
Persian Treasures of Iran

In-Depth Tour: 27 Days/26 Nights

April 5-May 1 and September 22-October 18, 2019

September Tour Follows Our Tour to The Caucasus

Persian Treasures of Iran Highlights tour offers all the “must see” sites of this intriguing country as well as visits to rural villages for slice-of-life observations. There will be opportunities for interaction with local people and immersion with the culture. We will visit historic sites, ancient traditional villages, enjoy spectacular landscapes, browse crafts centers and local bazaars.

Our itinerary gives distances; coaches do 50-70 km an hour depending on roads (mountainous or flat) and the drives are mostly full days with en-route visits. The roads are very good here and not “bumpy dirt” roads.



DETAILED ITINERARY

April 5 Sat /Sep 22 Sun Day 1 ARRIVAL TEHRAN PM OR April 6/Sep 22 ARRIVAL TEHRAN EARLY AM

You will be met at the airport and transferred to hotel. Rest of day/evening at leisure.

April 6 Sun /Sep 23 Mon Day 2 TEHRAN TOUR

Come down to breakfast as you wish, breakfast restaurant opens at 7 am.

We shall meet our guide in the lobby at 10 am and head out a visit to the National Museum, which is comprised of two buildings. *The Museum of Ancient Iran* (Archaeological Museum) displays an authentic collection of pottery, bronze and valuable pieces from millenniums BC until the Islamic era. The objects on display have been found from different regions of Iran including Susa, Persepolis, and many other ancient sites. *The Museum of the Islamic Era* (which has been under renovation for 9 years) has finally opened in late 2015. It contains arts and antiquities from throughout the Islamic period. This museum provides an excellent introduction to Iran.

Next, we are guided through the lovely Abguineh Glass and Ceramics Museum with a beautiful collection of glass and pottery from different periods.

Lunch at a local restaurant (pay direct).

This afternoon a visit to the fabulous National Jewels Museum (open 2-4:30 pm) with its extraordinary collection of gemstones and jewelry. The National Jewelry Treasury is housed within the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at the heart of the City of Tehran. Here is the most dazzling collection of gemstones and jewelry known in the world. The Crown Jewels of Iran have been little more than a legend in the past. Travelers marveled at the splendor surrounding the shahs of ancient Persia; but few were permitted to examine it in any detail. Now the most spectacular objects have been placed on public display.

Note: the museum is small and it does not take more than 30 minutes to tour, but there is always a long line to enter and you could be waiting on line for 30 minutes. There is not a system to pre-book tickets.

Time-permitting, we'll also visit the Carpet Museum, which has an excellent collection of Persian carpets from different regions of Iran.

We shall enjoy a casual early dinner at a local restaurant and return to the hotel for an evening of leisure on your own.

April 7 Mon /Sep 24 Day 3: TEHRAN

We start the day with a visit to the opulent Golestan Palace/Museum Complex, the former residence of the 19th early 20th century Qajar Kings of Iran, with several museums including the Marble Throne Room. This is the oldest of the historic monuments in Tehran.

Afterward, an exploration of the Grand Tehran Bazaar. The bazaar dates back to 19th and early 20th century with more than 10km of corridors and passageways. Lots of traditional merchants are busy working there. This is a great way to see a slice of the authentic Iranian lifestyle.

Lunch at a local restaurant (pay direct).

Next is a visit to Reza Abbasi Museum displaying collections of Persian art from pre-Islamic and Islamic eras until 20th century; the two galleries of paintings and calligraphy in this museum show different schools of painting and calligraphy in different time periods in Iran.

We culminate the day with a drive to North Tehran (close to our hotel) to visit the former residence of the ex-Royal Family of Iran at Sa'ad-Abad Palace/Museum Complex. The complex contains 18 palaces, of which 7 have been converted into museums. The current presidential palace is located adjacent to the Sa'd Abad compound.

April 8 /Sep 25 Day 4: FLY TO SHIRAZ

Transfer to airport for direct flight to Shiraz Iran Air IR324 departs 1110 am, arrives 1245 pm. On arrival, you will transfer to the hotel.

Afternoon touring TBA.

April 9 /Sep 26 Day 5: SHIRAZ

Full day city tour of Shiraz, the city of “roses and nightingales.”

We visit some of the delightful gardens of Shiraz, including the Eram Garden, the tombs of Iran’s greatest lyric poets, Hafez and Sa’adi, both located in pleasant gardens, with charming “Chai-Khaneh” (tea-house). Shiraz, as the capital of the 18th-century Zand Rulers of Iran, has many monuments dating back to this period: the Arg-e-Karim Khan, a fortress building in the now town-centre, which was the seat of government of Zand Rulers, and has been extensively restored in recent years; the Vakil Mosque.

