



Tourists at Sialk ancient hills, Kashan, Isfahan province

Kashan Visitors Up 25%

Close to 700,000 tourists have visited historic monuments in Kashan, Isfahan province, since the beginning of this year (March 20). Deputy head of Kashan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, Mehran Sarmadian, added, "Of this number, 8,000 were foreign tourists mainly from the Netherlands, France and Germany."

He noted that the number of visitors to Kashan monuments showed a 25-percent increase compared to the same period of

last year, IRNA reported.

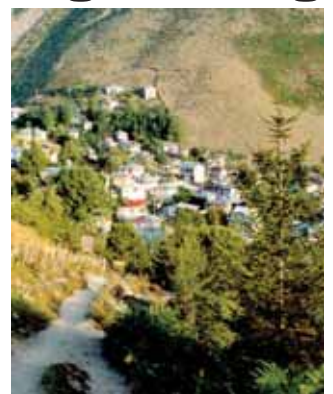
"The tourists visited Sialk ancient hills, Fin Garden, Jalali Fortress, old bazaar as well as the city's rampart wall," he said.

Sarmadian noted that foreign and domestic tourists also paid visits to Boroujerdi and Ameri historic mansions.

"Fin Garden, Fin Bath, Boroujerdi Mansion, National Museum and Ameri Mansion attracted the largest number of visitors respectively," he said.

There are more than 1,000 historic sites in Kashan, 158 of which have been registered in the National Heritage List.

Sightseeing



Javaherdeh Village

Javaherdeh (literally meaning the jewel village) lies 27 km west of Ramsar in the Caspian province of Mazandaran. The lush village perched atop Alborz heights is classified among Iran's most beautiful villages.

Over half an hour drive from Ramsar will take sightseers to the delicate summing place. It is located at a height of 1,800 meters, far from the bustle of the coastal city. Vacationers appreciate the tranquility and grandiose scenery of this rural setting. Travelers can have a great time by settling in the suites of Hotel Javaher. Javaherdeh's balmy summer weather, Safaroud River, streams as well as forest park can magnetize sightseers of all tastes.

Although located on the elevation, it is quite close to the Caspian seashore. The village is blanketed with snow half a year and is green and pleasant in spring and summer. The spa waters and Jame' Mosque are interesting places that one must not miss when visiting this place. Mountaineering, trekking and horse riding are enjoyable sports of the region.

This village has historical aspects as well. It used to be an ancient Zoroastrian burial site where the dead were laid to rest with a great amount of jewelry.

Some 32 ecotourism regions have been identified in Yazd province, head of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department told IRNA. Azizollah Seifi noted these regions, some of which have favorable climatic conditions, boast natural as well as valuable historic attractions.

He named the villages of Dehbala, Sanich, Banadkouk, Aliabad and Nasrabad in Taft as top ecotourism regions. Taft enjoys natural appeals, orchards as well as Shirkouh heights.

Yazd Rich in Ecotourism

Seifi referred to Gharbalbiz and Saryazd as villages in Mehriz which have picturesque desert views and stary nights.

Kharanaq is a marvelous desert village in Ardakan which has valuable historic monuments and natural attractions, he explained.

The official said that Fahraj village home to one of the oldest mosques, Bafq's Hassanabad hills, Khatam's Harat Forest Park, Abarkouh's 4,000-year-old pine tree and Tabas forests are other local ecotourism draws.

He continued that 18 villages including Saryazd, Herafteh, Bondarabad, Hoojatabad, Dehbala, Tezjeran, Bideh, Hassanabad, Shamsi, Gharbalbiz, Naiband, Banadkouk and Eslamieh have been designated as model tourism zones.

Every village has a tourism identification document recording information such as population, location, public facilities, climate, souvenirs and dialects.



The 4,000-year-old pine tree in Abarkouh, Yazd province

Five-Star Hotel On Isfahan's Soffeh Mount

A five-star hotel will be constructed on the slope of Soffeh Mount in the historic city of Isfahan, managing director of Homa Hotel Group said.

As reported by ISNA, Mohammad Mehdi Rahmania said at a press conference that the 200-room hotel will be extended over an area of 50,000 square meters.

Feasibility studies are currently being conducted, he stated, adding negotiations are also underway over the number of stories the hotel can have.

The official said the Isfahan Municipality has imposed restrictions on the number of stories new buildings in the city are authorized to have.

"But this hotel will be built out of the city on the Soffeh Mount slope," Rahmania explained, pointing out that the hotel should not be subjected to municipal restrictions.

Turning to restoration of Homa hotels in different cities, the official said that Bandar Abbas' Homa Hotel had been renovated in 2004-05 with a credit of 20 billion rials.

Changes will be made to the interior design of Shiraz's Homa Hotel by the yearend (March 20), he said, adding Homa hotels in Mashhad are relatively new and need no restoration.

"The group has plans to expand Tehran's Homa

Hotel building. There will be no need for restoration in the short term provided the project is implemented in time."

Rahmania explained that the group has currently no plans for construction of transit hotels at the country's airports.

The official, however, stressed that the entity affiliated to the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran would welcome proposals to launch transit hotels near airports.

Rahmania unveiled that the government intends to cede construction of a five-star hotel near Imam Khomeini International Airport to private entrepreneurs.

Chaharmahal Sport Potential Untapped

Boasting over 20 peaks, two overflowing rivers, three international wetlands, lush meadows, two ski pistes and seven horse-

racing clubs, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, lying in the heart of the stately Zagros mountain range, can turn into a sport tourism hub.



