

## Historical and cultural attractions, and Its role in economic development in Golestan Province

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**Abstract:** Iran is among ten prime countries throughout the world in terms of tourism attractions. This ancient land, with cultural values, long history of civilization, monuments and historic structures, has always been interesting and spectacular for tourists. Golestan province, with an area equivalent to 20438.7 sq km, is considered as part of the vast land of Iran which has historically a brilliant history; in addition, with more than 1,100 historical and cultural monuments is one of the major tourist areas in northern Iran. This paper aims to introduce the potential tourist capabilities (historic and cultural) of Golestan province and provide the appropriate strategies for optimal utilization of these capabilities in attracting tourists as well as providing the areas for promoting the economic level of local communities and a more balanced distribution of income in the province by researching in the documents and library resources and surveys.

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### Introduction

Tourism is the largest service industry in the world. This diverse industry is considered as a major source of employment, income, economic prosperity and development of infrastructural structures in many countries around the world (Jahanian, 7:1388). Tourism has complex and different aspects and if it is seen comprehensively, it can be resulted in a sustainable growth in the economy, culture and politics (Gey: 15, 1382). Diverse ethnic groups have lived in different regions of Iran vast territory, and their way of life, their talent and creativity in response to material and spiritual needs of life have created special works and historical and cultural monuments. These monuments do not belong only to the Iranian people, but also are considered as part of the historical heritage of humanity (Hamoun 1 consulting engineers, 21:1382). The ancient relics of each country represent the unique culture of that country and have the notable values and individuals' features of that land. These relics have a lot of spiritual values for that nation in particular and attractions for others in general, therefore they attract others to visit and understand them (Rezvani, 50:1382). Because of the historical monuments and cultural attractions of Golestan province, it has the great tourist potentials which can have the vast economic benefits for the province as well as

considering as a tourist pole of Iran. Therefore, understanding the tourism potentials of this province in the field of cultural and historical attractions is essential.

### Research objectives

The vast land of Iran with ancient heritage and attractive historical monuments has the great tourist attractions because of being in a rich geographical context. Golestan province has ancient heritage of high potentials in the field of historical and cultural tourism due to the vast relics. Therefore, this study aims to introduce the tourist potentials of Golestan province as a tourist pole in the north of Iran and increase the policy makers' awareness about the capabilities of this province; it has also a basic goal for planning in the field of improving the economic level of local communities and distributing a more balanced income in the province.

### Research Methodology

The method of this research is based on the library, documentary and survey practices and identifies the historical and cultural attractions at the regional scale.

### General features of Golestan Province

The Golestan province with Gorgan as its capital city is one of the northern provinces of Iran and is located in the range of 36 degrees and 30 minutes to 38

degrees and 8 minutes of northern latitude and 53 degrees and 51 minutes to 56 degrees and 22 minutes of eastern longitude. Golestan province with an area of about 20438.3 square kilometers covers 1.3% of the total area of Iran. (Plan and Budget Organization, 1385: 5). This province reaches to Republic of Turkmenistan in the north, Mazandaran province and Caspian Sea in the West, northern Khorasan province in the south and Semnan province in the East. Climate variability of Golestan is due to the diverse remarkable geographical and natural conditions, so that the southern areas have a mountainous climate, central and southwest areas have the Mediterranean and temperate climates, and the northern areas have semi-arid and dry climate. (Hashem Abad Gorgan Weather Centre, 1387: 14). Population of Golestan province has been 1,617,087 people in 1385, and the ratio of urban population has been 49.17% and the rural population 50.8% to the total population of province. Golestan has the young population and the highest percentage of population is related to the ages 15 to 24. (Plan and Budget Organization, 1385: 9). Golestan province has been the largest and the most prosperous territory in the north of Iran in the early centuries of Islam and before it. Until the seventh century, this land has been known as the Gorgan state and from the seventh to fourteenth century it has been called as the Astarabad state. Its civilization history dates back to about six thousand years ago according to the ancient explorations, and in fact it has been one of the oldest states of Iran and the center of creating the Aryan civilization in northern Iran. (Matoufi, 1374:18)

