

## Fascinating nature of Abr Forest in Semnan Province attracts countless tourists

Located at 45km from Shahroud, northern Province of Semnan, there exists Abr (Cloud) Forest, one of the oldest and most beautiful forests in Iran.

It is a fascinating natural setting far beyond imagination, showcasing a wonderful ecosystem with an abundance of fog covering the ground and vegetation which attracts a large number of domestic and foreign tourists every year, persiatrip.com reported.

As temperature drops a few hours before sunset and due to the closeness of two high and low pressure regions, namely Gorgan Plain and Abr region, clouds start developing on the saddles of mountains and scurrying into the forest.

At this moment, the forest is veiled in thick fog and visibility decreases to a meter ahead, providing visitors a memorable chance to enjoy walking in the midst of clouds as if they were walking on clouds.

Within the thick forests, it is hard to believe that you are in Semnan Province, a short distance from Iran's central desert and Khartouran National Park (a biosphere reserve), realizing the reason Shahrud is called 'a small continent': The cloud forest in the north and the central desert in the south.

As visitors go past the city of Baslam, scenes of the clouds far-off over the mountains and along the 4,000-meter Shahvar Mountain become more visible, promising that they are getting closer to the dreamy forest.

Stretching over 35,000 hectares and at a high altitude, the forest constitutes a part of the ancient Hyrcanian forests encompassing the northern slopes of the Alborz Mountains and covering the southern coastline of the Caspian Sea.

Having diverse vegetation, the forest



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includes old woody plants such as beech, oak, alder, elm and cherry trees, seemingly sometimes over the clouds as well as unique springs flowing in the middle. Of the fantas-

tic trees encircling the forest, juniper stands out, a tree native to the region which is seen everywhere with indescribable beauty. Also, the forest includes steep hills which are dense in



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some places and scattered in others that are clearly seen in broad daylight.

Being overcast and foggy in most seasons, the spectacular cloud forest offers an amazing holiday destination

especially in the summer due to having low temperatures.

Here, coolness and freshness are the truly pleasant senses for those who go to the area due to the proximity

of the clouds to people's face, often in the form of dew on eyes and hair.

Surrounding the district, there are also an ancient monument known as Maran Castle and the Shorshor Waterfall which flows at the bottom of a valley and remains intact due to its inaccessibility, making the site more beautiful.

Taking a ride in the forest is just like realizing the dream of walking on clouds, watching beautiful scenes, taking marvelous photos, and getting completely relaxed with a lifetime experience.

Part of the foreign tourists in the area are botanists who come to Iran to see the rare herbaceous species found in the Hyrcanian forests, and the second group is common tourists who come from Central Asia and the Middle East.

The animal species of this region include brown bear, wolf, leopard, wild boar, jackal, fox, rabbit, goat and snake. Wild pigeon, quail, wild eagle, vulture, hawk, cuckoo and pheasant are among the birds that live in the forest.

### Best time to visit

The Abr Forest is spectacular at all times of the year and enjoys a wonderful variety and beauty. But the best time to visit the area is March until late October.

If you are planning to visit this forest at this time of year, we suggest you take one-day, two-day or four-day tours.

Clouds in the forest begin to descend as the weather gets colder, reaching the surface of the forest. So start your tour early in the morning, and if you're not planning to stay in the area for the night, it's better to leave the forest before the weather gets dark.

## Tabatabaei House: An architectural masterpiece in Kashan

Tabatabaei House in Kashan, central province of Isfahan, is a historical monument built in the 19th century during the reign of the Qajar Dynasty (1789-1925).

Being a great example of a genuine Iranian residential complex, Tabatabaei House represents the distinctive features of traditional Persian architecture, iranios.com wrote.

Tabatabaei House is one of the best samples of the historical houses of Kashan, more elegant and more beautiful than almost all. Two hundred years ago the definition of a house and the majesty of one seemed to be a bit different from what we know today. At that time, science was in harmony with nature and mankind for making a masterpiece.

Also known as the paradise of historic houses in Iran, its elegant artistic ornaments dazzle the eyes. Tabatabaei House is a mansion in which art and architecture have created an astonishing combination. It shines as a valuable jewel among the historical monuments of Iran.



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The ancient house was built in the 1880s by a wealthy carpet merchant, Seyyed Jafar Tabatabaei. With an area of 4,730 square meters, the mansion took ten years to build. Ali Maryami Kashani, a famous master architect who has the design and construction of the magnificent Borujerdi House and the historic bazaar of Kashan in his record, also built the Tabatabaei House which is without doubt his greatest masterpiece. The paintings and plastering of the house are masterpieces done under the full supervision of Sani-ol-Molk Kashani, the great artist of that period.

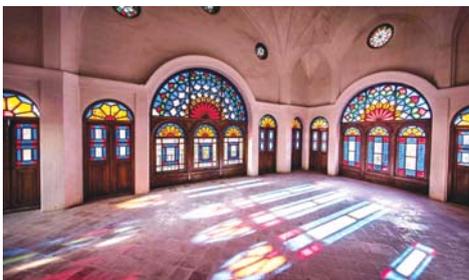
The splendor of the mansion is mostly due to special patterns that make its art and architecture remarkable. The owner of the house, Seyyed Jafar Tabatabaei, was very fond of Iranian carpets, consequently, by his order, all the plastering designs used on the walls are copies of original patterns of Persian carpets.



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Tabatabaei House, has three sections: The *andaroomi* (internal section), the *bi-rooni* (external section), and the servants' residence. It is an Islamic style for keeping the privacy of the interior section of the house. It has 40 rooms, four courtyards, four basements, three wind catchers, and two aqueducts.

The most attractive part of the house is the *shalmeshin* (a large room decorated with colorful glasses, delicate mirror works, and beautiful tilings). This magnificent seven-door room has unique and elegant decorations all over. The dazzling



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mirror works, amazing plaster works, and fantastic stalactite ceiling decorations are all put together in the most harmonic fashion possible. *Javan-e ayeneh* (mirror porch) in the front of the *shalmeshin*, is a galaxy of glaring mirrors. Inspired by the original patterns of Persian carpets, the design of the mirror porch, in addition to the hanging lanterns, has doubled its beauty.

As an insulation measurement, the Tabatabaei House, like other luxurious houses of the time, is built in the depth of the earth. Consequently, visitors should climb down the stairs at the entrance to reach the yard. This thick insulation of soil prevents the penetration of the scorching summer heat and dry winter cold into the house. Also, to some extent, it makes the house resistant to earthquakes. Another advantage of building a house in the depth of the earth is the ease of access to the aqueduct.

This quiet efficient natural air conditioning system begins with the wind catchers on the roof. They catch clean air from the roof and drive it through a guiding tunnel to a cooling well with a depth of eight to 10 meters. The air descends as it cools down and gets heavier. Then, the current of cool and fresh air enters through the opening of the tunnel and flows in the residential basement.



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Another interesting aspect of this architectural masterpiece, which has been registered on Iran's National Heritage List, is that in cool summer nights and during the winter, when the outside air temperature is lower than the air inside the cooling well, the airflow stops, causing the system to come to a halt. The amazing fact of the system is that during these last 140 years, it remains active and continues to work as it did on the first day.

Tabatabaei House is located in the center of Kashan, in the old part of the city. It is surrounded by other tourist sites such as Borujerdi House, Abbasi House, Ameri House, Toy Museum, Sultan Amir Ahmad Bathhouse and others.