



PASARGAD TOURS

Your Window on Iran

Pasargad Tours was established in 1987 by managing director Mr. Ebrahim Pourfaraj and has since been active in bringing foreign tourists to Iran. We specialize in organizing inbound tours which include cultural-historical, archaeological, architectural, ethnological, and ecotourism tours, as well as business trips to Iran.

Pasargad Tours was the first 'private' tour operator to actively promote tourism to Iran and has been repeatedly awarded "Certificate of Merit", as well as being recognized as the "Best Tour Operator in Iran" by the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization and the Export Promotion Council of Iran in 2001, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2016 and 2018. In order to further promote tours to Iran and introduce our company, we regularly participate at major international travel markets, with our own Company Stand or under Iran Country Stand, such as WTM/London, Top Resa/France, BIT/Milan, ITB/Berlin, TTG/RIMINI, JATA/Tokyo, etc.

Most of our tourists are from Europe, U.S.A, Canada, Australia, Japan, Russia and China. Another field we are expert in, is planning nature tours, safaris, and specialty and professional tours like Paris to Peking Motor Challenge and Paris-Persepolis Eco-Rally. Pasargad Tours is also expert in organizing foreign concerts and cultural events in historical places.

Our latest achievement at Pasargad Tours was bringing European trains to Iran such as the Golden Eagle Luxury Trains.

Pasargad Tours experts' attention to detail and experience in planning successful group tours has gained the trust of leading and reputable companies, as well as many of the major universities, museums, and other cultural institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, and the Metropolitan Museum of New York and TCS/Starquest Expeditions (Private Jet Trips). Many European, Canadian, Australian, Japanese, Russian, Indian, and Chinese cultural centers have chosen Pasargad Tours as their professional partner in Iran, culminating in the company receiving awards for exemplary quality based on the vote of an expert panel of judges and compliance with standards in conducting quality tourist programs in Iran.

Pasargad Tours is also member of many national and international organizations and associations such as: Iran's Tour Operators Association (ITOA), Association of Air Transport and Tourist Agencies of Iran (AATTI), Tehran Tourism and Travel Agencies Association (TTTAA), UFTAA.

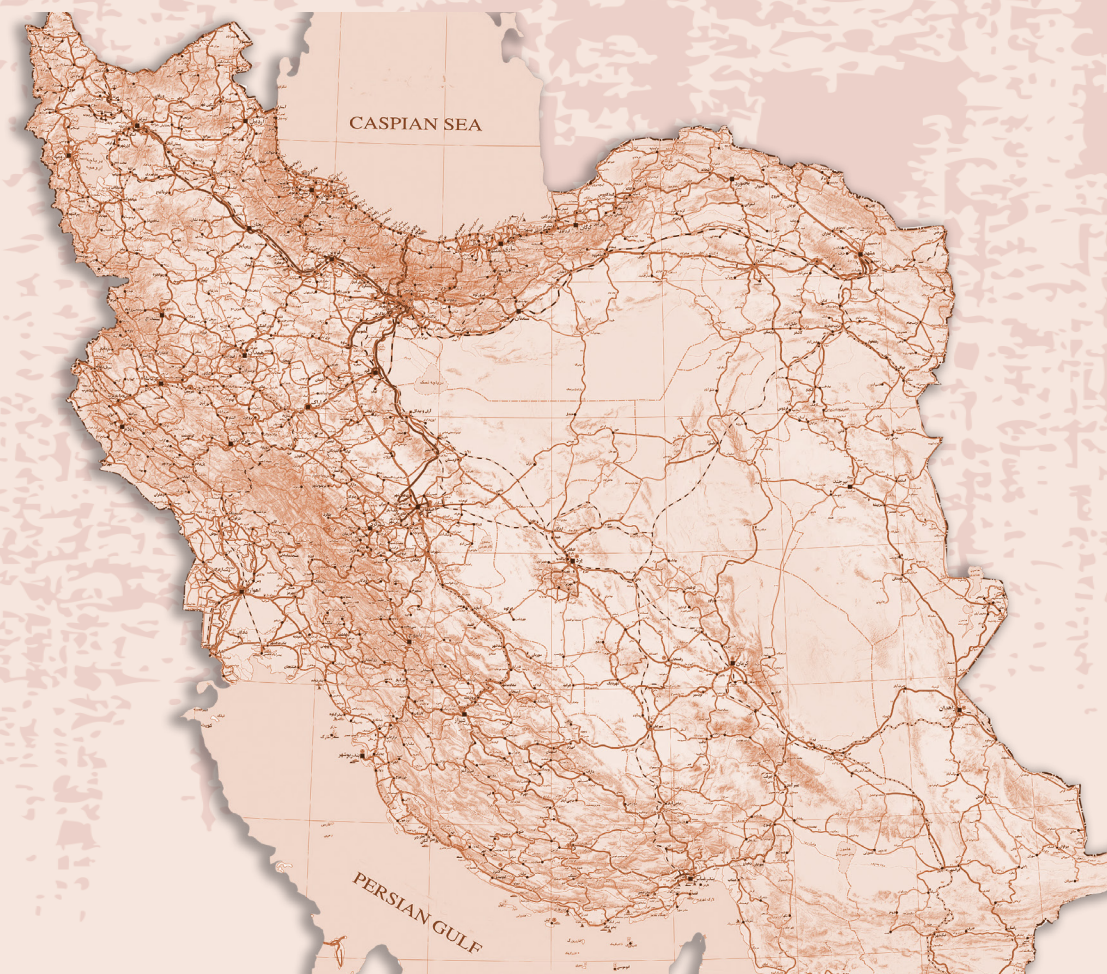
As Pasargad Tours we have received more than 47 awards and certificates as the leading company in the field of tourism in Iran.