### **Historical-Monumental Attractions**

#### **Castles**

Castles indicate the territory of government and political and military authority area of each region, and are also considered as the ultra-keepers and boundaries. Castles have had various types and each of them has had their own application. Some of them have been residential and the others been for military and toll. The location for building the castle, which has been the symbol and center of power and decision-making and been distinguished with its own special architecture and unique features, was in the best and highest place (Mashhadizadeh Dehaghani, 223:1385). Maran castle is the famous and spectacular castle in Golestan province which is located in 12 kilo-meters from the south of the city Ramian. This castle was a strong fortress to seek shelter due to its appropriate position. The nature surrounding this castle enjoys a beautiful and interesting perspective and has great natural enrichment. Other famous castles of the province which have the tourist attractions include: arch

(Tagh), Shah neshin, Jigh, Gabri Castle , Takht-e Soleiman, Kalari, Khandan, Chekal Shah Pasand, Ghadim Ghale (Ancient castle), Paras, Sar-Ghale, Qez Ghale, Kanizak and ...

#### **Hills and ancient sites**

Ancient monuments in the form of hill, each of them represents the cultural practices and our ancestors' lifestyles and their civilization. In Golestan Province there have been remained numerous ancient hills from the thousands of years ago which have been destroyed over the time because of accidents or events and have been changed to the soil hills now. Some hills are two thousand years old and some of them and their ancient relics date back to over five thousand years. Most of the hills are located in the vicinity and in the pass of defensive wall of Gorgan, and each of them can be a museum which attracts thousands of people around the world every year. Torang hill is one of the oldest hill and a world-renowned hill, it is 22 km north east of Gorgan and in the vicinity of a village with the same name and is located next to the water pool. This hill has attracted many archaeologists throughout the world. It dates back to five thousand years ago based on the foreign archaeologists' reports and results of scientific investigations and explorations. Traces obtained from this historical hill, based on the archaeologists' view, indicate the human settlements in the era before the Aryans. The similarities between the relics obtained from this hill, including small flower statues with the men and women shape, and the relics and artifacts discovered on the Crete Island located in the Aegean Sea indicate that there is a relationship between the relatives and the effect of their art on each other. This hill has the capacity and a lot of potential in order to attract and absorb the tourists to the monuments. (Maddah: 137,252). Other hills and historical and ancient places of this province with tourist attractions are: Ghare-Sheikh Hill (Tappeh), Malek Ali Tappeh (King Ali Hill), Shah Tappeh (King Hill), Shor Tappeh (Shor hill), Nar Tappeh (Nar hill), Tagh Tappeh (Tagh hill), Gomish Tappeh (Gomish hill), Qala Tappeh (Qala hill), Jen Tappeh (Jen Hill), Gorg Tappeh (Wolf Hill), Narges Tappeh (Narges Hill), Soli Tappeh (Soli hill), Azdar Tappeh (Azdar hill) and...

#### **Ancient and historic mosques**

Mosque, as the first geographical phenomenon originated from the Islamic thought, has been developed as a worship-political center around the world, and by playing the major roles has caused the institutional changes in the communities structure of Islamic lands (Nazarian: 25,1383). In this province, mosques decorated with various designs and maps

have been constructed over time, the Jameh Mosque (Congregational Mosque) of Gorgan and Karim-Ishan Mosque are among these mosques. Jameh Mosque is located next to the main market of Gorgan town (Nalbandan). This mosque was built in the brilliant era of Iranian architecture. Only its brick minaret with a Kufic inscription is remained. The wooden pulpit of mosque has eight steps and it inside is inlaid and covered with the glass frames. Entrance of mosque has unique based on the inlaid works and the minaret of mosque is short, and because of the humid weather in this area the minarets are built in low height. The other historical and most important mosque is located in the Karim Ishan state which is located in the east of Kalaleh city and is the relic of Qajar period. Brick structure of mosque, which is devoid of any decoration, has the square-rectangular structure. Entrance door of mosque, which is devoid of artistic elegance, has a poem verse, which tells about the date mosque is built on. The mosque courtyard is tetrahedron and chambers are built in one of its sides.