Additionally, we visit the Qajar-period Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, popularly known as the “Pink Mosque” because of its colorful tile decorations, the Narenjestan Garden/Pavilion, also dating from the Qajar period, and the family home of the wealthy Qavam Family of Shiraz. The Narenjestan has a reception hall or ‘Biruni’ and the private quarters of the family or ‘Andaruni’, which are now in two separate buildings. Complete the day with a visit to Vakil Bazaar.

April 10 /Sep 27 Day 6: SHIRAZ – EXCURSION TO PERSEPOLIS (100 km round trip)

A full day excursion to Persepolis, one of the most important sites of the Ancient World, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings with remains of the palaces of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes, and its famous bas-reliefs, depicting kings and courtiers and gift-bearing representatives of tributary nations of the Persian Empire.

We also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam to see Ka’be-Zardosht (fire temple/sanctuary), and Royal Tombs (also Achaemenid); plus seven magnificent Sassanian rock-reliefs (including Shapur the First’s famous victory over Roman Emperor Valerian); and Naghsh-e-Rajab, a nearby grotto with several more important Sassanian reliefs.

Time-permitting drive further 70 km to visit Pasargadae, the site of the tomb and remains of palaces of Cyrus the Great (the Founder of the Persian Empire), all located in the magnificent Dasht-e-Morghab. Return to Shiraz for overnight.

April 11 /Sep 28 Day 7: SHIRAZ-KERMAN (560 km/7 hrs not incl stops for sightseeing)

The drive to Kerman is slow as it is on mountain roads. We will pass along salt lakes, and through spectacular mountains, and outstanding fig and almond orchards planted on the steep slopes of the mountains.

En-route we visit the ruins of the Sassanian Palace at Sarvestan, thought by many to be a hunting lodge or small palace built by Bahram V (420-440 AD).

April 12 /Sep 29 Day 8: KERMAN - EXCURSION TO RAYEN & MAHAN VILLAGES (250 km rnd trip)

Full day excursion to Rayen Village. Visit the Arg, or Citadel, a miniature version of the Arg-e-Bam, with all the architectural features of a desert citadel, now on the map as a result of the tragic earthquake in Bam, which destroyed the town and its magnificent citadel. On the return to Kerman, stop at Mahan and visit the blue-tiled Mausoleum of Shah Nematollah-e-Vali, the great 14th century Sufi Leader; and the Shahzadeh Garden (late 19th century Qajar period garden/house). Overnight in Kerman.

April 13 /Sep 30 Day 9: KERMAN-YAZD (360 km/4 hours)

Morning tour in Kerman to include the 14th century Jame’ (Congregational) Mosque, Ganj-Ali-Khan Complex, including the bathhouse (hamam) turned into an Ethnographic Museum, the Caravanserai and the traditional tea house (another converted hamam).

Afternoon drive to Yazd, en-route visit Zein-ol-Din Caravanserai, dating from the Safavid period.

April 14 /Oct 1 Day 10: YAZD

Full day sightseeing in Yazd, the center for Iran’s small Zoroastrian community, who seeking refuge from the invading Arabs found a safe haven within its fortified walls. On this day you will visit one of the two Zoroastrian abandoned Towers of Silence (Dakhma), dating back to the 18th-century, where until some 40-50 years ago the dead were carried and left to decompose and be devoured by birds; and the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, the fire of which has been burning for about 1500 years. Among Yazd’s Islamic sites is the Friday Mosque (1324 A.D.), with the highest portal and minarets in Iran.

Other notable Islamic monuments in Yazd are the Seljuk shrine dedicated to the Twelve Shi’ite Imams; and Ziaieyeh Theological School, known as Zendan-e-Eskandar or Alexander’s Prison. There are also many beautiful old houses to be seen in Yazd, among them the Dowlat Abad Garden, with an 18th-century feudal hexagonal house.

April 15 /Oct 2 Day 11: YAZD-ISFAHAN (300 km/4 hours)

After breakfast we depart to Isfahan, en-route stop over first at Meybod, a small desert town with several very interesting monuments of desert/mud architecture and a caravanserai.

Continue to the village of Mohamadiye to see the traditional workshops, weaving the camel cloaks worn by the Moslem clergy in Iran.

