



Ahmad Masoumifar, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' office in northeast Iran, has proposed establishing a sisterhood agreement between Mashhad and the Saudi cities of Mecca or Medina. He said such an agreement would strengthen urban diplomacy and promote pilgrim exchange between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Speaking at a ceremony to mark 95th anniversary of National Saudi Day, which was held at Misaq Hotel in Mashhad, the Saudi's consulate, he stated: "With the presence of the Saudi Consul General in Mashhad, we can hope more than ever for the development of economic and trade relations with the corresponding places in Saudi Arabia, such as Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah," Miras-e Arya (CHTN) reported.

Mashhad Eyes Sisterhood Agreement with Mecca, Medina



Cultural Heritage ministry plans to hold Mehregan Festival

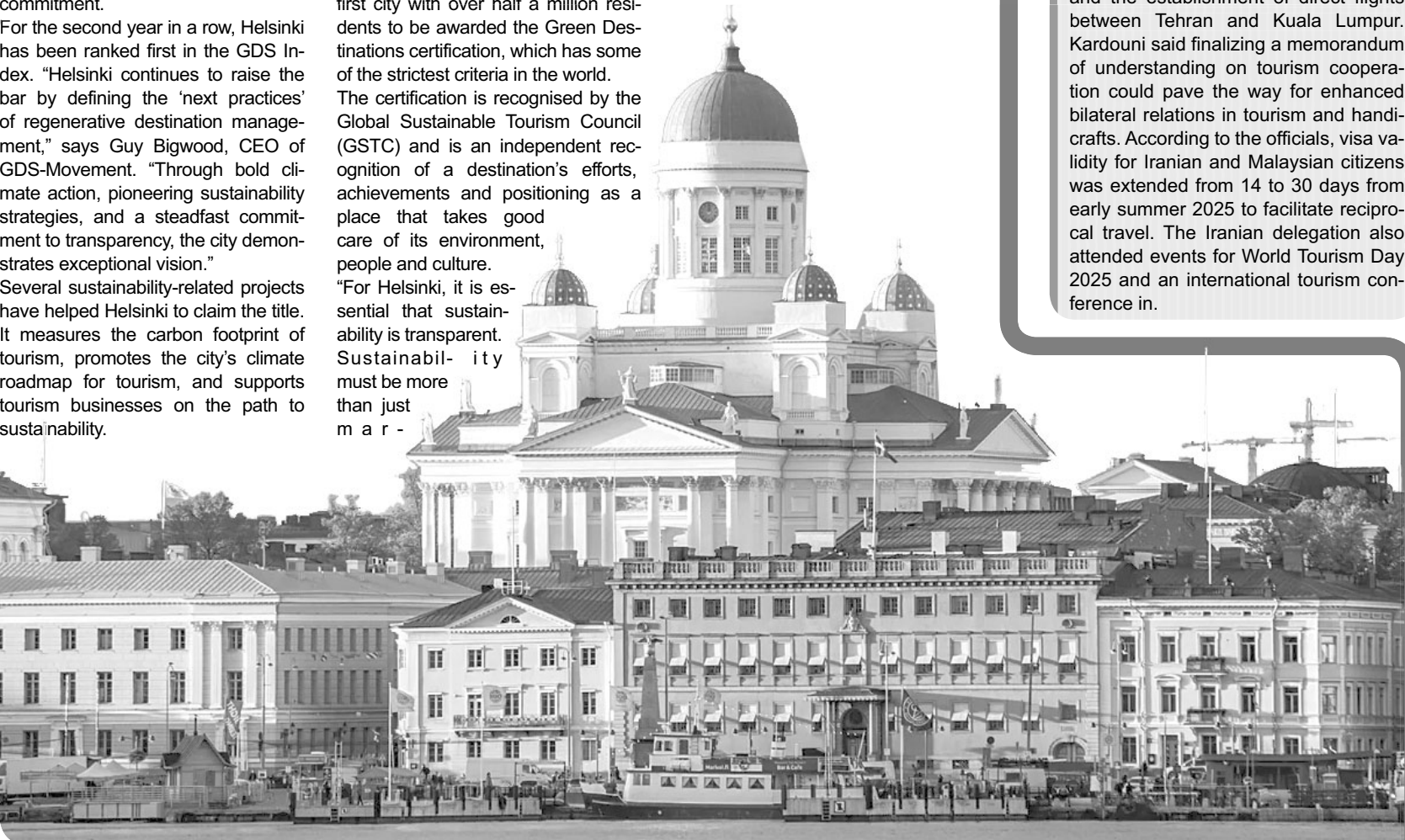
Mehregan Festival is the second largest celebration of ancient Iran after Nowruz, said Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage Ali Darabai, adding: "We are considering holding this world-recorded celebration on a public scale." Pointing to the arrival of the Iranian month of Mehr, he said that Mehregan Festival is a symbol of kindness, friendship, and gratitude, which is associated with the autumnal equinox and the harvest season. This ritual was jointly inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List by Iran and Tajikistan in 2024, he mentioned. The global registration of the Mehregan Festival, in addition to emphasizing cultural values, has highlighted the need for its popular revival, and planning must be made for its preservation and promotion, he said. According to Darabi, the Cultural Heritage Department intends to organize this year's Mehregan Festival in cooperation with other agencies and non-governmental organizations. Revival of Iran's national and traditional rituals and introduction to the younger generation, creation of a happy and vibrant social atmosphere for families and youth, strengthening the national and religious solidarity, preservation of intangible heritage and its connection with today's life, and development of cultural tourism are among the goals that Darabi listed for holding this event. He noted: "Strengthening cultural diplomacy and international cooperation with Tajikistan is another of our approaches to honoring Mehregan." Mehregan is an ancient annual festival that marks the autumn equinox and expresses the communities' gratitude for an abundant harvest. It is celebrated by many Iranians and by the people of Tajikistan. The ceremony of Mehregan is named after Mehr, the Zoroastrian god of friendship, peace, and solidarity. The Zoroastrian faith reaches back to antiquity and the festival is a major part of the group's identity. Participants perform local wrestling, and rope walking, and distribute food and drinks. In Tajikistan, the element is celebrated during or after the harvest and includes many of these same customs. Moreover, the ceremony functions to integrate people socially. People of all ages, genders, and backgrounds come together. The ceremony promotes mutual respect among communities and peaceful relationships.

