No.2739-Saturday,1 August 2026
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As the Japanese government pushes to restart nuclear reactors and shift its energy policy, the Fukushima nuclear plant appears to be turning into a tourist destination. Bloomberg reported on April 24 that as demand grows for tourism to disaster sites, visitors to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant are increasing. Tourists are flowing into villages abandoned by residents, and tours inside the plant are also being offered. According to Tokyo Electric Power Company, the number of visitors in 2024 was 20,542, the highest on record. Visitors are seeing for themselves the tanks storing radioactive wastewater and the damaged reactor buildings, grasping the scale of the accident. The Fukushima nuclear accident was a major radiation disaster that displaced about 160,000 residents. It occurred on March 11, 2011, when the power supply and cooling systems at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company were simultaneously paralyzed by the magnitude 9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing tsunami.

Fukushima Draws 'Dark Tourism' As Japan Restarts Reactors

Iran's Darak Village Moves Closer to Global Tourism Recognition

Darak, a unique coastal village in southeastern Iran where desert dunes meet the blue waters of the Makran Sea, is moving closer to being registered as a global tourism destination after being shortlisted among eight Iranian villages nominated for international recognition.

Located in Zarabad County in Sistan-and-Baluchestan Province, Darak has increasingly drawn attention for its rare natural landscape, pristine coastline, and traditional way of life, placing it on track to become one of the most important tourism destinations in Iran and South Asia. The village is best known for the extraordinary meeting of golden desert sands and the waters of the Makran Sea, a phenomenon rarely seen elsewhere in the world. Darak also features four different types of coastlines – sandy, rocky, coral, and dune-covered shores – all concentrated in a single area.Adding to its appeal are mangrove forests, ancient tidal wetlands, palm groves, and tropical trees growing only a few meters from the sea. Despite its coastal location, fresh water can be reached by digging shallow wells about two meters deep, allowing local residents to cultivate crops such as watermelon, corn, and dates.Officials say the village's untouched nature and mild climate, shaped by monsoon winds blowing from the Indian Ocean, make it an attractive destination throughout the year. The area also offers opportunities for surfing, boating, swimming, and other beach and water sports. Zarabad Governor Ehsan Raeesi described Darak as a "natural geopark" that should be preserved for future generations while developing tourism infrastructure carefully to protect its indigenous character.He stressed that improving facilities and infrastructure is essential for achieving global registration, identifying the repair of the coastal road and the underground installation of fiber-optic networks among the village's most urgent needs.

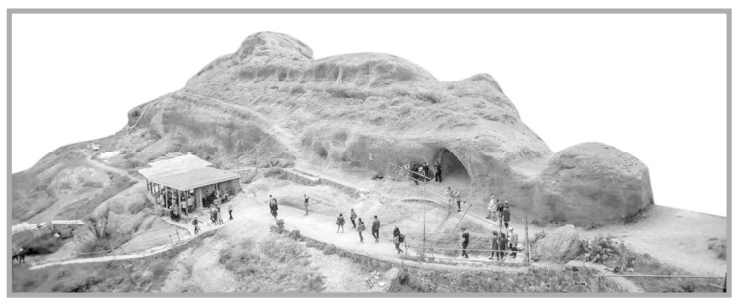
UNESCO Grants World Heritage Status to Iran's Alamut Castle and Related Fortifications

Iran's "Alamut Castle and Related Fortifications" has been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, becoming the country's 30th tangible cultural heritage property to receive the prestigious international designation.The decision was adopted on Sunday during the 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Busan, South Korea, marking another milestone in Iran's long-standing presence on the World Heritage list.

The newly inscribed serial property consists of seven historic castles and fortifications spread across the eastern and western Alamut valleys and the southern slopes of the Alborz mountain range in Qazvin province. The property includes Alamut Castle, Lambsar, Navizarshah, Shams-Kelaye, Qostinlar, Shirkuh and Ilan, all of which formed an interconnected defensive and administrative system between the 11th and 13th centuries.

The UN cultural body recognized the property as an exceptional example of a fortified mountain landscape that illustrates sophisticated planning based on a detailed understanding of geography, communication routes, defensive architecture, water-resource management and spatial organization.

From the late 11th century CE, Alamut served as the political, military and intellectual center of the Nizari Ismailistate, an influential Islamic movement whose influence extended across Iran and much of the Islamic world. Beyond their military role, the fortifications functioned as centers of scholarship and culture. The network provided refuge for the Nizari community while fostering scientific and intellectual activity until the Mongol conquest of Alamut in 1256. Even after the fall of the fortress, the sites



continued to influence the region's religious and intellectual history.As mentioned by experts, together, the seven fortifications illustrate the strategic organization, resilience and cultural significance of the Nizari Ismailistate during one of the most dynamic periods of medieval Iranian history.Last week, Veteran Iranian cultural heritage expert Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, noted that the property is one of the most significant defensive systems ever created in Iran's central Alborz Mountains and fills an important gap in understanding the evolution of Iranian architecture and military organization."The chain of Iran's architectural history cannot be fully understood without Alamut," Beheshti said.He explained that the mountainous landscape of the central Alborz had long served as a natural fortress, providing refuge for local rulers, communities and military forces throughout different periods of Iranian history.