Cheghakhor Wetland in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province

An expert with Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department observed that this western province has numerous capabilities for magnetizing sport fans.

Hamid Amini, a sport tourism specialist with the department, told IRNA that adventurous people can go kayaking and canoeing in provincial rivers.

Green meadows surrounding Cheghakhor Wetland, Alouni, Khammirza and Razi plains are apt for archery and shooting, he noted.

"But these potentials have remained largely untapped," he regretted.

According to the official, winter sports fans can ski in two pistes of the mountainous province, famous for its snow-clad summits.

Amini noted that the province can turn into a destination for tourists who appreciate cool and salubrious climate.

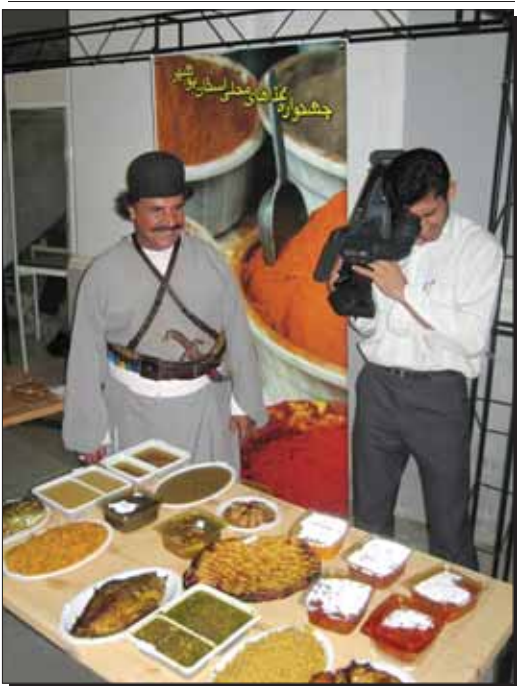
"Sports be it professional, amateur or a hobby prompt a substantial number of people around the globe to travel every year," he stated.

"So it is time Iranians capitalized on this lucrative industry," Amini insisted that the province can earn more money from sport tourism than any other tourism sector.

Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the \$4.5 trillion global travel and tourism industry. By 2011, travel and tourism is expected to account for more than 10 percent of the global gross domestic product.

Gertrude Stein (American writer & poet, 1874-1946):

When you get there, there isn't any there there.



Traditional Cuisine Festival was held at Bushehr Cultural/Artistic Complex on Sept. 27, marking the World Tourism Day. (Photo by Abbas Heydari)

Iranian Cyclists On European Tour

Two Iranian cyclists launched a tour of European countries from the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini (RA) in Tehran on Sept. 27, marking the World Tourism Day, IRNA reported.

Secretary of Sport Tourism Promotion Committee affiliated to Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, Kambiz Babaei, noted that the team named "The Persian Gulf Men" have chosen "Tourism, Peace and Friendship" as the theme of their journey.

The athletes identified as Abouzar Taqipour and Gholamreza Jalili are to cycle 15,000 km crossing 24 European nations.

"They are to present plaques from Isfahan Municipality to mayors of European capitals," Babaei noted.

The one-year tour has been jointly organized by ICHHTO, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Isfahan Municipality.

Record Q1 Arrivals in S. Africa

Top Ten Target for 2010

More than 2.7 million tourists visited South Africa between January and April, reflecting a 16-percent increase over the first quarter of last year, tourism minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk said, AFP wrote.

"With just over 2.7 million arrivals from January to April, this is the first time we have broken through the 2.5 million mark in the first four months of the year," he

said.

"This figure compares very favorably with our first quarter arrivals of 1998, which stood at just over 1.8 million. We have seen a 16-percent increase in arrivals across all territories compared to the same period last year."

"The largest component of this growth comes from the Africa and the Middle East region, which was 21.9 percent higher confirming the importance of this sector to our continued success," he said. "The region showing the second largest growth at 7.1 percent was Asia and Australasia."

Earlier the minister had said that South Africa aimed to become one of the world's top 10 business conference destinations by 2010, the year it hosts the Football World

Cup.

"This year, the global conference and meetings sector is forecast to comprise 10 percent of the estimated \$672 billion (530 billion euros) being generated from travel and tourism activity," he said recently.

Van Schalkwyk said South Africa was currently rated the world's 32nd leading conference destination by the International Congress and Convention Association and "we have declared our intention of breaking into the top 10 by 2010."

South Africa currently attracts 63 percent of all conferences held in Africa, helping support 12,000 jobs and contributing 2.6 billion rand (\$353 million) annually to gross domestic product, according to the minister.

Only 300 Licensed Guides Active

Only 300 out of the 3,500 licensed professional tour guides are currently providing services to travelers, secretary of Iran Tour Guides Society said.

In an interview with IRNA, Amir Hossein Arbabian blamed a decline in foreign tour arrivals, especially after the September 11, 2001 incidents, and the unpopularity of group travels among Iranian families as the reasons behind the poor job market for guides.

The official explained that a substantial number of guides had lost their jobs in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks which caused the tour arrivals to plummet.

Arbabian recalled that only 800 of the 2,500 licensed guides applied for extension of their cards a year after 9/11 incidents. "This means that 1,700 guides got unemployed due to the collapse of tourism industry," the official analyzed.

He put the number of licensed guides at more than 3,500 at present of whom 1,800 are willing to extend their cards.

Arbabian observed that lack of organized planning to tap tourism potentials is a blow to the industry.

He stated that the job market would not improve, unless the number of foreign tourists increases and the nation becomes more inclined to travel.