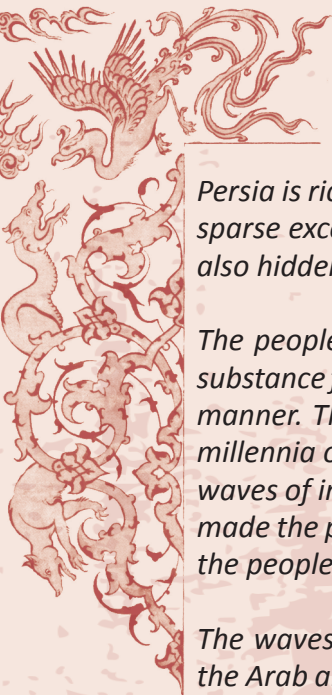
PERSIA

An Ancient Land

To many Westerners the word Persia is at once evocative of the image of a land of far away and long ago, of ancient monuments and beautiful works of art - carpets, tiles, fine ceramics, miniatures and metal work. It also evokes a present reality in the heart of Asia. a land joining both geographically and spiritually the Mediterranean world with the Indian subcontinent. And Persia is indeed such a reality, a world ancient and contemporary. linking the heartland of Asia and the cradle of Western civilization, a bridge between East and West. Moreover, through the heart of its traditional culture, it has always been a bridge between heaven and earth, reflecting the colour of its luminous skies and of its most famous stone, the turquoise, and the stone for which Persia has been known perennially throughout the world.

The country is bound on the north and south by two bodies of water, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. It is bordered on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan, on the west by Turkey and Iraq and on the northeast and northwest by the five newly independent republics of Central Asia. Persia is marked by remarkable natural contrasts. The traveller will experience within distances of a few miles major changes of season - snow on one side of a mountain range and sweltering heat on the other. There is also a great difference in vegetation and landscape between the fertile littoral provinces along the Caspian Sea and the dry lands of the Central Desert.





Persia is richly blessed in natural resources - the land is agriculturally rich although water is sparse except in few provinces. The stretches of sand and stone of the Persian desert have also hidden in their depths some of the richest mineral resources of the world.

The people and races that have populated the Persian plateau and provided the human substance for its culture have been many and diversified and yet unified in a most remarkable manner. The plateau, originally peopled by races whose origins stretch into the unknown millennia of prehistory, became the home of the Aryan tribes who settled in it after several waves of invasion from about two thousand B.C. Having absorbed the earlier peoples, they made the plateau thoroughly Aryan in language and culture; hence the name Iran by which the people have called themselves since the dawn of recorded history.

The waves of invaders throughout its long history - the Greeks accompanying Alexander, the Arab armies during its Islamization, the Turkish tribes which forced their way westward from Central Asia, and finally the Mongols, all left their mark upon the people of Persia but they, in turn, were assimilated into its cultural world.

