

17 DAYS GRAND TOUR AROUND THE IRAN

Tehran 2N/Alisadr 1N/Hamadan 1N/Kermanshah 1N/Shushtar 1N/Mahshahr 1N/Shiraz 3N/Kerman 2N/Yazd 2N/Isfahan 2N

Type: Discovery/Historical/Cultural/Religious

HIDDEN WONDERS OF WESTERN AND EASTERN IRAN

Discover an Iran beyond the media portrayals of a repressive and dour regime – this is a country full of warm, lively and friendly people.



Welcome to the hidden world of Iran. Travel through this fascinating country to discover refined Islamic cities, colorful bazaars, ancient Persian ruins, fascinating nomads and shimmering deserts. Whether you're Relaxing in a teahouse in Tehran, enjoying guided tours of ancient cultural sites, or breaking bread with nomads on the harsh Iranian plateau, the warmth and hospitality of the Iranian people is endearing and the profound beauty of their land is mesmerizing.

Iran is home of one of the oldest civilizations in the world, dating back to the Persian Empire 2,500 years ago. The country lies at the crossroads of three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe, and many ancient civilizations. A significant section of the Silk Road runs across Iran as do other great caravan routes to the south.

On this tour, travel through Iran to explore the ancient civilizations, glorious monuments, and architecture, extraordinary UNESCO World Heritage sites, fascinating nomads, stunning desert landscapes, ethical diversity and exotic Persian cuisines. Choose a guided tour and experience the historical sites or step into an adventure and enjoy unknown destinations and places or live with nomads. Feel the hospitality of Iranians and also the beauty of the land.

Highlights:

- Discover an Iran beyond the media portrayals of a repressive and dour regime – this is a country full of warm, lively and friendly people.
- Visiting several UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the Golestan Palace Complex, Soltaniyeh Dome, the Bisotun bas-reliefs, Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System, the Choga Zanbil ziggurat, Eram Garden, Persepolis, Pasargad, Meymand Village, Historic City of Yazd, ghanat & Jameh Mosque of Isfahan
- Discover Isfahan, the old capital and the 'Jewel of Islamic Iran'.
- Visit Kashan, including Abyane and the historical houses of Brojerdis and Tabatabais.
- Discover Iranian cuisine. Do not forget to eat Chelo kebab, Abgusht, Gormesabzi and..., you will never forget the taste of Iranian foods.
- Walk in the Iranian indoor markets and drown in colors and smells and beauties.

ITINERARY

Day 1: Start Tehran

Those on the group flights arrive very early this morning (or late the previous night) and will be transferred to the hotel. Land only passengers should arrive at the hotel this morning though we do recommend arriving the night before if not on the group flights (this night is included). Tehran is a sprawling metropolis buzzing with people. It is the economic heart of Iran and a modern city with museums, cafes and restaurants. We head out into Tehran and visit the Archaeological Museum with its collections of pottery, bronze and valuable pieces from various ages ranging from millenniums BCE to the Islamic era. We also visit the Abguineh Glass and Ceramics Museum, a valuable collection of pre-Islamic, Islamic and European glass and ceramics displayed within an elegant early-20th Century mansion. Finally, we visit the Carpet Museum with its extensive collection of old and new Persian carpets and rugs from the country's major carpet-weaving centers.

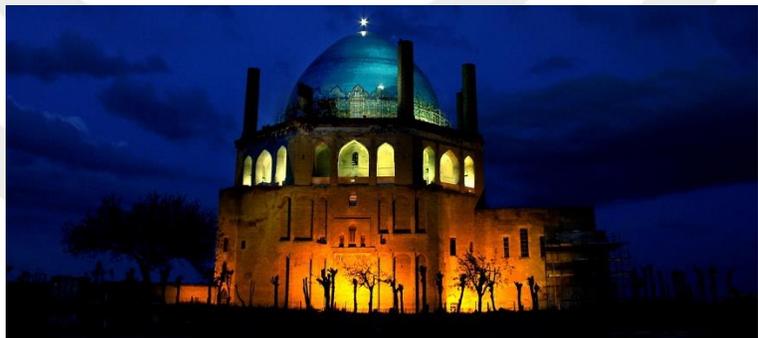
Day 2: Full day sightseeing in Tehran

We see more of Tehran today with full day visits including the Golestan Palace Museum Complex, built by Fath-Ali Shah of the Qajar Dynasty and dating from the 18th to the early 20th century. We continue to the Shams-ol-Emareh (Sun) Palace and the Ethnographic Museum, with a walk around the garden to enjoy the beautiful tile-covered walls and buildings. In the afternoon, we visit the fabulous State's Jewels Museum, housed in the vaults of the Central Bank of Iran displaying the most dazzling and priceless collection of jewels and gems in the world.



