

Isfahan, Bandar Abbas: discover enchanting cities of crafts and folk arts



TEHRAN - If you are looking to immerse yourself in the rich cultural heritage of Iran, two cities that should be on the top of your list are Isfahan and Bandar Abbas.

These remarkable cities have been recognized by UNESCO and included in its prestigious list of City of Crafts and Folk Arts, for their outstanding contribution to preserving and promoting traditional craftsmanship.

Isfahan, known as "Nesf-e Jahan" (Half of the World), is a treasure trove of architectural wonders and a hub of handicrafts. It is sometimes referred to as the crown jewel of Iran's handicraft industry, where its artisans do their best to safeguard know-how passed down from generation to generation.

The city was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons.

As a Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art, Isfahan envisages developing the capacities of artists and creative entrepreneurs by providing financial support and training in management and marketing through the Creative Isfahan Plan, launched by the Municipality in 2014.

Bandar Abbas, situated on the southern coast of Iran, has long been a hub for trade and commerce, attracting an assortment of diverse influences that have shaped its arts and crafts scene.

Bounded by the Persian Gulf, Bandar Abbas is full of history, culture, and natural attractions, with great significance for Iran's economy.

Visitors may roam in local souks where locals sell arrays of goods, from spices and herbs to handmade carpets and jewelry.

The strategic location of Bandar Abbas has

made it an important city throughout the history of Iran. The people of Bandar Abbas are famous for their unmatched kindness and hospitality. They speak Persian with their own special accent, and their interesting culture and traditions are unique in the country.

As a Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art, Bandar Abbas envisages integrating cultural and creative industries into local development programs, transforming the city through cultural values and encouraging the cooperation of all stakeholders to promote international interactions and maintain the human heritage to ensure sustainable development of the city.

Launched in 2004, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) seeks to bolster cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development as regards economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

Nearly 300 cities around the globe that currently make up this network work together towards a common objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level. The network covers seven creative fields namely Crafts and Folk Art, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature, and Music.

The cultural body also aims to strengthen initiatives led by member cities to make creativity an essential component of urban development, notably through partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society.

Moreover, the UCCN helps develop hubs of creativity and innovation and broadens opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector.

'Gateway of Slaves' gives clues about prehistorical urbanization in Achaemenid Iran

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN - Dahana-ye Gholaman - literary translated into "Gateway of Slaves" - is an extraordinary destination in southeast Iran that beckons to history enthusiasts and keen sightseers alike.

This historically significant site offers a compelling journey back in time, shedding light on the nation's complex past that led an urban development during the Achaemenid era (c. 550-330 BC).

Dahana-ye Gholaman holds immense historical importance as it was once an Achaemenid town, which has yielded public buildings and local elements, noticeable especially in the valuable documentation of domestic architecture.

The site is located some two km straight south of the village of Qale-Now ca. 30 km southeast of Zabol in Sistan-Baluchestan province, on a basin originally formed by the waters of the Helmand river, very close to the Afghan frontier.

The archeological site was discovered in 1960 by Umberto Scerrato of the Italian archeological mission.

The excavations, directed by Scerrato, began in 1962 and continued until the end of 1966 under the auspices of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO).

According to Iranica, they revealed an urban settlement of considerable proportions, certainly far more extensive than the architectural remains that have been uncovered. "It is a unique survival from the Achaemenid period and is notable not only for its size but also for its internal differentiation by function, reflected in the presence of large public buildings and an extensive residential area."

The other Achaemenid settlement in the area, located in the eastern and Afghan part of the province and excavated by Roman Ghirshman, does not share the same features,



although a comparative study of pottery from the two sites shows these obvious similarities.

Combined with other items, including seals, arrowheads, building plans, and pottery from other sites in Afghanistan Sistan, they make it possible to pinpoint the foundation of Dahana-ye Gholaman to the 6th or the beginning of the 5th century BC.

As mentioned by the prestigious Encyclopedia, the size of the inhabited area that has been found is remarkable: 1.5 km long from east to west and 300 to 800 m wide. Archaeological excavations have revealed that the city was founded according to a unified plan, and have also identified at least two major stages of construction.

"The excavated buildings, constructed of mud brick and pise on a

flat terrace below the desert floor, are distinguished by an absence of stratigraphy."

Studies conducted on the ancient complex, as a whole, suggests an urban foundation laid out according to a well-defined plan and literally built in the wilderness, inhabited for a brief period (a century or a century and a half), and then abandoned as a result of the natural forces that have

The Achaemenid Empire stretched from the Balkans to Central Asia at its peak. It was reportedly the first state model based on diversity and tolerance of different cultures and religions.

always determined the survival and migration of urban settlements in the arid regions of Sistan.

The site, in its heyday, suffered from the instability of the delta and the resulting inevitable changes in irrigation canals, sometimes catastrophic flooding in Helmand, and salinization of the soil.

The residential area, which seems

to have spread over about 100 hectares, is divided into two parts by a terrace. To the west, buildings line an old canal, the road of which can still be tracked; it must have crossed another north-south canal, separating the eastern part of the city.

