



The late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi (front-L) visits the Ashuradeh Island and Khazini Canal in the Caspian Sea on December 21, 2023, while reviewing plans to dredge and revive the Gorgan Bay on a boat.

### Share of incoming tourists to Middle East

A 2022 World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) report shed light on Iran’s burgeoning appeal to foreign tourists. In 2022, international visitor arrivals surged, with 4.1 million trips recorded — a remarkable 315% uptick compared to the previous year, effectively quadrupling the number. However, Iran’s share of the global tourism pie remains modest, capturing only 0.4% of all foreign tourist trips in 2022.

The 315% surge in foreign tourist arrivals in 2022 marked a dramatic rebound from the previous years’ declines: an 83% drop in 2020 due to the widespread impact of the coronavirus pandemic, followed by a 30% dip in 2021. Meanwhile, the Middle East as a whole welcomed 66 million foreign tourists in 2022, reflecting a robust 163% growth year-on-year. Iran’s share of this regional tourism pie stood at an estimated 6%.

### Ecotourism permits, national works

In September 2023, Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts issued a comprehensive statistical and comparative report at an exhibition, detailing its accomplishments over the previous two years. Among its notable achievements, the ministry highlighted the expansion of the country’s hospitality infrastructure with the addition of 313 hotels (excluding those in free zones) and the issuance of permits for 849 ecotourism accommodations. Furthermore, an impressive array of cultural treasures has been recognized: 427 movable cultural properties, 595 immovable cultural properties, 302 tangible works, and 476 intangible works — amounting to a total of 1,800 entries — have been inscribed on the list of national treasures. In the Iranian calendar year 1400

(ended March 20, 2022), Iran’s national programme to safeguard the traditional art of calligraphy gained international recognition with its inscription on UNESCO’s list of Good Safeguarding Practices. Then, in a remarkable leap forward, four joint international cases — celebrating Yalda (Shab-e Chelleh), the art of crafting and playing the oud instrument, sericulture and traditional production of silk for weaving, and Turkmen-style needlework art — were approved at the UNESCO meeting in Rabat, Morocco, in 2022. This propelled Iran to sixth place globally on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Additionally, in line with the 10-year plan, two global files showcasing Iran’s tangible cultural heritage — the cultural landscape of Masouleh and Hegmataneh, and

the historical center of Hamedan — have been meticulously compiled and submitted. Field evaluations for one of the world’s most extensive serial registration files, titled “54 Iranian Caravanserais,” have been completed. Seven cases of intangible cultural heritage, including Iftar and its associated social and cultural beliefs, the art of gilding, the tradition of pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), and the Sadeh Celebration, the Mehregan festival, the art of crafting and playing the Robab, and the traditional production of Rosewater along with its related social and cultural beliefs, have been forwarded to UNESCO for the years 2023 and 2024. These submissions are currently under review as part of UNESCO’s cultural inscription process.



**Martyr President**