The Persians see their history as a series of distinct periods separated by major events and a long continuous process. They see before them a vast prehistoric past whose epochs have been extended even further in time through archaeological excavations, a past which led finally to the foundation of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great at the dawn of recorded history. Then there is a second period comprised of several phases identified with the rule of Achaemenians, Seleucids, Parthians and Sassanids, the era of the great Persian Empire, terminating with the rise of Islam, its spread into Persia and the transformation it brought about. The last fourteen centuries of Persian Islamic history is marked by such colossal events as the rise of Turkish dynasties, including the Seljuqs and Ghaznavids, the Mongol and Timurid invasions, the re-establishment of order by the Safavids, Western domination during the Qajar period and finally the foundation of modern Persia, culminating in the social upheaval that led to the Islamic Revolution which turned Iran into a Republic.

This vision of Persian history separated by distinct periods yet unified within a whole is most directly reflected in religion, the backbone of Persian culture in every phase of its existence. The vast majority of Persians are Muslims, today mostly of the Shi'ite sect, which became the state religion of Iran during the Safavid period. Yet, before the Islamization of Persia they were for some fifteen hundred years Zoroastrians or Manichaeans or followers of some other Iranian religion. Persians are aware of these phases of history and different spiritual worlds, but while thoroughly embracing their Islamic culture they have not rejected their ancient past. This wedding of Islamic spirituality and the Persian mind released vast intellectual powers which soon made Persia the philosophic, literary and scientific center of the medieval world.

Today, in the midst of major transformation on the material plane, they are ever seeking ways to retain those qualities and traditions of perennial value which have preserved their identity and made of Persia a crossroads, a bridge between East and West, a haven reflecting the azure colour of its luminous skies.

TEHRAN, Gateway to Iran

The Azadi Square Monument, built in 1971, has become the gateway to Iran's capital city, Tehran. Although the Monument may have become to symbolize Tehran in recent years, the Alborz Range to the north of the city, and its majestic peak, the Mount Damavand, being the highest in Iran with a height of 18,550 feet (5654 meter), and visible from Tehran on a clear day, has long been associated with Tehran.

Compared to Iran's other capitals, Tehran is not considered an old city. Little is known about Tehran before 1220 A.D. when it along with Rey or Rhagae, the ancient capital of East Media, was razed to ground by the Mongol invaders.

Tehran remained relatively unimportant until the end of the 18th century when it was made the capital by Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar Dynasty, who was crowned here in 1795.

It was expanded by his successor Fath-Ali Shah who built the Golestan Palace. Tehran was located within the mud walls of Arg or citadel and had many gates, the last of which still remains today with the decorative Gate of Bagh-e-Melli in the administrative section of the capital.

Today, Tehran is a modern metropolis, a magnet for tourists, and hub of a great culture with its numerous museums, including the superb Archaeological Museum, with its prehistoric, historic and Islamic sections, the Abguineh Glass and the Reza Abbasi Calligraphy museums, and also the several museums housed on the Sa'adabad Palace grounds, plus the State Jewels of Iran which holds one of the most fabulous collections of treasures in the world.

The Iranian still identifies with the bazaar as a place that is traditional, vital and truly Persian, and Tehran boasts one of the richest and longest bazaars in Iran with six miles of covered passages.



WESTERN IRAN, Cities and Sites

Our itineraries in the west of Iran covers some of the most important ancient cities and sites in the country, located on the plain or in the foothills of the Alborz and Alvand mountains, offering scenic beauty as well as historical interest:

■ QAZVIN Old Safavid Capital

The Qazvin plain which attracted attention ever since the first inhabitants arrived on the Iranian plateau has among its earliest settlers the Kassites who are believed to have made their homes there as early as the 14th century B.C. But more recently it was the capital of the Safavids in early 16th century before they moved to Isfahan.

Among Qazvin's many historic relics are the Jame Mosque, dating back to the Seljuq period and boasting the largest mihrab of any mosque in Iran, the Shrine of Shahzadeh Hossein, a Moslem saint, and the Heydarieh Theological School.

As the capital of the early Safavid kings, Qazvin was the site of government buildings which inspired their more famous counterparts in Isfahan. Names such as A'li Qapu and Chehel Sotoun are universally associated with Isfahan, yet they originated long before the town became the heart of the empire. Unfortunately Qazvin's A'li Qapu palace has not withstood the test of time. All that remains is the gateway and part of the guardroom. But due to extensive restoration the Chehel Sotoun is in far better condition and has been converted into the Qazvin museum.

■ HAMADAN Ancient Ecbatana

One of Iran's oldest cities, located in the Central Zagros Range, Hamadan was once the Median capital Hagmatana, and was also known in its Greek form Ecbatana. As an important Achaemenian capital, Hamadan was graced with great palaces and temples the



remains of which now lie beneath the modern town.

