

Please stop being prejudiced against great Sistan and Baluchestan!

BY: Farah Beglari

The Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft office in Sistan and Baluchestan Province had organized a journey from Chabahar to Zahedan and Zabol for some Iranian tourist guides to introduce cultural and natural attractions of this amazing land.

I had the honor of being among these tourist guides. It was an amazing journey through a region called Sistan and Baluchestan inside the great Iran.

It has such an unbelievable rich culture with more than 3400 cultural and natural tourism attractions.

As an alone woman for the first time in my life I hitchhiked about 600 kilometers to see how the safety of the area is.

The result is great and now I will not exchange any luxurious way of traveling with hitchhiking in Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

Beautiful Arian (miniature) mountains not only broaden minds and spirits but also are great inspiration for sculptors, artists. It is a vast land, which reminds the visitors of science fiction stories. The region also boasts several mud volcanoes (Gel Afshan) with therapeutic efficacy and beautify the skin.

Besides the ancient culture as old and vast as the history of Iran, its kind and hospitable people put a remarkable impact on you that cannot forget their kindness and purity.

The desert, sea, mountains, farm lands and diverse types of animals are seemed at a glance.

Unfortunately this great land in a period of time had some tense atmosphere as a result of some drug smuggling movements, that now with the mercy of the people and the government remains in complete peace, but again tourist sites like WikiTravel, Lonely Planet, and embassies continue to carry much negative publicity and prevent tourists from traveling to this area.

At the end I would like to include two German tourists letter to this article so you can research and judge yourself.

Sistan and Baluchestan is a gem of our journey

Elisabeth and Christian is a German couple currently traveling the world in an old Volkswagen Campervan.

In a letter to me, they said that "We're both holding a BA in Hotel and Tourism Management - so exploring the world is not solely a passion, it is also our occupation."

"Counting together all of our trips so far, we've been to 65 countries and we're looking forward to the many more to come."

"Our initial plan was to make it from the Bazarjan border to Pakistan in 30 days. We couldn't have been more wrong. Mesmerizing and diverse landscapes, finger-licking-good food and most of all the genuine hospitality we encountered all over the country made us extend our visa again and again."

Three weeks out of the three months that the government currently grants tourists, we've stayed in the Sistan and Baluchestan Province. One of Iran's most violent places' according to WikiTravel (a



Elisabeth (1st from right) and Christian (2nd from right) and two locals from Sistan and Baluchestan Province pose for a photo while being served with traditional food

worldwide online travel guide), turned out to be one of the gems of our journey - we've personally rarely felt safer.

After having travelled the province from Zabol in the north to Chabahar in the south, along the coast and back, we were pleasantly surprised by the regular checkpoints, the helpful police and military personnel as well as the guarded parking options for our car. Locals approached us with friendly curiosity and great hospitality, often combined with the offer to stay for the night and have dinner - or at least to save their phone number to call whenever help might be needed.

Next to that, the local tourism organization proved to be immensely helpful to discover the province. In our opinion Sistan and Baluchestan has an incredible cultural heritage of archeological sites,

which you can't find anywhere else in Iran.

Travelers have the possibility to discover sites such as the 5000-year old Shahr-e Sukhteh, Arg-e Bampur, Ghaleh Naseri or the castle of Iranshahr - to only name a few. Apart from that, the province boasts with its rich natural beauty. Nature-loving tourist will enjoy Sistan and Baluchestan because of Taftan Volcano, the Miniature Mountains, deserts, lakes and a stunning seaside.

In our opinion, one can't say 'I travelled Iran' without having been to Sistan and Baluchestan. Of course, one shouldn't be careless and always use common sense, but as Mark Twain once said: 'Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.' - And this quote has never been more applicable than for the province of Sistan and Baluchestan."

Russia's first tourism information office in Tehran set up

TOURISM TEHRAN - Russia established its first tourism information office in Tehran on Tuesday concurrent with the 9th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition.

A delegation from Russia's Federal Agency for Tourism headed by the agency's director Oleg Safonov attend the event and hold some business-to-business meetings with Iranian tour guides and experts during the exhibition.