#### **Historic cities**

Tamishah state is one of the ancient and historical cities in the west Kordkuy city and a village named Sarkalateh Kharab-shahr has been constructed in its ruins. This city was considered as the important resistance center against the enemies' onslaughts to this area because of its defensive wall and the famous ditch. According to the historical evidences, the age of this city dates back to the Anoushirvan Sassanid era. By excavation in 1964 AD it became obvious that the wall of Tamishah was from forest to the sea (north - south) and was built with large bricks and had the circular towers. Jorjan (Hyrcania) is another historical city of this province; it has had different names throughout history. Verkan, Hyrcan and Gorgan have been its most famous names. After the Arabs came to Iran its name changed to Jorjan (Hyrcania) and for centuries it has been the cradle of civilization, culture, and knowledge (Mashkouti: 75, 1345). Ancient Gorgan was devastated after the Mongol invasions and only a name remained from it after Timur's attacks. Nowadays, archaeologists have found valuable relics from ancient Gorgan ruins and they demonstrate the individuals' great art and degree of civilization, culture, architecture, and urbanization at that era. Centuries later, the current Gonbad-e Kāvus city was built and developed next to it. Qabus tower is the most important historical structure of this land at that era. The town citadel was located at the highest level in the central part and was hexagonal and the streets of town were latticed and extended from North to South and East to West. Now the ruins of this city are located along the existing Gonbad-e

Kāvus city. Dasht Halgheh is another ancient city of Golestan and is located 15 kilometers southeast the city Gonbad. It is an irregular octagon and the sides range from 238 m to 1677 m. Two walls surrounded the city and the inner wall was 4 m and the external wall 6.75 m long. Ditch is dug out between two walls and is 53 m wide and in some parts 60 m. The external enclosure of this ancient city is 7 km and its area is 338 acres.

#### **Bridges**

Aq Qala Bridge, which is one of the ancient bridges of Iran, is located in Aq Qala town. In the Qajar era, a military leading castle was built in the location of bridge, and the bridge was located in the castle and in its enclosure. Gates were constructed at the entrance of bridge and they were used in order to control the entry and exit. In fact, this castle and bridge were the solid barriers to prevent the invasions and raids of nomad tribes. But many years ago, the castle was destroyed and the town of Aq Qala Bridge is built instead and located in the middle of town. The other Golestan ancient bridges which have the tourist attractions are the remained bridge of the town Jorjan (Hyrcania), Qarso, Sycabol, Bozpol, Nim mardan and ....

#### **Defensive Wall of Gorgan**

Defensive Wall of Gorgan is one of the most famous monuments in Golestan Province and has been known by different names as the Alexander Dam, Anoushirvan dam, Firuz Dam, and Qezel Alan (Red Snake) during different eras. Defensive Wall of Gorgan starts from the east of Caspian Sea and after passing through the north of towns Aq Qala and Gonbad Kavus (Kavus dome) continues to the east and disappears in the mountains Pish Kamar. The East side of wall goes parallel to the River Gorgan and through the important areas, at the middle side it passes through the north of Hyrcania (Jorjan) and after passing the most ancient parts continues to the West and changes its way from the Bibi Shirvan area to the south, after passing the famous castles, it goes through the north of Aq Qala city, and after passing Gomishan city reaches the Caspian Sea. Near the sea, its path is not clear properly due to the changes in sea level. The wall is 155 km long, and now it has from 2 to 5 m height in different directions and distances and it is 10 m wide. Now, the wall has a form as the continuous series of short hills in the area, and perhaps soil and sand as the coatings prevent the wall from complete destruction. However, the defensive wall of Gorgan is one of the most important and valuable monuments which can be interesting and worth visiting for each visitor, because it represents a corner of Iranian vast land history with ups and

downs and expresses our ancestors' will and attempts to maintain and guard their homeland against the invaders.

### **Qabus Tower**

Qabus Tower is one of the most unique monuments of outstanding architectures in Iran during the Islamic era and is located in the north of Gonbad Kavus and 3 km from the city remained from Jorjan (Hyrkania) old town. Based on the architectural and historical art it is a very valuable relic which has been remained from the prosperous and glorious era of Jorjan city. The mentioned relic with 51 m height is built above the great artificial hill (hill has 15 m height) by Shams Almaly Qaboos bin Voshmgir order and apparently the body of Qaboos is placed in it in a glass coffin (Ghaemi, 29:1379). Qabus Tower attracts numerous enthusiasts from other provinces and abroad to this land in order to travel and visit it, also it is a permanent promenade for residents in Gonbad city and surrounding villages due to its special position in Gonbad Kavus (Kavus dome).