Then onward to Na'in another charming desert town, half way between Yazd and Isfahan. Here we visit the 10th century Friday Mosque, the 17th century Pirnia House/ Ethnographic Museum and a walk through the old part of town.

April 16 /Oct 3 Day 12: ISFAHAN

Full day tour of the beautiful city of Isfahan, the 17th century capital of the Safavids, referred to as Nesf-e-Jahan (Half of the World) in Safavid sources. We visit the famous bridges of Shahrestan/Khajou/Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter with several churches, including the important Cathedral of Vank.

In the afternoon visit one of the world's grandest squares, the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan, with several sites (the Ali-Qapu Palace with its enchanting music rooms and balcony overlooking the Maidan, from where the Safavid Kings watched polo games, and two of Islamic world's greatest mosques – the Sheikh Lotfollah and the Shah – with magnificent architecture and tile work).

We'll walk to the nearby Chehel Sotun Palace, built by Shah Abbas II in the 17th century. Its' wooden columns reflected in the surface of the pool give rise to its name 'The Palace of Forty Columns.'

Those who like, may return to the Maiden and visit handicraft shops which are open on Fridays. The bazaar is closed.

April 17 /Oct 4 Day 13: ISFAHAN

Another full day sightseeing of Isfahan to visit the magnificent Friday Mosque, with the famous Uljaitu Mihrab (Prayer Niche) of the Il-Khanid period. The Friday Mosque is considered a museum of a thousand years of Persian religious architecture and is truly one of the world's greatest mosques.

We also visit the Harun-e-Velayat Shrine and the Ali Minaret. Return to the Maiden and visit Iman (ex-Shah) Mosque.

The day concludes with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world-famous. Our hotel, the beautiful Abbasi is close to the Maiden so you can shop independently and return to the hotel as you wish.

April 18 /Oct 5 Day 14: ISFAHAN-ABYANEH (200 km)

A lovely drive this morning to Abyaneh, with an en-route stop at the charming town of Natanz to visit a beautiful Islamic Complex (Friday Mosque, Monastery, Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani).

Continue to Abyaneh, a small village hidden in the Karkas Mountains. Abyaneh is one of the last places in Iran that surrendered to Islam. The people of Abyaneh have preserved their ancient culture and traditions over the centuries and still wear their traditional attire.

April 19 /Oct 6 Day 15: ABYANEH-KASHAN-TEHRAN (300 km)

This morning we drive one hour to Kashan and visit the historical garden of Fin, first planted during the Safavid period and kept alive with water from the nearby Sulaimanieh Spring. This beautiful garden was expanded by the Zand and Qajar monarchs, with many open pavilions added.

We will also visit a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Borujerdi House with its beautiful stucco dome, inlaid mirror work and some of the best examples of existing "badgirs" (wind-catchers).

Continue 2.5 hours to Tehran, and drive by the Mausoleum of Imam Khomeini.

April 20 /Oct 7 Day 16: TEHRAN-QAZVIN-HAMADAN (236 miles/approx 5 hours)

We'll depart at 9 am for the drive to Hamadan, stopping in Qazvin to visit the glittering shrine of Shahzadeh Hussain (a Shi'ite Saint), and the extensive Friday Mosque of Qazvin.

We continue to Hamadan. Check-in dinner and overnight.

April 21 /Oct 8 Day 17: HAMADAN-KERMANSHAH

This morning start with visits to the Tomb of Esther & Mordecai, a major Jewish pilgrimage center, the 12th century Alavyan Tomb Tower, the Tomb of Avicenna (died in 1034), Iran's celebrated philosopher/scientist/physician; finishing with a visit to Ganjnameh, the cuneiform inscriptions by Darius I, and his son, Xerxes, carved on the rocks of the mountain.

Then we depart for the 2.5 hr drive to Kermanshah.

We shall stop at Kangavar (a small town of great antiquity dating back to 200 BC, lying halfway between Hamadan and Kermanshah), to visit the Temple of Anahita, the goddess of water and fertility.

On arrival in Kermanshah, we visit the magnificent Sassanian reliefs at Tagh-e-Bostan, depicting royal hunting scenes and the investiture of the Sassanian kings.

April 22 /Oct 9 Day 18: KERMANSHAH - TAKAB

We start with a 3 hour drive to Takab, With an en-route stop in Bisotun to see the important Relief/Inscription of Darius the Great, which is 4000 feet high on the mountain face, and the Parthian Reliefs.