Excavations now being carried at the Hagmatana hills reveal remains of Median and Achaemenian administrative buildings on an extensive level. There is also a museum at the site displaying artifacts found at this and other sites in the region.

Ganj-Nameh (Treasure Book), the area's oldest Achaemenian rock carving is located on the slopes of Mount Alvand. Engraved on two stone panels, the inscriptions in Old Persian record the achievements of Darius the Great and Xerxes I.

A rare Median relic is the Sang-e-Shir (Stone Lion), a huge statue of a lion believed to have guarded the city gate in Median and Parthian times. Among Hamadan's Islamic structures is that built over the tomb of Esther and Mordecai, surrounded by a charming garden. According to legend, Esther, Queen of Xerxes, helped establish a Jewish colony near Hamadan, and for this reason the mausoleum is a place of pilgrimage for many Jewish people.

The Alavyan Tomb Tower, a 12th century structure is regarded by students of architecture as the finest example of Seljuq art in Iran. The Tomb of Avicenna, Iran's celebrated philosopher/physician/scientist, who died here in 1034 A.D., and the final resting place of Baba Taher Uryan, the 11th century mystic poet, are among other sites worth a visit.

■ BISOTOUN Darius' Inscription

At a site some 4,000 feet (1220 meter) high in the mountains, one of the most famous sites in Near Eastern archaeology has been attracting passersby since time immemorial. It was here that Sir Henry Rawlinson copied the trilingual inscriptions of Darius I, carved in 522 B.C. in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian, an important step in the eventual decipherment of cuneiform in the mid-19th century.



The Bisotoun relief above the inscription depicts Darius facing the nine rebel kings, whom the Achaemenid ruler suppressed when he came to power.

At the foot of the hill there are three Parthian reliefs, believed to be the oldest Parthian reliefs, badly damaged by the ravages of time and a land endowment carved by Sheikh Ali Khan Zanganeh, the premier of Safavid king Shah Soleiman.

■ TAGH-E-BOSTAN Sassanian Reliefs

The Sassanid kings chose a sensational setting for their rock reliefs at Tagh-e-Bostan, four miles northeast of Kermanshah. A sacred spring gushes forth from a mountain cliff and empties into a large reflecting pool, in winter the entire scene is shrouded in mist and clouds.



One of the most impressive reliefs, inside the largest grotto or Iwan, is the gigantic equestrian statue of the Sassanid king; Khosrow II (A.D. 591-628) mounted on his favourite charger, Shabdiz. Both horse and rider are arrayed in full battle armour. There are two hunting scenes on opposite sides of the ivan, one depicts the imperial boar hunt and the other in a similar spirit shows the king stalking deer. Elephants flush out the fleeing boars from a marshy lake for the king who stands poised with bow and arrow in hand serenaded by female musicians following in other boats. These royal hunting scenes are among the most vivid of all rock reliefs, true narrative murals in stone. Jumping 1,300 years in time the upper relief shows the 19th century Qajar king Fath-Ali Shah holding court.

AZARBAIJAN, *East and West*

The two northwestern provinces of East and West Azarbaijan, with Tabriz and Orumieh as their capitals respectively are among Iran's richest and most fertile regions. The people of Azarbaijan speak a Turkish dialect called Azari. The province is geographically varied with mountain ranges, fertile plains and the large salt lake known as Orumieh Lake. Two of Iran's highest peaks. Sabalan and Sahand are also located in this province. Some of the cities and sites in the province and in the neighbouring provinces of Ardebil and Zanjan are on our itineraries:

■ TABRIZ

The first major Iranian city that overland travellers coming from Turkey see. It was the Mongol capital in the 13th century, and again under the Black Sheep Dynasty who ruled from Tabriz in the 15th century. Jahan-Shah (1436-67 A.D.) was an active ruler who enlarged and beautified Tabriz, building the Blue Mosque in 1465. Ravaged by centuries of invasions and severe earthquakes, only fragments of the original tilework survived, hinting at the glory that was. The Blue Mosque is one of the few completely covered mosques in Iran and has exquisite polychrome ornamentation. The flavour of old Tabriz is preserved in the covered bazaar where jewelry and carpets, among the finest in Iran, are found. Another site to be visited is the Shah-Goli Pavilion built in



the middle of an artificial lake.

Tabriz boasts at least two museums, the archaeological and the anthropological, both displaying artifacts produced during the long course of human habitation in Azarbaijan.



