

In Praise of Hope; A Reflection on the Resilience of Iran's Tourism

Years have passed since the COVID19- pandemic, yet the image of Kish International Airport during those difficult days remains vivid in my memory. Flights were cancelled one after another, and the silence that filled the terminal reflected the stillness of an entire industry upon which millions depended. Serving then as the Managing Director of the Kish Free Zone Organization, I came to realize more deeply than ever that Kish is not simply a tourism destination; it is a meeting point of culture, economy, investment, hospitality, and, above all, social hope. The pandemic taught us that tourism is far more than hotels, flights, and attractions. It is a living ecosystem built upon trust, hope, and human collaboration. Although the pandemic has passed, the industry continues to face economic uncertainty, social change, and regional challenges that shape travel decisions and investment. In such circumstances, resilience is no longer an abstract concept but an essential principle for survival and sustainable progress. To me, resilience is not merely the ability to endure hardship. It is the capacity to preserve hope, make responsible decisions, and find new paths forward despite uncertainty. During the darkest days of the pandemic, I witnessed this spirit among the people of Kish. What sustained tourism was not financial capital alone, but mutual trust, shared responsibility, compassion, and solidarity. These values enabled the island to recover and remain a valuable lesson for confronting future crises.

Crises are inevitable, but they are temporary. Markets fluctuate, infrastructure may suffer, and visitor numbers may decline. Yet as long as public trust, social capital, and hope endure, tourism can always recover. Iran possesses extraordinary and lasting strengths—its rich history, cultural heritage, natural diversity, artistic traditions, and renowned hospitality. While these assets remain intact, protecting the country's image, travelers' confidence, and the motivation of tourism stakeholders requires the collective commitment of policymakers, industry leaders, academics, media, and the private sector.

Tourism should be measured not only by visitor statistics but by its ability to strengthen local communities, preserve cultural heritage, and deepen understanding among people. Supporting domestic tourism, empowering local businesses, promoting lesser-known destinations, and advancing responsible tourism have become strategic necessities rather than optional choices. Likewise, tourism media should inspire hope through truthful and balanced narratives that acknowledge challenges while highlighting realistic opportunities for progress.

Throughout my academic and executive career, I have become convinced that the future of tourism depends less on the absence of crises than on the quality of governance and crisis management. Trust remains the industry's greatest asset, built through honesty, strategic planning, and collective responsibility.

If I were to summarize my experience in one sentence, it would be this: **Tourism is, above all, the embodiment of hope.** Every traveler, every welcoming host, and every entrepreneur who perseveres contributes to building a brighter future. History has repeatedly shown that Iran has overcome adversity with resilience and determination, and there is every reason to believe that its tourism industry will do the same. By viewing tourism through the culture of hope rather than merely the economics of travel, we can strengthen social cohesion, preserve cultural identity, foster resilience, and create a more peaceful and prosperous future.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Ahangaran, J. (2026). In Praise of Hope; A Reflection on the Resilience of Iran's Tourism . *Tourism of Culture*, 7(25), 3.

DOI: [10.22034/TOC.2026.248432](https://doi.org/10.22034/TOC.2026.248432)

URL: https://www.toc-sj.com/article_248432.html?lang=en