Continue to Takab and visit the ancient site of Takht-e-Soleiman, located in a broad and remote mountain valley near Takab. From the time of Zoroastrian Magi - who guarded the sacred fire of Azar Goshasp beside the bottomless lake of deepest blue - until today, Takht-e-Soleiman (The Throne of Solomon) has remained for all who see it, a sacred and enigmatic place. The massive stone walls and remnants of the thirty eight watch towers, plus remains of the palaces, the fire temple and the Anahita temple, built around the lake mainly by the Sassanians in the 3rd century AD, are part of what is left of the complex. The crater of Zendan-e-Soleiman (the Prison of Solomon) can be glimpsed in the distance.

Transfer to hotel for overnight.

April 23 /Oct 10 Day 19: TAKAB-MARAGHE

Early morning departure to Maraghe (6 hr drive). On arrival we have lunch and embark on a half-day city tour of Maraghe to visit the beautiful Seljuk tomb-towers (12th century) of Maraghe including the tower of Gonbad-e-Sorkh, with its fantastic brickwork.

We also visit the site of the observatory of Maragheh (1259-1272), and Mulla Rostam Mosque and its beautiful prayer hall, a fine example of the wooden hypostyle of the area.

April 24 /Oct 11 Day 20: MARAGHE-KANDOVAN- TABRIZ

Depart this morning for the 2 hour drive to the intriguing troglodyte village of Kandovan, up in the heights of Mt. Sahand, a volcanic mountain. In Kandovan people have carved their houses in the rocks and still live in them as in ancient times.

After our visit, we continue approx. one hour to Tabriz. Lunch at a local restaurant and we proceed on our tour of Tabriz, the center of East Azerbaijan Province.

Visit the Blue Mosque, known in the world as the Turquoise of Islam, and Azarbaijan Museum, displaying a fine collection of pre-historic and historic artifacts found in the area. Drive by the 13th century Arg-e Alishah, which was originally a magnificent Friday Mosque, but turned into a fortress in the 19th century; the Constitution House and the Poets' Tombs.

We culminate the day at the traditional bazaar of Tabriz, one of the most extensive in Iran.

April 25 /Oct 12 Day 21: TABRIZ-ARDEBIL-SAREIN (235 km/3-4 hrs)

Drive to Ardebil to visit the Mausoleum of Sheikh Safi-eddin Ardebili, a widely revered Sufi leader of the 14th century, who made Ardebil his home. He was the forefather of the well-known Safavid Kings of Iran, and his Mausoleum has been the Mecca of thousands of pilgrims and dervishes throughout the centuries. Visit local bazaar if you wish.

Rest of afternoon is independent.

Overnight in the spa town of Sarein, where local Iranians come to enjoy the natural hot springs.

April 26 /Oct 13 Day 22: SAREIN-BANDAR-e-ANZALI (245 km/4 hrs)

Drive to Anzali via the spectacular Heyran Pass and Astara. Bandar-e-Anzali is a small port town, with some character, and is the major port on the Caspian. There are no mosques/tombs/sites, which we think you may have seen quite a lot of, making this a refreshing change and chance to observe daily life in a small town and browse the local handicrafts bazaars. Enjoy the Anzali Lagoon.

April 27 /Oct 14 Day 23: BANDAR-E-ANZALI-RAMSAR (160 km + 80 km excursion to Massuleh)

Drive to the nearby town of Rasht and enjoy a short excursion to the traditional village of Massuleh, one of the oldest and longest inhabited villages in Iran. Massuleh was proclaimed a heritage site by the Iranian Cultural Heritage

Organization. Return to Rasht and drive along the Caspian Coastal Road and small towns and villages to Ramsar, the 'old' Riviera of Iran, for overnight.

April 28 /Oct 15 Day 24: RAMSAR-GORGAN (370 km/5.5 hours)

Drive to Gorgan via Chalus and Sari, with short stops to visit local markets and interact with local people; also visit the port town of Bandar-e-Turkmen to visit local bazaar.

April 29 /Oct 16 Day 25: GORGAN-MASHAD (609 km/7 h 15 min)

Drive to Mashad, via Gonbad-e-Qabus, to visit the highest brick structure in the world and one of the oldest tomb-towers in Iran- the Tomb-Tower of Qabus-ibn-e-Voshmgir, dating to the 10th century.

Continue to the ancient town of Neishapur to visit the tombs of Iran's celebrated mystic poets Omar Khayyam and Attari. Onward to Mashad.

April 30 /Oct 17 Day 26: MASHAD

Mashad is located in the valley of the Kashaf River near Turkmenistan (156 miles from Ashgabat), between the two mountain ranges of Binalood and Hezar-masjed. The city benefits from the proximity of the mountains, having cool winters, pleasant springs, mild summers, and beautiful autumns.