"According to previous agreements, Iran and Russia plan to hold some mutual workshops on tourism education, marketing and investment in the near future," the deputy director of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Organization, Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed, said during his meeting with Safonov.

He also stressed on easing of visa procedure for citizens of the two countries.

"The ministry of foreign affairs is working on this issue



According to Sputnik, nearly 34,000 Iranian tourists visited Russia in the first nine months of 2015

and we hope that the case would be Russia's concern as well," Rahmani-Movahhed added.

During the meeting, Safonov called holding of Tehran exhibition as a great event and 'a good opportunity to introduce Russia to other countries'.

"Establishment of Russian tourism information office would have a great role in introducing Russia to Iranians who want to travel the country," he said.

Safonov said that Russia is also working on easing visa procedure as well.

"Russia's Federal Agency for Tourism is ready to cooperate with Iran's private sector in tourism," he said.

Exhibitors from Iran and 16 other countries are participating in the 9th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, which opened on February 16 and will run until February 19 at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

Tips on traveling in Europe this summer

If you're planning on vacationing in Europe this summer, recent headlines may have prompted some travel questions.

Here's some of what you need to know.

Should you make charges in euros or U.S. dollars?

You're asked at a hotel or restaurant if you would like to pay in euros or dollars. What do you say? The near parity between the euro and the dollar may make it tempting to pay in the latter - but don't. In general, always choose the currency of the place you're in.

It's not uncommon for there to be a markup on the currency conversion rate. Even worse, if you pick your home cur-

rency you're typically socked with a service fee known as a dynamic currency conversion fee (or DCC), which can add up to an additional 2 percent, 3 percent, even 6 percent or more, of your bill. If you didn't ask to pay in dollars but are nonetheless charged in dollars, tell the merchant to reissue your bill in euros. (Also be sure to use a credit card such as Chase Sapphire Preferred or American Express Platinum that doesn't charge foreign transaction fees.)

Do you need new carry-on luggage?

In June the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which represents members of the airline industry, put forth

industrywide guidelines for cabin baggage on aircraft with 120 or more seats.

The new preferred bag size, the group said, would be 21.5 by 13.5 by 7.5 inches, smaller than the common 22-by-14 by-9-inch bags many passengers have. So much for that generously sized bag you were thinking of buying for your European adventure. A number of major international airlines expressed interest in the initiative, including the German carrier Lufthansa. Soon travelers would be able to buy these smaller carry-on bags, which would come with an "IATA Cabin OK" logo, recognizable by the airline staff during the boarding process. And wouldn't you know it, the association said it would

not make Cabin OK logo tags available to travelers with bags that already meet the guidelines. Consumers would have to shell out for new bags if they want the Cabin OK designation.

(Source: The New York Times)



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PICTURE OF THE DAY  Mehr/Mohammad Khademolsheikh



Three ice climbers ascend a frozen slope in the 9th ice climbing festival, which was held in Rudbar-Qasran district near Tehran on Monday.

Clues about human migration to Imperial Rome uncovered

Isotope analysis of 2000-year-old skeletons buried in Imperial Rome reveal some were migrants from the Alps or North Africa, according to a study by Kristina Killgrove from University of West Florida, USA, and Janet Montgomery from Durham University, UK.

Mostly children and men

Previous work has focused on the overall human migration patterns within the Roman Empire. To understand human migration on a more granular level, the authors of this study examined 105 skeletons buried at two Roman cemeteries - Casal Bertone and Castellaccio Europarco - during the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD. They analysed the oxygen, strontium, and carbon isotope ratios in the skeletons' teeth to determine their geographical origin and diet. They found up to eight individuals who were likely migrants from outside Rome, possibly from North Africa and the Alps.

(Source: Past Horizons)

A CLOSER LOOK

Weird things that happened in February

1903: The bear truth

During a hunting trip, U.S. President Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt was having no luck finding his desired prey, a bear, so his assistants tied one down for him. Yet the Hunter-in-Chief refused to take the shot as he believed it to be unsportsmanlike.

News of this apparent act of mercy soon spread, and even inspired Brooklyn stationers Morris & Rose Michtom to make stuffed toy bears in the President's honor. They began to be sold in early 1903, carrying the President's nickname - Teddy.