How this European City Became the World's most Sustainable Tourist Destination

Dozens of destinations around the world are grappling with the problematic effects of overtourism. Alongside sparking housing crises and overwhelming infrastructure, the phenomenon is proving disastrous for the environment. Authorities have been forced to experiment with mitigation measures like visitor caps and restricted access to natural sites. But some destinations have managed to protect themselves from mass tourism thanks to decades of sustainable strategies. The international Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index is an annual ranking that uses 70 different indicators to identify the world's most sustainable tourist destinations. A European city topped the ranking. Here's the strategy behind its winning tourism model. The GDS compares over a hundred cities around the world that are committed to sustainability. Its assessment is broken down into four key categories: destination management, supply chains, social sustainability, and environmental performance. Specific indicators within these categories include visitor management, environmental impact of airports, safety, and climate change commitment. For the second year in a row, Helsinki has been ranked first in the GDS Index. "Helsinki continues to raise the bar by defining the 'next practices' of regenerative destination management," says Guy Bigwood, CEO of GDS-Movement. "Through bold climate action, pioneering sustainability strategies, and a steadfast commitment to transparency, the city demonstrates exceptional vision." Several sustainability-related projects have helped Helsinki to claim the title. It measures the carbon footprint of tourism, promotes the city's climate roadmap for tourism, and supports tourism businesses on the path to sustainability.

Ensuring the participation and well-being of residents is also an important factor in the development of sustainable tourism. "We are promoting tourism with all areas of sustainability in mind, reducing negative impacts and increasing positive ones. The aim is for Helsinki to be a better place when a visitor leaves than it was before they arrived," says Helsinki's tourism director, Nina Vesterinen. Helsinki's sustainability as a tourist destination is also the result of cooperation between many different operators, according to local authorities. For example, the increasing number of companies with environmental certifications and the more climate-friendly production of district heating and electricity have helped the city reach the top of the list. "Up to 99 per cent of the rooms of hotels with more than 50 rooms in Helsinki are environmentally certified. This level is significantly higher than in Europe in general," says Vesterinen. "Similarly, more and more destinations, meeting and conference facilities, tour operators and others have environmental certifications." ■ **Helsinki's sustainable strategy draws tourists** In March, Helsinki also became the first city with over half a million residents to be awarded the Green Destinations certification, which has some of the strictest criteria in the world. The certification is recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and is an independent recognition of a destination's efforts, achievements and positioning as a place that takes good care of its environment, people and culture. "For Helsinki, it is essential that sustainability is transparent. Sustainability must be more than just a r -

