



More than 36 million domestic trips were made across Iran during the Nowruz holidays this year, according to final statistics released at a session of the Traveling Services Co-ordination Headquarters, chaired by Deputy Minister of Tourism Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey. From March 15 to April 4, a total of 36,519,671 trips were recorded, while 60,970,523 overnight stays were registered across official, semi-official, and emergency accommodation facilities, said Seyyed Mostafa Fatemi, secretary of the headquarters. Notably, of the mentioned figure, 10.37 million overnight stays occurred in official lodging facilities. The provinces of Mazandaran, Gilan, Khorasan Razavi, Tehran, and Isfahan saw the highest influx of travelers, while Mashhad, Shiraz, Tehran, Isfahan, and Bandar Abbas ranked among the top visited cities, Fatemi noted.

Big Data Aids Iran's Nowruz Travel Tracking, Recording over 36 Million Trips

Chogha Hill: a Tourism Delight in 'Little Paris'

Chogha Hill, known as the "Roof of Borujerd," has become one of the city's most prominent tourist and recreational centers. Situated in the western part of Borujerd, a city known as "the Little Paris" by the locals, this scenic hill offers a breathtaking 360-degree view of the city and its surroundings. Its unique geological composition, featuring volcanic rocks and rare wild plant species, enhances its appeal to nature lovers and adventure seekers alike. Visible from the city's entrances, Chogha Hill provides visitors with a panoramic vista of Borujerd's vast landscapes. To the east, one can admire the historic monuments such as Jameh Mosque and Imam Mosque, as well as the lush expanse of Fadak Garden. To the west, the striking Goldasht plain stretches out, while the Silakhor plain unfolds to the south. The north offers a glimpse of the historic Hatam Castle Bridge, further enriching the scenic experience. Beyond its natural beauty,



Chogha Hill's thoughtful development has contributed to its growing popularity. Designed as a rocky park, it boasts well-maintained roads, infrastructure, and attractions such as the Zagros International Four-Star Hotel, an artificial lake, waterfalls, fountains,

and artfully placed sculptures. Additionally, a martyrs' mausoleum and an anonymous tomb add cultural and historical significance to the site, making it a unique and multifaceted destination. Borujerd is a gem in the Lorestan province of western Iran. His-

torically significant, the city dates back to the Sassanid era when it was a small but important settlement near Nahavand, now part of Hamedan province. During the Seljuk period in the 9th and 10th centuries, Borujerd flourished as an industrial and

commercial hub in the heart of the Zagros Mountains. Its prominence continued into the Qajar era (18th and 19th centuries), when Borujerd was selected as the state capital of the Lorestan and Khuzestan region. Even today, it remains an industrial powerhouse in the province, known for its thriving production units and markets catering to both domestic and international consumers. The city's rich history extends even further back, with evidence of Parthian-era artifacts discovered in its vicinity. Additionally, one of Iran's oldest mosques, the Jameh Mosque of Borujerd, stands as a testament to the city's deep historical roots, having been constructed on the remains of a Zoroastrian fire temple. With its stunning landscapes, historical treasures, and modern amenities, Chogha Hill stands as a symbol of Borujerd's charm, offering visitors an unforgettable experience in the heart of Iran's western highlands.

Perspective



Iran Tourism Minister Kazakh Envoy Discuss Ways to expand Cultural Ties

Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri and Kazakh ambassador to the Islamic Republic have discussed avenues to enhance cultural cooperation between the two nations. In a meeting with Ontalap Onalbayev on Saturday, Salehi-Amiri called for an extended duration for visa cancellation from 14 days to one month and direct flights between a number of cities as a strategic measure in this regard, IRNA reported. Pointing to the historical background and cultural richness of Kazakhstan, the minister emphasized on new horizon of cooperation in line with cultural diplomacy.



He urged the need for compiling some strategic memoranda of understanding for boosting cultural ties. The minister called the introduction of tourism potentials of the two countries an effective measure in enhancing people-based ties. He suggested compiling investment packages for the construction of five-star hotels and inviting top cultural personalities of Kazakhstan to Iran to promote cultural exchange. Referring to Iran's capacities in the handicrafts sector, he declared the readiness of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts to hold joint cultural-artistic exhibitions in two countries. He called the above measure an effective step to deepen mutual understanding, cultural dialogue, and proximity of nations. Appreciating the cooperation of the Kazakhstan government in the global registration of Nowruz as an identity element of the joint civilization of the region, he emphasized promoting cooperation on the registration of joint heritages in UNESCO. He called the exchange of experience and knowledge in the fields of renovation of historical monuments, archeology and specialized trainings as pillars of sustainable cooperation between two countries. Also, Kazakh ambassador appreciated Iran's civilizational richness as well as cultural, historical, and natural attractions. He emphasized his government's will to promote all-out ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Onalbayev gave news of the full readiness of Kazakhstan to promote ties with Iran in cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts fields.

