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hossein (AS), the third Shiite Imam), traditional arts, handicrafts and tribal lifestyle exhibits.

According to the official, a total 6.6 billion rials has been set aside for these events, IRNA reported.

He added that the summer festivals were planned by the National Taskforce to Facilitate Travels in an effort to help domestic tourism to flourish. In this line, travelers will be provided with economical travel facilities.

The official said private enterprises had expressed readiness to make their amenities available at discount rates, while governmental bodies had also pledged to pay part of travel expenses.

Turning to a scheme to grant travel vouchers to state employees, Malekzadeh noted that the plan was being studied by the cabinet.

He added that the plan would become operational once it is endorsed by the government.

IRNA earlier quoted ICHHTO as saying that all state-run bodies would be obliged to pay 25 percent of travel costs of their employees in the form of vouchers.

The organization would also undertake 35 percent of the travel expenses of government employees.

Museum Staff to Be Trained

Managing director of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization's Educational Planning Office unveiled a plan to hold training courses at museums across the country.

Morteza Ahmadi told ISNA that the classes are

aimed at raising the quality of museum services for visitors.

He noted that the courses are organized with eight different orientations including museum management, educating curators and museum attendants as well as public relations personnel.

The official added that two courses are scheduled during the current Iranian year (started March 21) and two are planned for the next year. Insisting that High Council of Educational Planning for Museums considers promotion in museum standards as a key factor in tourism

promotion, Ahmadi said at present the courses' syllabi are under compilation.

According to the official, the syllabi of courses designed for museum managers, curators and attendants would be prepared in compliance with global standards and methodology.

Border Amenities For Pilgrims



A domestic company, Shamsa, intends to build prayer halls, toilet facilities and water coolers at the western Mehran border area in Ilam province to be used by pilgrims on their way to Iraqi pilgrimage sites, ISNA wrote.

The company's managing director, Mostafa Mohazzab, said Shamsa has also undertaken to cover an area of 500x40 sq.m. with sun shades 11 km off Mehran border to make the pilgrims' stopover at Iran-Iraq border a more comfortable one.

He noted that 30 comfort stations with tap water would be constructed some 80 km off Iraq border.

Mohazzab stated that no public conveniences and welfare amenities have yet been provided by the Iraqi government along roads leading to the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.

"Lack of service areas, public toilets in particular, along routes linking Iran

to Iraqi cities of Karbala and Najaf creates problems for pilgrims, especially during hot summer days. This prompted Shamsa Company, affiliated to Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, to construct such amenities," the official elaborated.

Pointing to the small number of police forces stationed in border areas, he proposed that more police personnel be assigned to the area to accelerate the procedures for the departure of pilgrims.

Mohazzab cited negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran Police based on which IRIP is promised to reinforce its security staff at border points.

He stated that about 25 40-seat Iranian buses are headed through Mehran and Shalamchah borders toward Iraq's holy cities daily. Also about 2,300 Iraqis enter Iran per day to go on pilgrimage to national holy cities.



Naraq Jame' Mosque

Naraq Jame' Mosque is located in the city's old quarter. The mosque was built in 1822. A Hosseiniyeh (a place where religious mourning and chest-beating ceremonies are held) and Haj Mahdi Cistern (Ab Anbar) sit near the mosque. Part of the mosque's yard was destroyed as a result of the urban sprawl. The mosque has two women-exclusive parlors on eastern and western wings of the building with entrances into the courtyard—which were blocked in the course of developments in recent years.

The mosque is a rectangular structure with 18 domes. Its ceiling sits on eight octagonal columns. Its altar was decorated with tiles in contemporary times. The mosque has two carved wooden doors on its northern side. The monument was registered on the National Heritage List in 2001. The city of Narraq is located near Kashan in Isfahan province.

Ecotourism Can Bring Solace To Urban Dwellers

Ecotourism industry can provide fatigued urban dwellers with an alternative to spend their leisure hours in the heart of nature and away from the hectic city life, an associate professor with Mashhad's Ferdowsi University said.

In an interview with IRNA, Mohammad Jafar Zomorrodian said the urban spread has brought about numerous environmental ramifications including air and noise pollution.

The expert observed that the boring and bustling urban lifestyle stresses out citizens, prompting planners to focus on ways that can restore mental health

and calm to denizens more than ever before.