Because of these geographical characteristics, many of the surviving historical monuments in the region consist of defensive castles and mausoleums, reflecting the area's strategic importance over many centuries, he said.

The UNESCO inscription is expected to strengthen international recognition of the Alamut cultural landscape, support continued archaeological research and conservation, and promote sustainable tourism in the region while highlighting one of the most remarkable examples of medieval mountain fortification, governance and intellectual life preserved in Iran.

Perspective

Tehran, Tashkent Discuss Direct Flights and Visa Facilitation

Tehran's ambassador to Tashkent and the head of Uzbekistan's Tourism Committee have discussed expanding tourism cooperation, increased direct flights and facilitated visas for Iranian citizens during talks in Uzbekistan's capital, according to Uzbek media reports published.

According to Uzbekistan's UZ Daily, Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Ali Eskandari met Abdulaziz Akkulov, chairman of the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, and proposed easing visa issuance for Iranian travelers.

They also discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation in tourism, make better use of existing tourism potential and increase two-way tourist flows between the two countries, the report said.

The discussions also focused on promoting tourism opportunities in Iran and Uzbekistan, and developing cooperation in medical tourism.

The officials also agreed to make greater use of the two countries' historical and cultural heritage to promote Uzbekistan's tourism market in Iran and steadily increase reciprocal tourism exchanges.

The talks form part of broader efforts by Tehran and Tashkent to expand bilateral relations across multiple sectors.

Separately, the office of Uzbekistan's president said President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian held a telephone conversation in which they agreed to further develop bilateral cooperation, particularly in trade, the economy, investment, transport and cultural and humanitarian exchanges.

According to the presidential statement, the two presidents reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening practical cooperation in key sectors of the economy.

During the call, Mirziyoyev also expressed concern over continuing tensions in the Middle East and stressed the importance of restraint and the resumption of dialogue to reduce tensions, the statement said.

Iran and Uzbekistan have sought to deepen economic cooperation by expanding trade, transport connectivity and investment links. The two countries have also worked to strengthen regional transit corridors and broaden cooperation in logistics and other sectors to support cross-border trade.

Summer Holidays up in the Air as Europe Braces for jet Fuel Shortage

Low-cost airline Transavia this week announced its first flight cancellations in May and June, citing skyrocketing prices for kerosene, a widely used aviation fuel. As the war in the Middle East continues, European carriers are braced for more cancellations but hope to avoid a fuel shortage that will ground their fleets this summer.Is it safer not to fly this summer? As the blockade in the Strait of Hormuz continues to disrupt global oil markets, concerns are rising that Europe will run out of jet fuel weeks before the peak summer travel months.

The clock started ticking in mid-April, when the head of the International Energy Agency warned Europe had "maybe six weeks of jet fuel left".This week, Transavia became the latest airline – after Ryanair and Volotea – to announce it would cancel some European flights in May and June, citing the exorbitant cost of fuel and difficulties importing kerosene from Persian Gulf countries.As peace talks between the US and Iran stall and traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remain frozen, how likely is it that European flight will be grounded en masse this summer? And what can travellers do if their flights are cancelled?

Shortage fuelled by lack of imports

For weeks the lack of oil and hydrocarbon imports from Persian Gulf countries due to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has fuelled speculation about an impending shortage of kerosene, a fuel derived from refined crude oil that powers the vast majority of aircraft engines.

"France produces much less kerosene than it consumes," said Wouter Dewulf, a professor in the Department of Transport and Regional Economics at the University of Antwerp and AMS. "About 3 million tonnes are produced by French factories each year, while the country consumes 5 million. The extra two million come from overseas, primarily the Middle East."

Persian Gulf countries do not just export their crude oil, but also refined products such as Jet A-1, the most commonly used aviation kerosene. The blockade in the Strait of Hormuz has caused a shortage of both kinds of product.

In France, data from the Ministry of Energy shows that before the war in the Middle East 50% of the country's jet fuel was refined in France and 20% in the Middle East with the remaining 30% shipped from Europe, the US and Asia.

Other European counties are in a similar position. "The continent produces very little oil and has reduced its capacity to refine oil in the past few years," said Thierry Bros, a professor at Sciences Po in Paris and an energy specialist. "It increasingly depends on importing products that have already been refined from overseas, making it particularly vulnerable to international crises."France: 'no risk' in coming weeks

Even so, "France is in a better position than some of its neighbours," said Bros, as it is less dependent on imports from the Middle East. The UK, for example, imports 60 percent of its kerosene from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.The two major airports in Paris – Orly and Charles de Gaulle – should be able to avoid the effects of the fuel shortage, a senior executive at Aéroports de Paris (ADP) said.