### **Radkan Tower**

It is one of the conical and famous towers in Radkan state and is located among the Alborz Mountains and in two km from the east of Radkan village. This tower is built in order to guide the caravans, and is called Castle Gabri. Tower has 35 meters height and the building of structure is the tomb of one of the Lieutenant generals of Bavand family in Tabarestan (Ghaemi, 46:1374). Dome of Radkan tower has two covers and is tall cone-shaped; an aperture can be seen in the circular body of tower. This Tower is superior to other towers of province such as Qabus Tower because of its plastering.

### **Cultural Attractions**

Golestan province has an ancient history in the vast land of Iran in terms of culture and civilization. Remained signs including the cultural festivals (Eids), music, customs, local games, and handicrafts imply the history and historical, cultural and artistic background of people living in this territory.

### **Holidays (Eids) and celebrations**

Nowruz is one of the leading and ancient festivals of Iran which is held with special ceremony from past until now. Since the ancient times, when the length of day and night become equal and the new green nature is appeared with flowers and blossoms, a magnificent special ceremony has been held. None of the changes, successes, and failures which have emerged in the historical life of Iran for centuries has changed the bases of Iran. Now, people in Iran welcome the new nature with the joy and happiness. From the early

Esfand, in some areas in Golestan province two Nowruz readers (Nowruzkhān) sing the poems written for starting the Nowruz and receive their reward from landlord people; people consider rewarding lucky and respect them as the messengers of spring. People and especially young ones celebrate the last Wednesday of each year, which is known as the Chahar shanbeh Suri, make big fires in several points and jump the fires and repeat the sentence (Your red to me, My yellow to you), and welcome the New Year with joy. Sixty-three years old celebration is common among Turkmens in the province. When any of men reach the age 63 years, they celebrate because of honoring Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) 63 years of life. Turkmens have named this celebration as "Agh Ghoyoun" (White Sheep) and according to the organizer's financial status it can be simple or luxurious. People who are wealthy hold the wrestling or riding the horse competition in Agh Ghoyoun celebration. Turkmen weddings, weddings in Persian villages, Eid al-Adha, Sevid Ghazan, and Yalda Celebration are other important celebrations of this province.

### **Music and dance**

Since the ancient eras the music and good voices have been the human phenomena, national arts, and social and vital individuals' needs. The customs, traditions, and in general the culture of a society can be realized by the word of music, and the music is probably every individual's one of the most valuable cultural heritage. Music and songs in Golestan province express the ancient traditions and are the expressive language for these individuals' joys, sadness and bittersweet epics. Like other people, the Golestan music has a root in its individuals' opinions and thoughts and inspires from their minds, hopes, and far and near wishes. Katuli and Gadari music are the common music in Golestan province. Various dances are common among Turkmens in Golestan province according to different races, type of movements and songs including a Turkish dance, Balochi, Kurdi, and dagger dance. Generally, dance and its movements represent the moral features, events of life, and human actions and also the wishes and desires; in addition dancing is considered as the popular culture of this province and is done in various occasions. Dagger dance, which is the young Turkmen dance, is one of the most attractive and famous dance in Golestan province and Iran. First, young Turkmens wear Turkmani clothing, stand along each other a make a ring and put their hands on the individuals' neck next to them. The one with sword stand in the middle and the induction is sung. The number of people, who are involved in the induction, is not important, sometimes six or eight or more ones

come to the field. This beautiful dance, which is all excitement, movement and cry, will be continued until one of them is swooned because of the severity of inflammation, and then the one with sword will sing sonnets in his ears until he will become conscious.

### **Local Sports**

Wrestling is one of the most ancient Iranian sports and games especially in the Golestan province. Wrestling have been very much in vogue among people in this province and has become one of the local sports and entertainment among these people. Wrestling with a scarf (Miavand) is common among Persian people living in Golestan, and in all small and large villages. During the past, people in this region wrestled in all weddings, circumcision ceremonies on 13th and 14th Farvardin and in all of ceremonies. Therefore, this sport is considered as one of the local and ancient sports. Turkmen wrestle in the wedding and circumcision ceremonies; in this kind of ceremony, the young wrestlers receive awards. This award is usually the little money, a piece of cloth, or sometimes a lamb. Money and objects which are considered as the rewards are divided into several parts and the elders in the ceremony called each part "Bayragh" which will be given to the winner wrestlers. Horse riding is the other local sport which is the favorite sport in Golestan province. Having an interest in horse has deep and historical roots in Golestan province especially among Turkmen and this is because the specific geographical circumstances and the individuals' biological status. Now, there are 4 equestrian institutes in Gonbad, Aq Qala, and Bandar Torkaman and the every year the horse racing is held in spring and fall. Because the largest horse-riding set of Iran is located in this province, there have been a huge potential in order to attract the local and foreign tourists.

