



Lufthansa said it is set to resume flights to Iran on Jan. 16, 2026, following security and operational assessments carried out in coordination with Iranian aviation authorities. Preparations for the German carrier's return began several weeks ago with visits by Lufthansa's regional manager in Iran, the company's senior aviation security and risk management officer, and the Austrian Airlines country manager. The team held meetings with Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, Imam Khomeini International Airport and other operational centers. They inspected facilities, systems and management processes, and reviewed technical requirements with Iranian officials before Lufthansa finalized its decision to restart flights. Iran's Civil Aviation Organization said the resumption of Lufthansa services reflects demand for international travel and Iran's extensive ties with other countries.

Lufthansa to Resume Flights to Iran from January 16, 2026

16th-century Ardabil Carpets Lie far from Home in London and Los Angeles

Two monumental 16th-century Ardabil carpets--woven in the Safavid court for the shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili--now lie thousands of kilometers from their home, housed separately in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Once a matched pair and among the finest products of Iran's golden age of carpet weaving, the works were removed from the Ardabil shrine in the late 19th century after earthquake damage and sold abroad. Today, they are celebrated centerpieces of Western museums, while Iran displays only a contemporary reproduction in Ardabil. Commissioned in 1539-40 during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I, both carpets bear identical signatures attributing the work to Maqsd of Kashan, believed to have designed and overseen the project at a royal workshop, likely in Tabriz. They are also inscribed with a verse from Hafez: "I have no refuge in this world other than thy threshold / My head has no resting place other than this doorway." The pair belongs to a period when court-supported workshops and skilled designers transformed carpet weaving into one of Safavid Iran's most celebrated arts. Many masterpieces of that era survive today not in Iran but in international museums. The larger and more renowned example, now owned by London's Victoria and Albert Museum, is described by the museum as "the world's oldest dated carpet and one of the largest, most beautiful and historically important." The colorful carpet features a unified design built around a vast yellow medallion, flanked by two hanging lamps and surrounded by intricate scrollwork rendered in natural dyes.



The dense pile, about 5,300 knots per ten square centimeters, contains an estimated 26 million knots in total. The V&A notes that the carpet was still inside the shrine when British visitors saw it in 1843. Following the earthquake that damaged the complex roughly three decades later, it was sold to a Manchester firm and eventually put on the market in 1892. The museum acquired it in 1893 for £2,000 after designer William Morris praised its "singular perfection." In the late 19th century, the London carpet underwent extensive restoration, during which sections of both original Ardabil carpets were used to complete it--further altering the pair's integrity. Today it lies in a custom-built display case in the V&A's Jameel Gallery, illuminated for brief intervals to preserve its colors. LACMA holds the second surviving carpet, measuring 718 by 400 centimeters, described as "spectacular" and woven with wool pile on a silk foundation. Like its mate in London, the LACMA carpet bears the date 946 AH (1539-40) and the signature of Maqsd of Kashan. The museum explains that the pair was likely a royal commission for Shah Tahmasp, intended for the Safavid ancestral shrine at Ardabil. LACMA's account emphasizes the carpets' shared origin and notes that their exceptional scale, quality, and inscriptions point to production at a royal Tabriz workshop. Its composition mirrors the London carpet's medallion-and-lamp design, though the Los Angeles version is displayed with less restoration and remains closer to its original proportions. Today, Iran preserves only a modern replica in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum. While millions visit them in London and Los Angeles, but far from the shrine for which they were created nearly five centuries ago.

Pomegranate Festival begins in Saveh

Saveh's Fourth National Pomegranate Festival, hosted by the historic Jameh Mosque of Saveh, began with the presence of national and provincial officials, agricultural activists, and gardeners from across the country. Announcing this, Head of Markazi Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department Hossein Mahmoudi explained that the event was inaugurated with the presence of Markazi Governor-General, the representative of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, MPs representing Zarand, Kouhbanan, Saveh, Zarandieh, Tafresh, Ashtian and Farahan in the Iranian Parliament, and Head of the Agriculture, Water, Environment and Natural Resources Committee of the Iranian Parliament, Miras Aria (CHTN) reported. Referring to the rich history of horticulture in Saveh, he said that in addition to introducing the capabilities of gardeners, Saveh National Pomegranate Festival is a valuable opportunity to attract the tourists, boost the market for products, and create interaction between those involved in agriculture sector and processing industries. He clarified that the festival, which will last for 10 days, includes programs such as holding specialized training workshops, scientific and promotional meetings, presenting research achievements in the pomegranate field, showcasing the capacities of the related handicrafts, directly offering garden products, and performing native and cultural rituals. Mahmoudi stated that Jameh Mosque of Saveh is one of the oldest and most valuable historical monuments in the country. "The combination of historical and cultural capacities with the introduction of agricultural capabilities has made this festival a unique event at the national level." Saveh's Fourth National Pomegranate Festival will be open to the enthusiasts, tourists, and agricultural activists from all over the country until December 6, with the aim of supporting the producers, strengthening the agricultural economy, developing sustainable tourism, and better introduction of the Saveh Pomegranate brand. The Pomegranate is native to Iran and eastward up to northern