Day 3: Visit Soltaniye en route to the Alisadr

As we leave the hustle and bustle of the Iranian capital behind, We head north-west today, first towards Qazvin and then on to the city of Soltaniyeh, where we visit its magnificent mausoleum, a UNESCO World Heritage site and a masterpiece of Persian and Islamic architecture. Then we will continue our route to Alisadr.



Day 4: Alisadr – Hamadan

After visiting the amazing cave 'Ali Sadr', we go to Hamadan. Visiting Hamadan highlights: Alavian Dome,

Abu-Ali–Sina(Avicenna) the great philosopher, Baba Taher-e Oryan Mausoleum , the Iranian famous poet, and Tomb of Esther and Mordechai, stone Lion, Ganjnameh, dating back to Achaemanid Era and belonging to Darius the great, plus Hegmataneh Historical Ruins.



Day 5: Hamadan - Kermanshah

Our route today takes us first to Kangavar where we'll visit the Anahita Temple, and then on to Bisotun (a UNESCO WHS) to see a series of world famous bas-relief carvings dating back to 521 BC. Bisotun, is the world-famous rock relief carvings, about 100 meters off the ground, upon which we learn about the historical inscription issued by well-deserved Persian King, Darius, dating back to 521 BC. Lying on Bisotun wall, the Hercules Statue, has been witnessing people fascinated by its wonders for years, is the other beauty of this site. We arrive in Kermanshah and go to the hotel for rest and restoration.

Days 6: Kermanshah – Khorram Abad - Shushtar

Our drive south today takes us to Khoramabad, Today we visit an incredible age-old, firm castle. Falak-ol-Aflak Castle, is situated strongly on the top of a large hill with the same name. The majesty of this gigantic structure, built in Sassanid Era, catches the travelers' eyes. Head to Dezful, we have a short stop to visit the Traditional Hydraulic System of this Southern city. Then drive to Shushtar.



Day 7: Shushtar - Mahshahr

Iranian heart of ancient history is beating here. First we explore Shushtar including historical Hydraulic System, the biggest industrial complex before Industrial Revolution, a simple but smart engineering and UNESCO World Heritage Site, Its waterfalls and old mills opens the doors to the heydays of long historical periods. Shush, an ancient city of the Elamite, Persian and Parthian empires of Iran, is our next

exploration. The rich Archaeological Museum of Susa, the remnants of Apadana Palace dating back to the Achaemenes Era, French Castle and another valuable Jewish site, Tomb of Daniel (an Hebrew prophet), are amongst our visits of today. A 20 kilometer road trip from shush toward south, we reach Tchogha Zanbil, UNESCO World Heritage Site, magnificent Ziggurat. It is the best



surviving example of Elamite architecture anywhere. The ziggurat was built about 1250 BC by the king Untash- Gal, mainly dedicated to Inshushinak, the Great god of the Elamite. At the end of this exciting day, we head to Mahshahr.



Day 8: Mahshahr - Shiraz

Our trip through history still continues. Today we visit Tang-e Chougan (Chougan gorge) and some remnants of glorious Sassanid Town of Bishapur, stunning Anahita Temple and the relief of Valeria, a king of Rome. Leaving the historical remains behind, we enter Shiraz, the city of poetry, flower, nightingale, culture and history. To Change the mood of our trip a little bit and depending on timing we visit Shah-e Cheragh holy Shrine at night.

Day 9: Shiraz

We are almost in the middle of our trip and warmly welcomed by beautiful city of Shiraz. 9th day of our visit is partly historical and partly excursion in Shiraz popular flowery gardens. Vakil Ensemble; Mosque & bazaar, Eram Garden UNESCO World Heritage Site, Arg-e Karimkhan (Karimkhan Citadel), dating back to Zand Era and Nasir-ol-Molk colorful mosque. Then we get to know tombs of two Iranian Famous Poets, HAFEZ and SAADI and Iranian literature.



