

# IRAN TO BOOST THEIR TOURISM INDUSTRY DESPITE TENSIONS



Iran looks forward to strengthening its relationships with Arab and neighboring countries to boost its tourism industry. Due to the absence of Western tourists, the tourism industry has been struggling to recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic.

Could the allure of Iran's ancient cities and grand landscapes entice Emiratis, Iraqis, and Armenians to visit Isfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad? **Iran is working to expand its tourist offer in the northwestern border regions and on the shores of the Gulf to attract visitors.**

The country boasts a rich culture, friendly locals, and affordable accommodations. These advantages are presented to offset the requirements imposed by the Islamic Republic on travelers, such as wearing a veil and refraining from drinking alcohol or engaging in nightlife. In the less-traveled northwest region, near Turkey, Iraq, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, efforts are being made to promote tourism.

## Geopolitical Tensions

Armenians seem willing to cross the border in the current tense situation between Tehran and Baku. Still, the Azerbaijanis are hesitant due to ongoing conflicts and disagreements between neighboring countries.

According to experts, in the 2010s, many Azerbaijanis sought medical treatment in Tabriz, which helped boost medical tourism in the region. However, in recent years, Iran has seen a decrease in the number of visitors from Europe due to fears and concerns.

## Destination Not Recommended

Over the last two years, several Western capitals have advised citizens not to travel to the country due to the arbitrary detention and arrest risk. These warnings continue to be in effect this summer, despite Tehran's recent release of seven Europeans, some of whom were exchanged for Iranians held in Europe. Nevertheless, approximately twenty Europeans are still held in custody in Iran.

## Europeans Are Poorly Represented

According to experts, Tehran is willing to resolve tensions, but it may take some time before Europeans return in significant numbers.

It has been almost a year since the protest movement began after the tragic death of Mahsa Amini on September 16. **Currently, most tourists visiting Iran are from countries with positive relations, such as China and Russia.**

Iran also seeks to attract visitors from the Gulf countries, particularly the Emirates, to the islands of Kish and Qeshm. These islands offer a relaxed setting with beaches, luxury hotels and shopping centers.

In 2022, the country welcomed 4.1 million foreign visitors, an increase from the epidemic numbers but still considered low.

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