■ TAKHT-E-SOLEIMAN

From the time of the Magi who nurtured the sacred fire of Azar Gushnasp besides the bottomless lake of deepest blue until today, Takht-e-Soleiman (The Throne of Solomon) has remained for all who see it a sacred place. The ruins of Takht-e-Soleiman lie in a broad and remote mountain valley southeast of Maraghe. The massive stone wall and remnants of thirty eight towers built around the lake by the Sassanids in the 3rd century A.D. is all that is left of the complex. The crater of Zendan-e-Soleiman (The Prison of Solomon) can be glimpsed in the distance.



■ ARDEBIL

Lying more than 130 miles east of Tabriz in a remote corner of the country, Ardebil has gained importance in recent years and become a separate province. Its touristic claim to fame, however, is the tomb of Sheikh Safi-eddin Ardebili, a widely revered Sufi philosopher of the 14th century who made Ardebil his home. Since his death at the age of 83 his mausoleum has been the Mecca of thousands of pilgrims every year. Shah Isma'il, founder of the Safavid Dynasty, was sixth in descent from Sheikh Safi-eddin, whose name gave the Safavids their name. The shrine prospered through the patronage of the Safavid kings who extended and embellished it, and donated many gifts to it.



■ MAKU

The Church of Saint Thaddeus, also known as Qara Kilisa or Black Church, is located thirteen miles south of Maku. It is one of the oldest churches in Christianity, and holds a special meaning for Iran's Armenian minority who gather there every year in July for the feast of Saint Thaddeus, the early Christian apostle who was martyred there. The original building is constructed of black and white stone and dates to about 10th century A.D.



■ SULTANIEH

Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh (Oljaitu), a 14th century Il-Khanid ruler of Persia, moved his capital from Tabriz to the spacious plain of Sultanieh, 25 miles southeast of Zanjan, now a separate province southeast of Azarbaijan, erecting there a new city from 1305 to 1313 A.D. The magnificent palaces, mosques and public buildings that so astounded foreign ambassadors to the Mongol Court are gone, but the tomb of Oljaitu, one of the finest achievements of Persian architecture, still stands, among the poppies that cover the plain and desert hills with a carpet of red flowers in spring. The tomb was richly embellished by the best craftsmen but Oljaitu feeling it was not suitable for a secular ruler had the decorations covered with plaster which is now being skilfully removed. In 2005, UNESCO listed Sultaniyeh as one of the World Heritage Sites.



CASPIAN COAST, Iran's Tropics

The Caspian Coast, including the two littoral provinces of Gilan (centre Rasht) and Mazandaran (centre Sari), with its thick forests and intensive rice cultivation presents a striking contrast to the dry inner plateau of Iran. The picturesque provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan bound by the Caspian Sea (the world's largest lake) in the north and Alborz Range in the south are divided into a multitude of valleys whose rivers drain into the sea.

There are several roads connecting Tehran to different parts of the two provinces, all through breathtakingly beautiful scenery, across the mountains or alongside rivers. One of the roads from Tehran to Chalus on the Caspian Coast winding north across the rugged Alborz mountains, passes the popular ski resort at Dizin, considered one of the best in the world.

The two provinces with their tropical climate in summer and mild winters, beautiful sandy beaches and scenic beauty are very popular with Iranians as a holiday and weekend resort and numerous holiday and residential complexes and private villas dot the landscape.

■ RASHT

One of the oldest towns in the north, it is also the largest settlement of the southern Caspian and the industrial centre of the region. There are several sites in Rasht including the Rasht Museum, and the uncovered bazaar, typical of the province's bazaars with their special market days and handicraft stalls.



■ MASULEH VILLAGE

A one-hour drive from Rasht brings one to the village of Masuleh where the architecture intimately relates to the rocky mountain terrain of Gilan. It is one of the oldest and longest continuously inhabited villages in Iran and pronounced as a world heritage by UNESCO. Houses hug the cliffs, rising vertically upward, with rooftops and village streets virtually indistinguishable. Brightly coloured socks and dolls are knitted by the women of the village and sold in the local bazaar.



■ BANDAR-E-ANZALI

Two of Iran's most profitable industries, caviar and silk production, are carried out in the Caspian port of Bandare-Anzali, one of the oldest ports along the Caspian Coast and 30 miles from Rasht. The Mordab-e-Anzali (Anzali Lagoon), with a rich variety of floral, animal and aquatic life has a special beauty all its own, especially the pink lotus which stands three feet (almost 1 meter) above the water and bursts into gorgeous flowers in summer. A boat trip through the lagoon is an unforgettable experience.