Another Summer of Disruption? Spain's Anti-tourism Protests Reignite ahead of Easter Break

Residents say new government measures are not enough to combat the negative effects of mass tourism. Last summer, Spain erupted with protests driven by the soaring tourist numbers putting a strain on residents' daily lives. More than 90 million foreign visitors descended on the country in 2024, and consultancy firm Braintrust estimates that the number of arrivals will rocket to 115 million by 2040. Angered by the inadequate government measures to manage the flow, locals across Spain staged hunger strikes, plastered visitor hotspots with anti-tourism messages, and squirted tourists with water guns. As the Easter holidays approach, the anti-tourism sentiment is brewing once again, and protests are ramping up. Tens of thousands of Spaniards marched in protests

held across the country on 5 April in anger over high housing costs with no relief in sight.

of housing as accommodation is snapped up for tourist lets and land bought for building new resorts.

industry is growing and growing and using up so many resources and the island cannot cope," Ivan

by bit." Other tourist hotspots like Barcelona and Madrid are also struggling with soaring

tax on properties bought by non-EU residents in its latest move to protect the housing market from foreign buyers. Sales of homes to foreigners, including EU citizens, make up roughly 15 per cent of the housing market, according to the Spanish property registry. Despite these moves, resentment continues to ferment with protests already taking place ahead of the Easter break. Government authorities said that 15,000 marched in Madrid on 5 April, while organisers said 10 times that many took to the streets of the capital. In Barcelona, the city hall said 12,000 people took part in the protest, while organisers claimed over 100,000 did. Marchers in Madrid chanted "Get Airbnb out of our neighborhoods" and held up signs against short-term rentals.



Residents are demanding that authorities step up regulations before peak season sees tourist destinations overwhelmed again. The unchecked influx of tourists to Spain in recent years has generated a rash of unwelcome effects for residents. One major impact is the spiralling cost

Last April, demonstrators in Tenerife organised a hunger strike over two new hotel developments with some locals saying they had been forced to sleep in their cars or caves because they couldn't afford housing on the island. "We have nothing against individual tourists but the

Cerdena Molina, who helped organise the protests, told local news outlet The Olive Press. Airbnb criticises Spain's new rental rules: Data shows crackdowns on owners don't stem overtourism "Airbnb and Booking.com are like a cancer that is consuming the island bit

rental prices for residents. In June last year, Barcelona's city council announced a plan to rid the city of tourist flat licenses by 2028. The city hasn't granted any new licenses since 2014, when it froze the supply at around 10,000 units. Spain is also planning to introduce a 100 per cent



French chateaux come in all shapes and sizes, from sturdy medieval fortresses with battlements and drawbridges to flamboyant Renaissance homes fit for a Disney princess. But it is hard to find a more photogenic property than the Château de Azay-le-Rideau, its delicate turrets and creamy façade reflected in the still waters of the moat. Prepare for house envy off the scale! I never need an excuse to stroll through Azay's bijou park and revisit the furnished interior, undeniably French but touched with 16th century Italian style. And this year, there are still more reasons to go back as this picture-perfect property celebrates its 500th anniversary with exhibitions and concerts, illuminations and family-friendly events.

Valley of the French kings

But there are wider celebrations in the area this year as the Loire Valley marks 25 years of UNESCO World Heritage Site status. One of the largest listed sites in France, this glorious area is recognised for its 'living

cultural landscapes' covering architectural heritage, Renaissance ideals, and the harmonious development of the natural environment. After the French defeat at Agincourt in October 1415, French king Charles VII fled Paris – and the English – for the Loire Valley, quickly followed by his courtiers. Over the next 300 years they built, enlarged and embellished elegant country homes around this strategic and beautiful waterway. Today more than 100 chateaux are open to the public, including Chambord (above), a vast hunting estate and party palace for Renaissance king, François I, where you can easily fill a day and more. I loved walking amongst the forest of turrets on the chateau roof; exploring Europe's largest enclosed nature reserve on a jeep safari; and watching the equestrian show in The Stables.

Expect the unexpected

Chambord is just one of several big hitters in the Loire Valley and has plenty of room for all. But you are best to visit early or late in the day, if you want to enjoy other

popular but smaller properties like Château de Chenonceau that spans the river Cher. Don't miss the walled garden where flowers and foliage are grown for the magnificent displays gracing every room. Chateau de Clos Luce, Loire Chateau de Clos Luce, Loire And seek out some of the less familiar names. At the heart of the Renaissance movement was Italian artist and engineer Leonardo da Vinci, but how many visitors to the Loire Valley know they can visit the house where he spent his closing years as a guest of François I? The Château de Clos Lucé near Amboise is one of my favourite small mansions with its wooded park where models of Leonardo's inventions stand beside tranquil lakes.

Desirable plots

Amongst more than 30 garden attractions open to the public, the intricate geometric plantings of Château de Villandry near Tours are world-famous, but I also recommend the Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire, an arts and

nature centre where the annual winter art festival gives way to a spectacular garden festival. This year's event, the 34th edition, runs from April 19 to 2 November with a theme of enchanted gardens and storytelling.

Apprentices' Garden, Cheverny, Loire Apprentices' Garden, Cheverny, Loire

And I can never resist a return to the formal gardens and landscaped park at Château de Cheverny, inspiration for Marlinspike Hall in Hergé's cartoon adventures of Tintin. I struck lucky last time and was treated to a kingfisher flypast during a boat excursion on the lake. And if you love the outdoor life, ask at any Tourist Information Office about guided excursions by kayak or on horseback. Then reward your efforts with a meal of local produce to celebrate yet another anniversary – 15 years since UNESCO added the 'Gastronomic meal of the French' to its intangible Cultural Heritage list. As though anyone needed an excuse for a good French meal!

Living it up in the Loire, France