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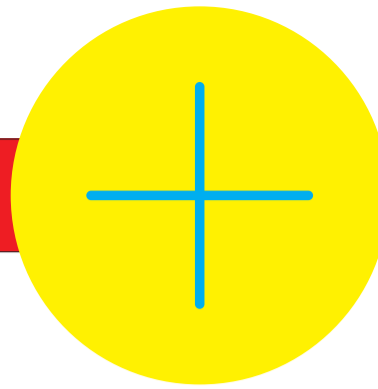
COVID does things to our sleep and even dreams



SCIENCE ALERT - By the end of 2022, more than 650 million COVID infections had been reported to the World Health Organization, and 6.7 million deaths worldwide.

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Qeshm Island
 surfiran.com



Tochal
 iraniantours.com

Travel to Iran in winter

There are two high seasons for tourists to visit Iran: Spring and autumn. Between the end of November and the beginning of March is the low tourist season, while still having bearable temperatures, which is not the case during the summer. Traveling to Iran during the winter can provide you an opportunity to experience activities that you cannot during the rest of the year, including visiting the islands of the Persian Gulf and going into the hot desert of the Kaluts. Moreover, if you think that Iran is a desert area you couldn't be more wrong. Iran is actually a moun-

tainous country, with many peaks over 4000 meters in altitude. There are many ski resorts in Iran, most being open between the end of November and the end of April, depending on the snowfall, surfiran.com reported. If you'd like to ski in Iran visit the country in the winter to avoid the crowd of Norouz (Iranian New Year holidays, March 21-April 2), and avoid the weekends (Thursdays and Fridays). Iranians are fond of skiing, and the resorts located near Tehran quickly get crowded. Every ski resort offers the possibility of renting skis as well as ski

clothing and equipment for a relatively low price. Indeed, one of the things that make skiing in Iran so attractive is its cost, much cheaper than any resort in Europe. Following are the best ski resorts to try out:

Dizin

Located in the Alborz Mountains, an hour and a half from Tehran, Dizin is the biggest ski resort in Iran. It is one of the most important in the Middle East, and among the 40 highest ski resorts in the world.

Tochal

Did you know that you

don't even need to go out of Tehran to go skiing? Tochal is a ski resort located in the northern part of the capital, with the first track starting at 3,850 meters. It's a small resort but, well, it's in the capital city. Furthermore, it offers a breathtaking view of Tehran.

Lut Desert

Dasht-e Lut (Lut Desert) is Iran's largest desert, with an area of 120,000 square kilometers. It's where the hottest temperature on earth has been recorded. Spread between the provinces of Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan and South Khorasan, Lut Desert is

listed as a UNESCO world heritage site. It is famous for its "sand castles," large formations known as Yardang, that create a strange breathtaking landscape.

Qeshm Island

Qeshm Island is the largest in the Persian Gulf. As temperatures can reach up to 50° Celsius in the summer, winter is the perfect time to visit the island. As beaches are many and visitors few, it's possible to swim peacefully with nobody around. From Qeshm, it is also possible to go to Hengam Island, another small island full of pristine sand beaches.



Lut Desert
 visitworldheritage.com



Dizin
 apochi.com

94k int'l students study at Iranian universities: Deputy minister

Over 94,000 foreign students are studying at Iran's universities, 24 percent (27,000 students) of whom are studying at public universities, an official said.

Deputy Minister of Science, Research and Technology and Head of the Student Affairs Organization Hashem Dadashpour made the remarks on the second day of the conference of heads of universities and higher education centers in Tehran on Friday.

He noted that enrolling international students is one of the main priorities of the ministry, and that President Ebrahim Raeisi underlined the need for absorbing foreign students.

A total of 107 universities possess the certificates to enroll international students, Dadashpour said, adding that the ministry is mostly focusing on enrolling students from Iraq and Afghanistan. Iranian universities have enrolled 56,000 students from Iraq and 33,000 students from Afghanistan, while the remaining 5,000 are from other countries. Admission of students from Africa and Latin America has been very low, he warned, saying that only 284 students from Africa and 17 others from Latin America have been registered at Iranian universities.

On the admission of foreign students during the Iranian year which ended on March 20, 2022, he noted that universities in Qom, Mashhad, Uroumeh, Esfahan, Mazandaran, Kordestan, Tabriz, Ahvaz, Sabzevar and Yazd have been the top higher education centers in absorbing foreign students. Nearly 99 percent of international students pay tuition fees, while one percent rely on scholarships, the official mentioned.

Dadashpour also underlined that 27 institutes have been qualified to absorb foreign students so far, and 20 others will get permission to pave the way for enrolling international students at Iranian universities, so the number of these institutes is scheduled to reach 150 by next year.

Iran plans to increase the capacity of absorbing international students to 250,000 within the next three years, with the aim of being ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of providing foreign students with higher education, Dadashpour concluded.



A woman rides a two-wheel tractor in an orange orchard in Mazandaran Province, on January 6, 2023, as the harvest season has started in northern Iran.
 HAVVA AHMADI/MEHR NEWS AGENCY

World No. 1 Alcaraz to miss Australian Open with injury

REUTERS - World number one Carlos Alcaraz will not play in the Australian Open after picking up a right leg muscle injury during pre-season training, the Spaniard said.

"When I was at my best in pre-season, I picked up an injury through a chance, unnatural movement in training. This time it's the semimembranosus muscle in my right leg," he wrote on Twitter on Friday.

"I'd worked so hard to get to my best level for Australia but unfortunately I won't be able to play the Care A2+ Kooyong or the Australian Open. It's tough, but I have to be optimistic, recover and look forward. See you in 2024," he added.

"We're sorry we won't be seeing you this year @carlosalcaraz. Wishing you a swift recovery. See you back on court soon," the official Australian Open account said on Twitter.

The 19-year-old claimed his maiden major title at last year's U.S. Open, which also made him the youngest ever men's world number one.

Before the start of the first Grand Slam of the year, he said he was nearing full fitness ahead of the new season, having missed the ATP Finals and Davis Cup due to an abdominal injury sustained at the Paris Masters.

Alcaraz replaced Russia's Daniil Medvedev at the top

of the rankings after beating Norway's Casper Ruud in the U.S. Open final in September by electrifying the crowd with his acrobatic shot-making, hard-hitting forehand and emphatic fist pumps. Tennis fans were looking forward to witnessing one of the sport's brightest young stars at Melbourne Park, who could have faced nine-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic, or fellow countryman Rafa Nadal, the defending champion.

The young Spaniard's absence at the Australian Open means Nadal is set to be the men's top seed at Melbourne Park.



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