1288: An irregular proposal

According to British and Irish tradition, the year 2016 offers one of those rare chances for marriage proposals to work differently - as it is said that women can pop the question only on a leap year. A popular story claims this began in 1288, when Queen Margaret of Scotland passed it into a law, which also claimed that any man who refused a proposal on February 29 would have to pay a heavy fine. As Margaret was five and living in Norway at the time (and there being no evidence of this law on the statute books), however, this origin is historically spurious.

The leap year tradition is also attributed to a fifth-century Irish nun, Brigit, who pleaded with St. Patrick to allow women to propose marriage to shy suitors.

1355: Oxford blues

The historically acrimonious relations between Oxford locals ('Towns') and students ('Gowns') were never as strained as in February 1355. What began as two students moaning in one of the town's many pubs - which resulted with them throwing their drinks into the innkeeper's face - spilled over into a full-scale two-day riot. The fracas caused the deaths of 63 scholars and some 30 townspeople.

1497: Lighting the bonfire of the vanities

What's the best way to bring yourself closer to God? According to the supporters of the powerful and puritanical priest Girolamo Savonarola, it was by burning your worldly possessions associated with sin, temptation and vanity. On February 7, 1497, thousands of men and women lit fires in the streets of Florence, Italy, to destroy objects such as fine clothing, cosmetics, musical instruments and mirrors. Worst of all, the 'Bonfire of the Vanities' claimed so-called immoral books and priceless works of art.

1472: Norse and marriage

King Christian of Norway and Denmark had hoped to form an alliance with Scotland by marrying off his daughter, Margaret, to James III. But when he failed to stump up the dowry for the union, he had no choice but to put up parts of his territory as collateral.

Pledging the chilly northern islands of Orkney and Shetland was intended to be temporary but the cash-strapped King couldn't make any of the payments. So on February 20, 1472, the islands were signed over - and have stayed in Scotland's hands ever since.

1194: Let loose the lion

While returning from his bloody and costly crusade, King Richard the Lionheart had fallen into the clutches of an enemy - not Saladin in the Holy Land, but Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI.

Imprisoned for well over a year, Richard was finally released on February 4, 1194 after England forked up the ruinous ransom of 100,000 pounds of silver. Not only was this several times what could be raised in a year but the coffers were already empty to pay for the ill-advised crusade.

The fact that it was raised was a remarkable fiscal feat, especially as Richard's scheming brother, John, was offering the captors tens of thousands to keep their prisoner behind bars.

1845: Vase vandalized

Late on February 7 1845, a visibly intoxicated man stumbled into the British Museum and rashly ignored the strict rule of 'look but don't touch'. At the tail of a week-long bender, the young Irishman, William Mulcahy, used another sculpture to smash the nearby Portland Vase to pieces.

Due to a mistake in the wording of his police charge, however, the vandal avoided the worst of the hangover, as he could only be convicted for the destruction of the vase's protective glass box, rather than the first-century Roman treasure itself.

1964: Lean on me

On 27 February 1964, the Italian government announces that it is looking for ideas to save the famously leaning Tower of Pisa from collapse. It took another 35 years, however, before the tower was closed to the public and restoration work began.

(Source: History Extra)

ON THIS DAY

1568	Holy Roman Emperor agrees to pay tribute to the Sultan for peace
1600	Philosopher Giordano Bruno is burned alive at Campo de' Fiori in Rome, charged with heresy
1776	1st volume of Gibbon's "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" published
1854	Britain recognises independence of Orange Free State ((South Africa
1867	1st ship passes through Suez Canal
1933	1st issue of "Newsweek" magazine published
1943	Adolf Hitler visits field marshal Erich von Manstein's headquarters in Zaporozje, Ukraine and stays until the 19th
1957	Suez Canal reopens
1979	China invades Vietnam, marking the start of the Sino-Vietnamese War
2008	Kosovo declares independence from Serbia
2012	The President of Germany, Christian Wulff, resigns over a corruption scandal
2012	Approximately 70 ancient Olympic artifacts are stolen from the Archaeological Museum of Greece