Day 10: Shiraz

We drive toward another part of Iran glorious history. The most well-known monument, Persepolis, UNESCO World Heritage Site tells you the story of one of the world's most sophisticated civilizations, dates back to 2500 years ago, Achaemenids. The complex includes magnificent Persepolis (Thakht-e Jamshid) & Pasargadae, the tomb of Cyrus, the great, Achaemenid' palaces and relief, Naqsh-e Rostam Necropolis, and Naqsh-e Rjab.



Day 11: Kerman

Today we Journey Kerman Province. On the way we visit Sarvestan Palace dating back to Sassanid Era. Then we have a detour to visit Meymand Village, UNESCO World Heritage Site, a village with an exotic structure of cave style houses. It has won the International Melina Mercury Prize, due to human adaptation to nature. Enter Kerman, a 3rd century A.D city, we visit water supply system, water reservoirs, and manmade refrigerators (Ice houses), a brilliant

innovation and old structure to produce ice in winter and keep until summer, in a desert city dating back to hundred years ago

Day 12: Day trip of Arg-e-Rayan citadel (a miniature version of Bam), Mahan

We head towards the village of Rayan to visit the Arg (Citadel) of Rayan, a miniature version of the Bam Citadel which was destroyed by an earthquake in 2003. Arg-e-Rayan has all the typical architectural features of a desert citadel with ramparts, towers,

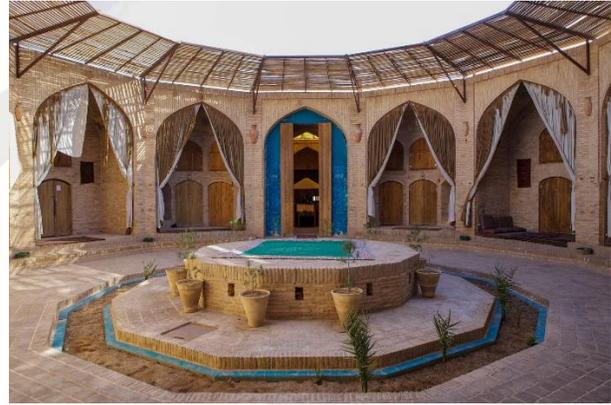
covered lanes and spectacular views of the nearby Mt. Hezar, snowcapped for most of the year. Returning towards Kerman, we stop in the small town of Mahan to visit the blue-tiled Mausoleum of Shah Nematollah-e-Vali, the great 14th century Sufli Leader, and the Shahzadeh Garden (a late 19th century Qajar period house and garden). Back in Kerman we visit the Friday Mosque, the Ganj-Ali Khan Complex and Hammam which has been converted into an Ethnographic Museum. We explore the Maidan (square) with its mosque, madrassa and water cistern all dating back to



the 17th and 18th centuries and the Vakil Tea House (another covered bathhouse). We will walk through bazaar. There's still a great atmosphere.

Day 13: Kerman – Mehriz - Yazd

Our route today takes us to Mehriz, to visiting Zein-O-Din, a rare circular 17th-century caravanserai south-east of Yazd. Soon after our visit, we head to Yazd, despite being close to desert; Yazd is a green city. It owes its greenery to another ancient Iranian engineering technique. Their smart solution to the water shortage is recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Site. They invented Qanat and brought water from heart of the earth to the ground. A different UNESCO-Listed, still alive architecture of old city of Yazd



(Historic City of Yazd), simple life style and hospitable people in spite of unkind and tight nature, all of which leave you speechless. At the entrance to Yazd we go straight to the hotel. Rest and then go to Amir Chakhmagh Ensemble.

Day 14: Visit Ateshkade Fire Temple, mausoleum, mosque and bazaars of Yazd.

We enjoy a full day sightseeing in historic Yazd, the centre for Iran's small Zoroastrian community. Visit one of the two Zoroastrian abandoned Towers of Silence (Dakhma). Dating back to the 18th Century, until some 70-odd years ago the bodies of the dead were carried and left here to decompose and be devoured by birds. The next Zoroastrian site is the Fire Temple which houses a flame which is said to have been burning for over 1,500 years.