India. It is widely cultivated in most provinces of Iran, with different colors, sizes, and flavors. It is impressive to see the variety of pomegranates in the country. The ancient land is well-known for the quality of pomegranates and is the largest exporter of pomegranates in the world. Every autumn, many pomegranate growers across the ancient country hold festivals to thank God and celebrate the harvest season. Alongside the grape and the fig, the pomegranate has played an important role throughout the Orient since the earliest times. When it comes to Persian literature, the pomegranate (Anaar) is there bearing a metaphor or symbol. Some say pomegranates can be used to manifest a range of metaphors in Persian poetry due to their intense red color, round shape, and numerous seeds. Ancient Iranians believed that the pomegranate was a sign of fertility due to its abundant seeds. It is a high pillar of festivities on Yalda Night. Narratives say the presence of pomegranates symbolizes blessings for a new life. The number of seeds scattered indicates how many children a young woman may give birth to! By tradition, Zoroastrians offer pomegranates to their daughters and sons when they get married, wishing them fertility. Moreover, they used to burn pomegranate sticks during religious rites. Around 2000 BC, the Lor ethnic communities living in the west of Iran created amazing crafts which are known as Lorestan bronzes today, and on some of the Lorestan bronze objects, the pomegranate tree is recognizable. Also, the pomegranate is seen in some bas-relief carvings inside the UNESCO-designated Persepolis, which was once the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings. Moreover, some Sassanid bas-reliefs depict pomegranates as a symbol of fertility and productivity. The pomegranate has long been one of the essential ingredients for Persian cuisine to bring a kind of balance, taste, and flavor.



'America-first' Pricing: Higher Fees for Foreigners at US National Parks Stoke Tourism Concerns

The US Interior Department says new charges will fund park upkeep, but businesses fear international travellers will be put off visiting. A \$100-per-person (€86) charge for foreigners entering Yellowstone, Grand Canyon and other popular national parks is stoking apprehension among some tourist-oriented businesses that it could discourage travellers, but supporters say the change will generate money for cash-strapped parks. The new fee was announced on Tuesday by Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and takes effect from 1 January. Foreign tour-

ists will also see a sharp price increase for an annual parks pass, to \$250 (€216) per vehicle. US residents will continue to be charged \$80 (€69) for an annual

pass. The change in policy puts the US in line with other countries that charge foreigners more to see popular attractions. At the Whistling Swan Motel



just outside Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana, owner Mark Howser estimates that about 15 per cent of his customers are foreigners. They come from Canada, China, India, Spain, France, Germany and elsewhere, said Howser, who also runs a bakery and general store. Those visitors already pay up to \$35 (€30) per vehicle to enter the park. The higher charge for foreigners, Howser said, "is a sure-fire way of discouraging people from visiting Glacier." "It's going to hurt local businesses that cater to foreign travellers, like myself," he said. "You're

discouraging them from seeing something in the country by attaching a fee to that experience." A Yellowstone tour operator, Bryan Batchelder, with Let's Go Adventure Tours and Transportation, said the charge represents "a pretty big hike" for the roughly 30 per cent of his clientele that are foreigners. That percentage has been going up in recent years after Batchelder switched to a new booking service. Next summer, he said, will reveal how the new charge plays out among foreign visitors. "They'll probably still come to the country, but will they visit national parks?" Batchelder asked.

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Perspective



Tourism Investors Exempt from Land Use Change Fees, Deputy Minister Says

Deputy Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian has announced the exemption of investors from paying land use change fees. Speaking in the specialized tourism panel of the Ardabil International Investment Conference on Friday, he told IRNA that previously, paying fees, which



were equivalent to 80 percent of the original value of the land, was an obstacle to the investment, but with the new resolution, tourism projects are exempt from it. He explained the government's development policies in the field of tourism, adding that the campaign of not charging construction permit fees for tourism-related projects has also been widely welcomed in 13 provinces and more than 40 cities, and Sarein county in Ardabil province is a successful model and the initiator of this plan. He listed the reduction of project start-up costs, including the Engineering Organization tariff, as other supportive policies being pursued by the government, adding that tourism investment is a cross-sectoral issue, and the government will fully support the private sector participation, environmental considerations, and the implementation of sustainable tourism policies. He mentioned the granting of licenses for mixed tourism facilities as one of the important incentive measures in recent years, saying that the new model, with the possibility of issuing separate licenses for the sale of tourism goods, has been approved by the legislator. Shalbafian said that 2,748 tourism projects are under construction across the country, adding that all job-generating projects in handicrafts, ecotourism, and tourism can be covered from various sources of facilities. Referring to the important position of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage as the third agency in job creation, he emphasized that the job realization rate in the tourism sector has reached more than 90 percent in the past four years. Respecting the support of domestic production, he emphasized that supporting the investors is supporting the future of Iran, and supporting investment in Ardabil is supporting the future of Ardabil. The province, with 12 counties, is known for its natural landscape, hospitality and long-standing silk and carpet trade. It is home to the UNESCO-listed Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble and attracts large numbers of visitors, particularly in summer.