THE CARAVAN ROUTE

Many of the towns and sites in Iran's east and northeastern provinces are situated on or along the ancient silk road, the old caravan routes or the Great Khorassan Road. Remains of many intriguing caravanserais called Robat in the area is a testimony to the fact. Many of these are fitted in our diversified itineraries from Tehran to the province of Khorassan, via the northern route through Gorgan, or the more interesting via Semnan, Damghan, Shahrud and Sabzavar, about 600 miles to Mashad.

■ MASHAD

The provincial capital of Khorassan, Iran's largest province is itself the nation's second largest city. It is also Iran's holiest city and a place of pilgrimage for Shiite Moslems from all over the world. Khorassan, one of Iran's most important provinces both geographically and historically, once included parts of Afghanistan, Tadjikestan, Turkomanistan and Uzbekistan under the entity of the Greater Khorassan. It is also the cradle of the Persian (Farsi) language and the civilization of eastern Iran, and the homeland of many great Iranian poets, writers and scholars.

Khorassan's most recent history is associated with the Afshar Dynasty and its founder Nader Shah Afshar. A number of edifices including the Qasr-e-Khorshid (Sun Palace), scattered along the Kalat-e-Naderi, where Nader Shah kept his headquarters, date from this period (1736-1747). Nader is buried in Mashad in a modern mausoleum.

Imam Reza, the eight Shi'ite Imam, died in 818 A.D. in the small village of Sanabad in Khorassan, and was buried next to Abbasid Caliph, Harun-al-Rashid. The Shi'ites believe that he was murdered, and his tomb came to be known as Mashad, or the place of martyrdom.

Today pilgrims pass through chambers of glittering mirror work and tiles to reach the tomb of Imam Reza. The chambers are always filled with hundreds of people praying and reciting the Koran. Among Iranian kings who contributed to the building and decoration of the Imam Reza Shrine is Shah Abbas I, who walked

to Mashad from Isfahan, further demonstrating his devotion by covering the dome over the tomb chamber with sheets of gilded copper in 1607. The mosque of Gowhar Shad stands to the south, and to the left is the entrance portal to the old court, also built by Shah Abbas, capped by a small pavilion called the Naghareh Khaneh or Drum Tower, where drums and trumpets daily salute the rising and



setting sun. The mosque built during the reign of Timurid monarch Shahrokh, by his pious wife, Gowhar Shad between 1405 and 1418 is one of the finest in Iran.

The Imam Reza Shrine complex including one of the richest libraries of manuscripts and hand written books is truly one of the most magnificent religious centers anywhere in the world.

■ TOOS

Iran's greatest epic poet, Ferdowsi, is buried at Toos, near Mashad where his statue also stands. Almost every Iranian can recite part of the Shahnameh or Book of Kings, composed in 994 A.D., in which Ferdowsi recounted in 60,000 verses the early history of Persia.



■ ROBAT-E-SHARAF

One of the oldest and most elaborate caravanserais, a masterpiece of Seljuq architecture, built about 1120 A.D. The trade routes of the twelfth century have shifted, leaving the splendid structure standing alone among low hills north east of Mashad. The complexity of Robat-e-Sharaf suggests that it may have been used by the Seljuq rulers as a temporary residence.



ON THE EDGE OF THE DESERT

Mud architecture has developed its own distinctive style in Iran as a result of the social, geographical and climatic conditions peculiar to the country. Some of the oldest and most charming Iranian mud villages and towns still border the great Iranian deserts, although many of them have changed faces and features today, they continue to attract travellers, and many of them are on our itineraries:

■ QOM

Ninety miles south of Tehran, is Iran's second holiest city, due to its being the burial place of Hazzrat Masoumeh, the sister of Imam Reza, the eight Shi'ite Imam, and a great pilgrimage place for people from all over the country. The core of the magnificent shrine, dominating the Qom skyline, was built by the Safavids and Fath-Ali Shah Qajar who covered the dome with gold-plated tiles. Other sites in Qom, all of a religious nature, include the Masjid-e-Jame, with its fine Safavid architecture.



■ KASHAN

Few Iranian cities generate as much civic pride as Kashan. It is the epitome of everything that is typically Persian, from its mosques, caravanserais and stately gardens, to its carpets, ceramics and delicate embroideries. Ranking among the finest gardens in Iran, the Fin Garden was first planted during the Safavid period and kept alive with water from the Sulaimanieh Spring. It was expanded by the Zand and Qajar monarchs, with many open pavilions added. A museum on the site displays artifacts from nearby Tappeh Sialk.