Amongst Yazd's Islamic sites are the Friday Mosque (1324AD) which boasts the highest portal and minarets in Iran and the Mirchachmagh Maidan and Mosque. Other notable monuments, found in the old Fahadan area of Yazd, are the Saljuk shrine, dedicated to the Twelve Shi'ite Imams; and Ziaieyeh Theological School, also known as Znedan-e-Eskander (Alexander's Prison). Yazd also has many beautiful old houses such as Dowlat-Abad Garden, an 18th Century feudal hexagonal house.



Day 15: Yazd-Meybod-Na'in-Isfahan

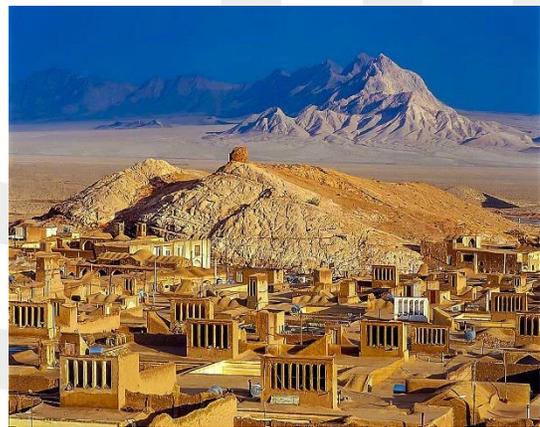
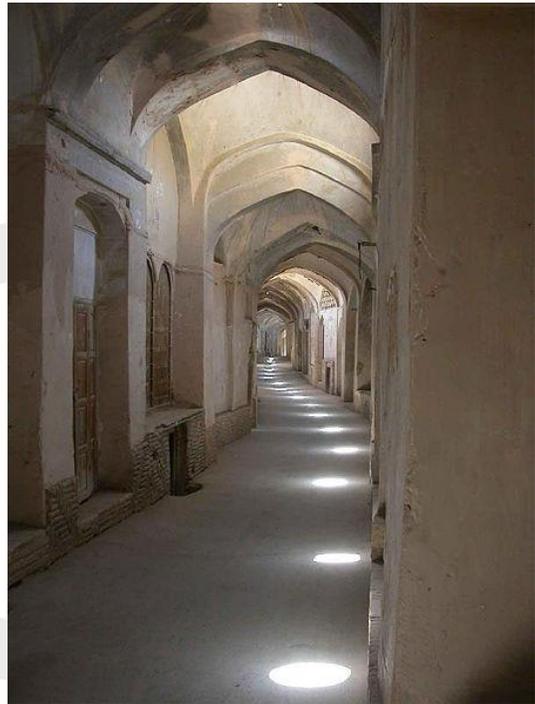
We start overland journey from Yazd to Isfahan. Take a detour to the small town of Meybod. Set along an ancient trade route, Meybod also offers a number of fascinating sites to visit, including its caravanserai. Built in a typical Safavid style, this ancient desert inn features verandahs, shaded passageways and nearly 100 rooms – some of which are now used as workshops. At the local icehouse, you'll learn about the thick-clay construction and subterranean chambers that allowed local residents to store ice and food even during the intense desert heat of summer before refrigeration came along.

Visit Na'in, an ancient community with origins dating back to the 8th century AD. At the local Ethnographic Museum, set in an erstwhile private residence, you'll get the chance to learn more about the region's history and culture. Before going to Esfahan, we go to the Jame Mosque.

Reach Isfahan, the 17th-century capital of the Safavid empire and one of the world's greatest cities – architecturally striking, wealthy beyond imagining, and politically powerful with Europeans, Ottomans, Indians and Chinese coming to its court. It was also the heart of a vast Persian empire that stretched from the Euphrates River in present-day Iraq to the Oxus River in Afghanistan. Indeed, its grandeur was such that it inspired the rhyming proverb, Isfahan nesf-Jahan (Isfahan is half the world).