Full day spent in Mashad, Iran's holiest city, and the centre of Iran's largest province, Khorassan. Mashad owes its importance as a pilgrimage center to the Shrine Complex of Imam Reza, the Eight Shi'ite leader who was martyred in the 8th century. Visit the outer courtyards of the Shrine of Imam Reza and the Gohar Shad Mosque (non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the building of the shrine and mosque), and the museums, also the Mausoleum of Khajeh Rabi' (a disciple of the Prophet of Islam), dating to the Safavid period.

May 1 /Oct 18 Day 27: MASHAD-DEPART

Transfer to the airport. There are flights departing Mashad on Qatar Air, Turkish Air and Emirates.

PRICE: \$xxxx per person based on min 6 people, Single Room: \$xxxx

Upgrade to Garden View room at Abbasi Hotel Isfahan, based on availability; prices upon request

Cheshmandaz Wing (regular rooms with garden view). Pardis Wing (bigger, newly renovated rooms with garden view)

Includes:

Accommodation as listed or similar: We selected the smaller and more traditional hotels, centrally located wherever available. 5* in Tehran, Shiraz, Kerman & Isfahan and the rest mainly 4 & 3* however in some places 2* is best available. Please note that we have rated the hotels lower than what they rate themselves to provide realistic expectations. All hotels based on availability.

Tehran: Laleh Hotel 5* (formerly Inter-Continental) <http://www.lalehhotels.com/index/index/lang/fa>
or Azadi Hotel (formerly Hyatt) <http://www.azadihotel.com/page/+English>

Shiraz: Pars https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g316021-d1008076-Reviews-Pars_International_Hotel-Shiraz_Fars_Province.html

or Zandiyeh 5* <http://www.homahotels.com/Summary.aspx/> or <http://www.zandiyehotel.com/en/>

Kerman: Pars Hotel <http://pars-hotels.com/kerman-info/>
or Akhaven Hotel or Grand Tourist Inn 3*

Yazd: Yazd: Moshir Al-Mamalek Garden Hotel 4* <http://hotelgardenmoshir.com/en>
or Safaiyeh 4*

Isfahan: Abbasi <http://www.abbasihotel.ir/en>
or Kowsar 5* <http://www.hotelkowsar.com/>

Abyaneh: Abyaneh 3* https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g680042-d1548177-Reviews-Hotel_Abyaneh-Abyaneh_Isfahan_Province.html
Or Viruna 3* <http://www.viunahotelabyaneh.com/en.php>

Hamadan: Azadi or Bu-Ali 3* <http://azadihamedan.pih.ir/index.aspx?siteid=31> or <http://buali.pih.ir/>

Kermanshah: Azadegan

Takab:

Maragheh: Grand Hotel 3* <http://www.iran-booking.com/en/hotels/grand-hotel-sea-maragheh#details>
Tabriz: International/Gostaresh 4* <http://www.gostaresh-hotel.net/En/>
Ardebil/Sarein: Laleh 4* <http://sareyn.lalehotels.com/index/index/lang/en>
Anzali: Sepid-Kenar 3* https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g680036-d2235724
Ramsar: Azadi Ramsar 3* <http://parsianramsar.pih.ir/index.aspx?siteid=11&pageid=901>
Gorgan: Nahar Khoran/Azin 2* <http://www.iran-booking.com/en/hotels/azin-hotel-gorgan#photos>
Mashad: Salam 4* <http://salamhotel.ir/>

Daily breakfast and lunch

Arrival/departure transfers on tour dates

Land transport by ac van 8 seats, mini bus 14-16 seats, or bus 31 seats depending on group size

Accompanying professional national escort/guide

Domestic flight Tehran-Shiraz

Entrance fees to monuments

Visa approval reference number

Meals: Breakfast at the hotels and lunch at best available local restaurants or at hotel restaurant if in a town with no quality options.

Does Not Include:

Visa fee

Trip Cancellation/Travel Insurance

Transfers if not arriving/departing together on same flights (extra cost for additional transfers)

Tips to drivers and guides

Personal Expenses such as phone calls, laundry, drinks

NOTE: The Abbasi Hotel in Isfahan is Iran's most sought-after hotel, and is fully-booked all the year round, and overbooked during high seasons. Garden view rooms are limited and are only allocated, on availability, at supplementary cost, and with advance request. Please also note that standard rooms at the Abbasi will be allocated in the old or new section of the hotel as available.