As for the importance of Dahana-ye Gholaman in relation to Achaemenid Empire, it can be said that it is the sole large provincial capital surviving from the empire and that excavations there have brought to light a combination of "imperial" elements, identified in the public buildings, and local elements, noticeable especially in the valuable documentation of domestic architecture.

Together, these elements, which are both unique and distinctive, ensure the fundamental importance of the site for understanding the origins and evolution of urban settlement on the Persian plateau during the Achaemenid period.

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Ancient potteries, 5000-year-old daggers up for restoration

TEHRAN - Kerman province's tourism department is set to restore a haul of ancient artifacts that includes tens of pottery pieces and two 5000-year-old daggers.

"We consider restoring a haul of ancient artifacts that includes two daggers that date more than 5000 years and pottery pieces discovered by both illegal excavators and authorizes archaeologists," the deputy provincial tourism chief said on Saturday.

Restoration of 60 relics will be completed by the year-end (March 19, 2024), Mojtaba Shafiei said.

"Those earthen objects bear considerable cultural values. They have been made through different methods; by potters' wheel and or marly by hand."

Kerman province is something of a cultural melting pot, blending various regional cultures

over time. It is also home to rich tourist spots and historical sites, including bazaars, mosques, caravanserais, and ruins of ancient urban areas.

Kerman is bounded by the provinces of Fars in the west, Yazd in the north, South Khorasan in the northeast, Sistan-Baluchestan in the east, and Hormozgan in the south. It includes the southern part of the central Iranian desert, the Dasht-e Lut.

Archaeologists discover crystal quartz weighing unit

Archaeologists working at Keeladi, a historic excavation site located 12 km southeast of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, have unearthed a crystal quartz weighing unit from the Sangam era.

The weighing unit, found 175 cm beneath the ground, is the first of its kind since excavations began in Keeladi in 2014.

Unique in design, the crystal unit has a somewhat spherical shape.

An official statement from the state archaeology department said that the unit measures two cm in diameter, 1.5 cm in height and weighs a mere eight

grams. In addition, archaeologists also found a terracotta hopsotch, an iron nail, black and red ware, and red slipped ware. Archaeologists also found an earthen snake figurine.

This discovery has stirred excitement among historians and archaeologists as weighing units in the past were primarily made of stones. Even as a detailed assessment on the findings is underway, an expert said they do not know the precise unit that the crystal was used to weigh.

"We can confirm that they were used for weighing purposes. Though we

found stone-made weighing units earlier, these were not rock-made but made of minerals. These weighing units were not used for paddy or vegetables but for weighing high-value items such as gold, precious and semi-precious stones. Crystals or mineral materials are used as weighing units because they give accurate results and do not depend on the climate," said an expert with the state archaeological department.

The crystal quartz unit might have originated in the Kangayam area (near Coimbatore). "Even the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has evidence for this.

There are also studies about the availability of crystal quartz in Karur region," a department expert said. Even as detailed studies are underway, experts estimate that the quartz is probably from a period between 600 BC to 2nd century CE.

Keeladi is currently witnessing the ninth phase of excavations launched by Chief Minister MK Stalin last April. Ongoing archaeological excavations in Keeladi and a few other sites in Tamil Nadu have extended the timeline of the Sangam Era from 300 BC to 600 BC.

(Source: Indian Express)

Business travel recovery stalls as companies seek to cut costs and emissions

The recovery in business travel has stalled this year amid record price rises for premium flights and growing pressure on big companies to cut their carbon emissions.

Europe's three major airline groups reported a drop in the rate of recovery in corporate travel in their most recent earnings, while bookings at U.S. airlines have flatlined over the past year.

According to data from the Global Business Travel Association and CWT, a business travel and meetings company, the average premium-class air fare has risen from \$3,666 in 2019 to \$4,395 this year. Recent price rises are the highest on record, they said.

Robin Hayes, chief executive of JetBlue, said in the U.S. airline's results call this month that the industry was now operating "in a world where business travel may not be coming back".

British Airways owner IAG, Air France-KLM and Lufthansa said bookings from corporate customers were between 60 and 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels in the second quarter, a decline from the first three months of the year, according to calculations from analysts at Bernstein.

IAG chief executive Luis Gallego told analysts that "things are not improving recently" for corporate travel, and that booking volumes have "plateaued", although he highlighted signs of a stronger second half of the year.

The bosses of Air France-KLM and Lufthansa, meanwhile, said they had written off a full recovery in domestic business travel, with Air France cutting capacity on some routes in response.

Across the Atlantic, the post-pandemic recovery has typically outpaced Europe, but business travel

bookings at US airlines have stagnated at 75 percent of 2019 levels since spring 2022, according to analysts at Melius Research.

Paul Abbott, chief executive of American Express Global Business Travel, said multinational companies had been slower to bring back business travel than small- and medium-sized companies, where demand has recovered to 86 percent of 2019 levels, compared to 70 percent for larger corporates.

His company has increased its focus on SMEs and reported record revenues in its most recent quarter.

Some big companies have cut back on travel to reduce their carbon emissions. Relying more on video calls can also save time and money.

(Source: Financial Times)

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