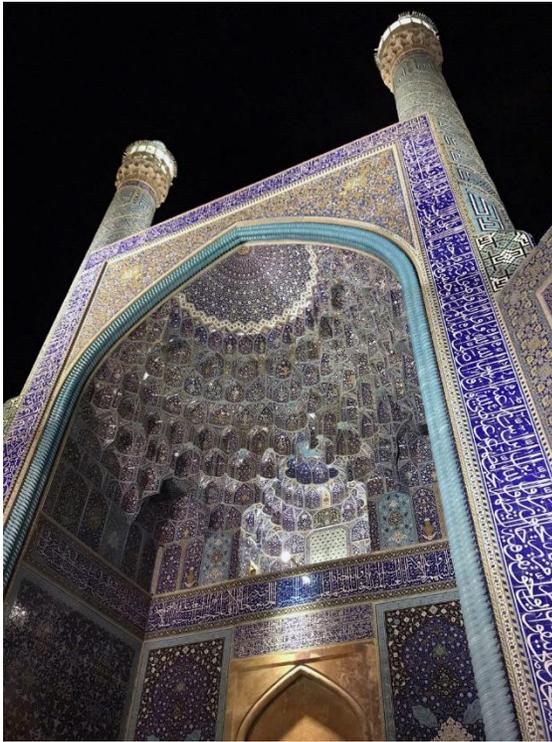
Join our expert guide in exploring the city, starting with some of the centuries-old, still-elegant bridges that span the Zayandeh River. The 14th-century Shahrestan Bridge, for example, reminds one of the aqueducts of ancient Rome and is the oldest bridge in Iran.

Other famous bridges on the Zayandeh River are Sio-se-pol and Khajou. There are sluice gates below the bridges to let the water flow down the river in the spring and there are beautiful stony archways above each gate.



Day 16: Isfahan

We start the day by exploring Naghsh e Jahan Square, the 17th-century site which is also one of the largest public spaces in the world. Visit the Shah Mosque, revered as a masterpiece of Islamic architecture and easily recognized due to its magnificent tile work and a soaring cupola and minarets.



Marvel at the beautiful music rooms and balconies of Ali Qapu Palace and get the chance to explore the Qeisarieh Bazaar, which surrounds Naghsh e Jahan Square. With hundreds of local vendors that specialize in traditional arts and crafts, it's a wonderful place to shop for pottery, enamel, jewelry and delicately inlaid board games.

Next up is Chehel Sotun. Set in a landscaped and forested park in front of a tranquil reflecting pool, this graceful pavilion was built by Shah Abbas II for entertainment and court receptions. Enter into the building through a portico supported by twenty slender wooden columns and discover soaring halls embellished with frescoes, paintings and mosaics. The Hall of Mirrors is especially breathtaking!

In the city's Armenian quarter, you'll get the chance to delve more deeply into the region's complex history. Visit several churches in the area, including the 17th-century Vank Cathedral with its lavishly decorated

interior and a unique blend of Islamic and European architectural elements.

Day 17: Isfahan – Kashan – Tehran



Drive to Kashan after breakfast and visit the Abyaneh Village en route. The village is also known as the Red Village because of its red-mud houses (the area has red soil). The houses of Abyaneh bear an ancient architectural style and feature the use of clay as the main construction material along with latticed windows and wooden doors.

On reaching Kashan, head for its two famous traditional houses, Boroujerdi or Tabatabaei. Travel to the Fin Garden, a UNESCO World Heritage site, This Persian garden reflects ancient landscaping principles that trace their roots to the time of Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BCE.

Leaving Kashan behind in the evening and head for imam khomeini international airport and go back home.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Arrival and departure airport transfers
- 16 nights' accommodation in standard-grade hotels
- Land travel in Iran by air-conditioned coach
- Services of an experienced Iranian tour guide throughout the tour
- Meals: 17 breakfasts and 17 dinner
- entrance tickets according to the travel plan

WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- International air fares, taxes and surcharges
- Travel insurance
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry or phone calls
- Visa code application fees
- Tips to guides and drivers
- Visa costs

Important:

In cities where there is no 5* hotel, we will have to stay in hotels with highest stars in that city.

HOTEL CATEGORY AND ACCOMMODATION

Cat.	Hotel Name	Location	Nights
5*	ESTEGHLAL 5*	TEHRAN	2
2*	TOURISM INN 2*	ALISADR	1
4*	AMIRAN 4*	HAMEDAN	1
5*	PARSIAN 5*	KEMANSHAH	1
3*	TABIB 3*	SHUSHTAR	1
3*	SOREN GRAND 3*	MAHSHAHR	1
4*	ARIOBARZAN 4*	SHIRAZ	3
5*	PARS 5*	KERMAN	2
5*	SAFAIYEH 5*	YAZD	2
5*	ABBASI 5*	ISFAHAN	2