### **Turkmani women's clothing**

Turkmani clothing is one of the cultural and tourism attractions. Turkmani people have a very interesting culture due to their apparel and clothing, so that the Turkmani clothing, especially the women's clothing, has an international reputation. Women wear colorful and interesting headscarves and long dresses for keeping their Hijab. Turkmani women's clothing includes large-flowered scarf, long and simple dress, small sweat-absorber, and necklace made of coins and tinsel. In fact, women's clothing with colors and form depend on their style and give a special beauty to them. Turkmani women's clothing is full of variety and beauty and its type differs for every age. Ethnic, cultural and natural factors involve in forming the Turkmani individuals' garment and clothing.

### **Markets (Bazaar)**

Market prepares the population coming and going, buying and selling, and even visits desirably, and attracts each good applicants hierarchically (Shia: 215, 1386). Market (Bazaar) is the other cultural attractions of province and is permanent and weekly. In addition, day markets are held in most cities in certain days during the week. Since years ago, these markets have been established in Bandar Torkaman and Aq Qala cities, but nowadays it is widely established in all cities of province and is welcomed by general public. Nalbandan market in Gorgan city is one of the old markets in the Golestan province and is located inside the old parts of Gorgan city. This market was one of the most important centers of bartering, distributing and disseminating the cultural and social ideas during the last years. Despite the fact that this market has changed during the years by the emergence of climatic, economic, social and cultural factors, is still the main body of city where the goods sellers and buyers trade and gather.

### **Traditional handicrafts**

Handicrafts of each country indicate its inhabitants' talent and creativity in response to the material and spiritual needs. At present conditions, Iranian industry and handicrafts not only play important roles in response to the material needs, but also have special positions in terms of aesthetic and culture point. Thus, the mentioned relics are considered as the tourist attractions (Yavari: 45, 2003). Because the handicrafts is a very clear appearance of nature, culture and arts of different ethnic groups of Golestan province and the window to the past history of this province, it has the ability to become one of the top attractions in the tourist industry. Handicraft products in this province are inspired from the nature of region and shaped in the artists' minds based on the need and natural and human geography. There is no doubt that tourism in this province has always had close relationship with the handicraft products and caused the growth and development in the province. Nowadays, Golestan province is one of the major poles which manufacture the Turkmani carpet, rug, gharchin, kilim, felt, Jajim, wrapper, backrest, basket and wooden things.

### **Conclusion**

Historically, Golestan province as part of the vast territory of Iran has a bright history, and is very rich in terms of having the historical and memorial fields. The extremely ancient history of Golestan province and being in the connecting road of East and West has led it as one of the most important historical centers of Iran. Due to its special geographical

position, except its natural attractions, this province has high potential in terms of historical, cultural and memorial attractions. So that a variety of hills, castles, ancient mosques, towers, historical cities, bridges, defensive walls, celebrations, music, handicrafts, weekly markets and ... can be noted in its geographic area. The highly desirable leisure potential of this province and the attraction of these relics have caused that thousands of Iranian and foreign people visit this attractions in different seasons and on special occasions every year and provide the infrastructure for making money and creating jobs for the province. Due to the large capacity and proper leisure potential for attracting domestic and foreign tourists, if the following proposed strategies are operated, the large-scale tourist attraction, economic development and prosperity of this province and ultimately the economic and social development will be provided for this province.

Developing the infrastructures

Developing the communication networks with the aim of providing the information needs to tourists

Public education in the province with the aim of spreading the culture of admission to tourists

Developing the residential, entertaining and recreating places properly in the province and improving its quality

Introducing the historical and cultural attractions of province through the new advertising tools

Appropriate public and private sector investment in tourism industry

Holding the conferences, exhibitions, and festivals with the aim of introducing the touristy capabilities of this province

Increasing the security in the province especially in the touristy places

Training the proficient tour guides who are fluent in international languages and settling them in the touristy places

Educating the international behavior code, and rules and solemnity to the public and those involved in tourism in this province

Holding the organized tours for visiting the relics and historical and cultural monuments

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