He stressed that nature-based tourism, known as ecotourism, has gained momentum globally as a way of relieving the strains and stresses associated with the artificial living environments.

Zomorrodian cited the World Trade Organization's figures based on which ecotourism rate is increasing.

He explained that although since ancient times, the Persian culture has laid emphasis on touring and respecting the nature through traditional customs such as Sizdah Bedar—the last day of Iranian New Year holidays spent outdoors in parks, beaches and green areas—the modern approach toward nature-based tourism has not been yet inculcated among domestic travelers.

The expert is of the opinion that boasting deep valleys, riveting caves, picturesque mountainous landscapes, ravishing waterfalls, beautiful sandy beaches and vast desert areas, the country has the potential to become a key ecotourism destination.

Ventures Proposed on Bushehr Coasts

Persian Gulf coasts in southern Bushehr province boast unique natural potentials for being converted into a tourism-wooding region.

Making the remark, advisor to Bushehr Department of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism, Bahman Niroumand, proposed that measures be

adopted to draw the attention of investors to the intact coasts of the Persian Gulf. "This takes on added significance if we consider that the Caspian Sea

shores in north of the country have been used to full capacity and the area is short of expanses of land to be used for setting up tourism amenities," he analyzed, IRNA reported.

Bushehr province, stretched along a 625-kilometer strip, boasts hundreds of natural beautiful landscapes that can be exploited to generate tourism revenues, if equipped with recreational and accommodation facilities.

"Despite having few recreational and accommodation centers, Genaveh Port in Bushehr exerts a pull on more than one million tourists per year," Niroumand said, adding two model tourism zones sites are planned in Genaveh.

He noted that should the new ventures in Genaveh's tourism sector materialize, there will be a substantial rise in the number of tourists flocking to the port city all year long.

"Several foreign and domestic investors have already expressed readiness to invest in Bushehr tourism industry," he said, adding however that the required infrastructure including water, electricity and roads have not been yet provided.

"An Iranian enterprise has proposed to make an investment worth 500 billion rials in Mir Mohanna tourism zone provided the area is supplied with water, electricity and a roads network," Niroumand said.

Mir Mohanna and Jofeir are two model tourist zones in Genaveh Port in Bushehr province, he added.



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Miriam Beard (American writer, 1903-83):

Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.



A family visiting the historic Shokatiyeh School, Birjand, South Khorasan province (Fars Photo)

Close to 300,000 tourists visit the fascinating Kandovan village in East Azarbaijan province each year, head of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department told

Kandovan Draws 300,000 Sightseers p.a.

IRNA. Reza Ebadi noted. "The unique village is considered as one of the nation's important sightseeing places, which requires that sufficient investment be made in the region to reinforce tourism infrastructure."

Highlighting that the village should be made known to the world through copious marketing and promotional campaigns, he said the department is presently examining a number of proposals in this regard.

He explained. "The mentioned schemes give priority to peace and security for locals and a rise in their incomes."

The astonishing village



A view of Kandovan village in East Azarbaijan province

carved in stiff rocks is located 50 km south of Tabriz. Situated in a valley, it is covered with snow almost all year long.

The village boasts a fountain which inhabitants believe has healing effects,

especially on kidney and liver stones.

The rocky architecture with wooden ceiling is one of the rarest of its kind used for living. The walls of the houses are all from stone and even the entrance to old

houses is a low-height single piece of stone, to pass through which one has to bend.

A small local population lives in the natural caves, subsisting through farming and animal husbandry.

EU Supports Bosnian Promotion

The European Union said it had granted 3.8 million euros (\$4.9 million) to help improve Bosnia's tourism industry, still suffering 11 years after an inter-ethnic war in the country.

The funding was assigned to "support the economic development of Bosnia, especially the tourist potential of this country," the European Commission said in a statement.

The money is to be used to improve tourist infrastructure, strengthen tourist services, boost personnel skills and marketing, and put up a network of signposts, it added, AFP quoted.

"Official statistics show that Bosnian tourism's occupancy rate currently stands at 14 percent," said Goran Brckalovic, head of tourism in the country's chamber of commerce.

A total of 181,000 tourists visited Bosnia in the first five months of the year, according to the chamber.

The industry earned the former Yugoslav republic 136 million convertible marks (69.5 million euros, \$88 million) last year.

Bosnia is still recovering from the devastating effects of its 1992-1995 war that claimed up to 200,000 lives and left its economy in ruins.