"Aéroports de Paris relies on a network of pipelines directly connected to refineries and a terminal in Le Havre," on France's north-west coast, the group's chief strategy officer, Christelle de Robillard, said during a conference.

"The majority of crude oil that powers these facilities comes from North America. So, compared to others, we are in a rather better position," she added. If a fuel shortage does come into effect it is more likely to impact France's smaller airports, but before this stage the country still has two months' worth of strategic stock to work through, government spokesperson Maud Bregeon said. On the same day, Economy Minister Roland Lescure said this amounted to around two million barrels.

In addition, commercial stockpiles stored in airports would cover around 10 days of operations and reserves of crude oil could be converted into jet fuel if needed.

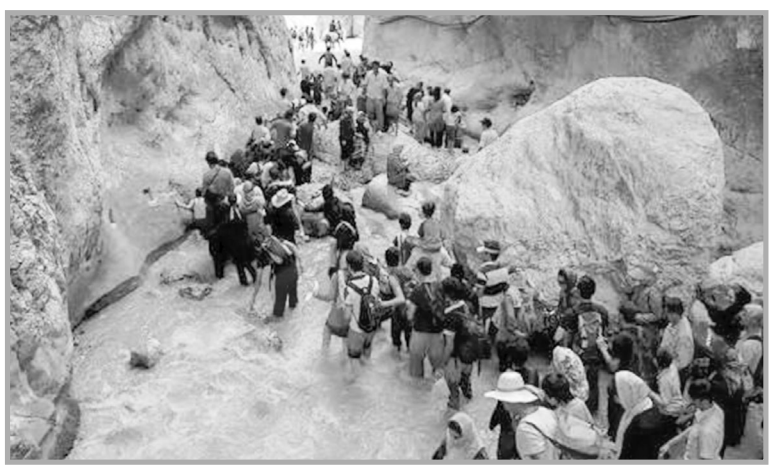
"At the moment, there is no risk of a kerosene shortage in the coming weeks," Bregeon added.Europe is preparing for "collective action" that "may prove necessary to preserve the functioning of the single market and ensure the continuity of supply", the EU Commission said.

Travellers can expect price hikesAlthough plans are in place to bolster supplies in France and Europe, travellers may face other difficulties."We have to distinguish between availability and price," said Bros. "Just because there isn't a shortage doesn't mean that prices for airplane travel won't shoot up."

"The price of kerosene has more than doubled due to the war in the Middle East and fuel accounts for up to 40 percent of the cost of an airline ticket," he added.

The biggest impact will likely be felt among low-cost carriers that prioritise low margins and maximise passenger load.

Hence why operators such as Transavia have already been forced to bump up prices and cancel some of their less-profitable flights.They are not obligated to offer compensation if the cancellation is due to "extraordinary circumstances", such as the current situation caused by the war in the Middle East.



Three Cool Escapes near Tehran for an Affordable Family day Trip

As summer temperatures rise in Tehran, many residents look for short, affordable getaways that offer cooler weather without the cost of an overnight stay. Within less than two hours of the capital, several destinations provide fresh mountain air, natural scenery and opportunities for hiking, picnicking and family outings.

Here are three popular day-trip destinations near Tehran.

Afjeh: A green village in Lavasan

Situated about 30 kilometers northeast of Tehran, the village of Afjeh is one of the closest mountain retreats to the capital. Surrounded by fruit orchards and traditional garden lanes, the village enjoys a cooler climate than Tehran during the summer months.

Its best-known attraction is Dasht-e Havij (Carrot Plain), a broad mountain meadow that attracts hikers and nature lovers, particularly in late spring and early summer. Visitors can also explore the Paschoik Waterfall and several hiking trails in the surrounding Alborz Mountains. Comfortable walking shoes and sufficient drinking water are recommended for the trip.

Tang-e Vashi: A refreshing summer adventure

Located near Firuzkuh, Tang-e Vashi (Vashi Canyon) is one of the most visited natural attractions around Tehran. The route takes visitors through a narrow rocky canyon where they walk along a shallow stream before reaching a waterfall at the end of the trail.

The flowing water and shaded canyon create a cool environment, making the site a popular destination during the hottest months of the year. The area also features a Qajar-era rock relief carved into the canyon wall, adding historical interest to the natural landscape.

Because parts of the route require walking through water, suitable footwear is essential, and visitors are advised to begin their trip early in the morning.

Barg-e Jahan: Orchards and mountain scenery

Barg-e Jahan, one of the oldest villages in the Lavasanat region, lies about 40 kilometers from Tehran in Shemiranat county. The village is known for its cool summers and has long served as a recreational destination for Tehran residents.

A river flowing through the village, mountain views and extensive orchards of walnuts, apples, cherries, sour cherries, plums and apricots make Barg-e Jahan an ideal setting for family picnics and leisurely walks. Although parts of its historic fabric have deteriorated in recent years, its natural surroundings remain its main attraction. The best time to visit is from mid-spring through late summer, when the orchards are green and the flowing water creates a pleasant outdoor environment.