A fine example of an old residence is Kashan's Boroujerdi House with its beautiful stucco dome and fine wall paintings and inlaid mirror work, with some of the best examples of existing badgirs (wind-catchers) - tall, square towers with open vents on each side to catch any cool breeze and carry it down to the recesses of the house. As in every Iranian city, the Friday Mosque is Kashan's oldest mosque, dating back to the Seljuq era, and is considered a first-class example of craftsmanship in brick and mortar.



Another famous Qajar building is the Madrasseh Agha Bozorg, a theological school and mosque complex. There is also the shrine of Imamzadeh Ebrahim, a Moslem saint, set in a small but tranquil and charming garden. The Bazaar of Kashan has a eminent architecture, in particular at its Timche-ye Amin od-Dowleh section, a caravanserai with a soaring, superbly decorated dome, dating from 1868.

■ NATANZ

A small mountain town located forty-nine miles from Kashan, it is famed for its bracing climate and fruit orchards. The Masjid-e-Jamé, among the finest in Iran, the mausoleum of Sheikh Abd-al-Samad Isfahani and its adjoining Khanaghah (Sufi monastery), built in the 13th century, and the remains of a Zoroastrian Atashkadeh (Fire Temple) or Chahar-tagh, are places of great interest to visit.



■ ABYANEH



One of the most interesting and oldest surviving villages to visit, which was completely Zoroastrian until the time of the Safavid king, Shah Isma'il I, in whose reign most of the villagers emigrated to India or to Yazd. Even today their colourful costume, traditional way of life and ancient dialect are still practically unchanged. The remains of a Sassanian atashkadeh and a pre-Seljuq mosque add to the interest of the visit.

■ NA'IN

Slumbering Na'in, an important transit centre at the geographical centre of Iran, is famous for carpet-making and also for its Friday Mosque, dating from the early Islamic period with some surviving features from the 10th century.

There is also a beautiful example of a Safavid period house, with delicate monochrome painted plaster decoration, close to the mosque. Na'in also boasts a very small but charming guest house built in the traditional style of architecture.



■ YAZD

Marco Polo visited Yazd on his way to China and called it the “good and noble city of Yazd”. His comments still hold true today as the reputation of the citizens of this desert city for honesty and hard work remains undiminished.



The architecture of Yazd is perhaps the most traditionally Persian to be found, preserved by the hot, dry climate and spared the devastation of the Mongols and other invaders. The badgirs (wind-catchers) are seen from Kashan to the Persian Gulf but are most highly developed in Yazd. It is also the centre for Iran’s small Zoroastrian community, who seeking refuge from the invading Arabs found a safe haven within its fortified walls. There are many fire temples and other Zoroastrian places of pilgrimage which attract people of the faith from all over Iran.



The main Atashkadeh of Yazd is located in the old quarter of the town, holding the eternal fire considered sacred by Zoroastrians. Outside Yazd are the two abandoned Towers of Silence (Dakhma), dating back to the 17th century, where until some 40-50 years ago the dead were carried there and left to decompose and be devoured by birds.

Among Yazd’s Islamic sites is the Friday Mosque, constructed in 1324 A.D. under the Mongol Il-Khan Abu-Sa’id and completed in 1375. The simple elegance of this mosque is completed by its stately portal flanked by two minarets, the highest in Iran. Other notable Islamic monuments in Yazd are the Seljuq shrine dedicated to the Twelve Shi’ite Imams, the tomb of Seyyed Rukn-eddin, and the shrine of Seyyed Shams-eddin. The Mir-Chakhmagh Square is also a famous landmark. There are many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat-abad Garden, with an 18th century feudal hexagonal house, including many beautiful wall and window decorations and also the Lari House.

■ KERMAN

Located far from the most important industrial areas and the rich farmlands of the north and west, the province of Kerman is sparsely populated. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the province boasts a remarkably cosmopolitan capital dotted with ancient monuments attesting to its importance in early Iranian history. Abandoned caravanserais and crumbling fortifications in many parts of the province indicate that for centuries it was an important junction on the caravan routes, connecting Iran and the subcontinent.