keting-level greenwashing, which is already demanded by EU legislation requiring environmental claims to be reliable and verifiable," says Vesterinen. 2025 has already been a record-breaking year for tourism in Helsinki. According to Statistics Finland, the number of nights spent by international tourists increased by 19 per cent in the first seven months compared to the same period last year. Booking.com's 2025 Sustainable Travel Report, for example, found that more than half of travellers are now conscious of tourism's impact on local communities as well as the environment. What's more, 93 per cent of respondents to the survey, which included thousands of people across six continents, said they want to make more responsible choices and have already taken steps to do so. The tourism director says the aim now is to continue improving Helsinki's sustainability credentials. "A large proportion of international tourists visiting the city arrive by boat or by air, the climate impacts of which we acknowledge," she says. "Accordingly, we are aiming to attract more and more tourists from Finland and neighbouring European regions."



Perspective



Tourism Minister Invites Malaysian Counterpart to Visit Tehran



Iran has extended an official invitation to Malaysia's tourism minister, Tiong King Sing, to visit Tehran as part of efforts to strengthen tourism, cultural, and economic ties between the two nations. The invitation was formally delivered by Rouzbeh Kardouni, adviser to Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, during his visit to Malaysia, according to a statement from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage. Kardouni met with King Sing and presented the written invitation on behalf of Iran's Minister, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri. During the meeting, an Iranian delegation expressed Tehran's readiness to participate actively in the international tourism exhibition "Matta Fair," scheduled for March 2026 in Malaysia. Salehi-Amiri also officially invited the Malaysian tourism sector to take part in Iran's International Tourism Exhibition, planned for February 2026 in Tehran. In addition, Kardouni held talks with Chua Choon Hwa, the deputy tourism minister of Malaysia, in Putrajaya, exchanging views on expanding cooperation through increased cultural exchanges, active participation in tourism fairs, and the establishment of direct flights between Tehran and Kuala Lumpur. Kardouni said finalizing a memorandum of understanding on tourism cooperation could pave the way for enhanced bilateral relations in tourism and handicrafts. According to the officials, visa validity for Iranian and Malaysian citizens was extended from 14 to 30 days from early summer 2025 to facilitate reciprocal travel. The Iranian delegation also attended events for World Tourism Day 2025 and an international tourism conference in.

Why Amsterdam's Embattled Residents are Suing the City over Mass Tourism

The legal action has been taken to denounce the municipality's ineffective tourism management, the group says. Despite measures to curb tourist numbers, overnight stays increased by three per cent in 2024. Residents of Amsterdam have taken a pioneering step to express their frustration with the city's overtourism problem. Locals have launched legal action against the council, which they say is not doing enough to curb unsustainable visitor numbers. The Dutch city has been straining under the impact of mass tourism for years, and the council has pledged to clamp down. Authorities have also launched campaigns to steer its tourism model away from the stag parties, pub crawls, drug use and sex work for which the city has been renowned. But residents say little has changed for them. Amsterdam residents take legal action against council over mass tourism A group of Amsterdam residents filed a lawsuit on Monday against the municipality. The citizens' initiative "Amsterdam has a Choice" raised €50,000 from locals and is supported by 12 other residents' organisations. The legal action has been taken to denounce the municipality's ineffective tourism management, the group says. In 2021, the council passed a bylaw that capped the number of tourist

overnight stays in the city to 20 million per year. Despite this, there were 22.9 million overnight stays last year, and the figure will likely be even higher for 2025. The residents argue that authorities are not complying with their own legislation and are not doing enough to combat overtourism.



"Overnight stays have been exceeding the agreed 20 million for three years without the municipality taking effective measures," said Jasper van Dijk, one of the residents who filed the lawsuit. The group acknowledges that the city council has already brought in measures to tackle visitor numbers. The tourist tax has been increased, and the number of river and sea cruises entering the city each year is set to halve. There is also a moratorium on new hotel construction. But despite these efforts, tourism is still growing, albeit more slowly than in previous years. The number of overnight stays in 2024 is a three per cent increase on the previous year. Between 23 and 26 million overnight stays are projected for this year. Amsterdam has already raised its tourist tax to 12.5 per cent, making it the highest in Europe. But the residents behind the lawsuit say it needs to be increased once again. "Amsterdam could use the significant additional revenue from the increased tourist tax to buy properties to help with the housing shortage or to rid the city of the street litter created in part by mass tourism," Van Dijk said. "If the municipality implements this substantial increase in tourist tax, it will generate more revenue than the combined costs of all the plans from the