Kerman has suffered many invasions and destructions by invaders, lastly at the hands of the founder of the Qajar Dynasty, Agha Mohammad Khan, in his attempt to overthrow the Zand Prince Lott-Ali Khan. He captured Kerman and treated its inhabitants with barbaric cruelty in revenge for their support of the brave Zand Prince.



In the early nineteenth century, Ebrahim Khan, Governor of Kerman, constructed an attractive ensemble of three buildings inside the Kerman Bazaar, including a lovely madrasseh built around a garden courtyard. Of the several mosques in Kerman such as the Haji-Agha, the Khawjeh Atabeg and the Malek mosques, the most noteworthy is the Seljuq Jame Mosque. But Kerman is probably best known for the Ganj Ali Khan complex, including the bazaar, hamam (bathhouse), converted into a museum, caravansera, and traditional teahouse, all with the finest tile and stucco work.

Kerman’s bazaar offers, in addition to the region’s renowned carpets, some of Iran’s finest textiles, and the province’s delicious dates. Kerman is also famous for its production of cummin or zireh. So well-known is the province’s cummin, in fact, that the proverb “to carry zireh to Kerman” has become as well known in Iran as the saying “coals to New Castle”, is in the West.

■ MAHAN

Shah Nematollah Vali (died 1431). founder of a dervish order which continues to be an active spiritual force today, spent many years wandering through Central Asia, perfecting his spiritual gifts before finally settling at Mahan, twenty miles southeast of Kerman, where he passed the last twenty-five years of his life. His shrine evoking harmony between nature and architecture, was built by one of his disciples, Ahmad



Shah Bahmani, ruler of Deccan, who erected the central domed burial vault in 1436 and embellished and enlarged by Shah Abbas I, himself a sufi, in 1601, who built the western gallery which leads into a tiled courtyard donated soon after the Saint's death by another one of his disciples. Shah Abbas also ordered the brilliant turquoise dome to be constructed.

Another site not to be missed in the small town of Mahan is the delightfully attractive historical garden from the Qajar period, the Bagh-e-Shahzadeh or Prince Garden, with a beautifully decorated pavilion in the middle.

■ BAM

An oasis medieval town dotted with date palms and citrus orchards. The remains of a towering fortified settlement near the modern town offers a rare glimpse into the town planning of 17th century Iran. The ruins of the ancient citadel of Bam is located one mile north of the present-day town whose economy is based on the export of its excellent dates.



The Arg-e-Bam (Bam Citadel) remains with crenelated fortification walls are mostly dated from the Safavid period. Deserted city streets, houses of rich merchants, communal baths, mosques and shops stand like skeletons of the past. Great effort has been taken to preserve these unique historical ruins without over-restoring.

■ RAYEN

The Arg-e-Rayen or Rayen Castle situated in the small town of Rayen was inhabited until 150 years ago and, although believed to be at least a thousand years old, may have foundations from the pre-Islamic Sassanid era. According to the old documents, it was positioned on the trade route, and was one of the centres for trading valuable goods and quality textiles. It was historically also a centre of sword and knife manufacturing, and later on, also guns.



■ ISFAHAN The Pearl of Persia

One of the most important historical cities in Iran, Isfahan was known in the Sassanian period as Spadan or Spahan. For over three hundred years Isfahan has been the main attraction for travellers in Iran. Located on the banks of Zayandeh-rud River, Isfahan is Iran's third largest city. The city's history dates back to 2,700 years ago when a Jewish colony first settled in the area still known as Yahuddiyeh.

Isfahan's moment of glory came in the 17th century when the town was reconstructed by the Safavid king Shah Abbas the Great, who moved the Safavid capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, to unsurpassed beauty. Today people still marvel at its magnificence. A tour of Isfahan should start with Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan which Shah Abbas planned to be the centre of the city. The square is framed by a wall of blind arches and surrounded by the Masjid-e-Imam (Shah Mosque), noted as the supreme perfection of Islamic architecture, and the Sheikh Lotfollah (the ladies mosque) with its colourful detailed work ranking among the world's best tile work.



The Safavid kings sat in the A'li Qapu Palace, built as a residential and ceremonial palace, overlooking the Maidan, and watched polo tournaments from its balcony. Isfahan's Qaisarrieh Bazaar, on the southern side of the Maidan, considered one of the most exotic in the Middle East, offers a rich variety of carpets, tiles and miniature paintings. The Bazaar is linked to the older commercial section of the town with the Masjid-e-Jame, dating back to at least 1,000 years ago, and believed to have

been built on the site of a Zoroastrian fire temple. The Chehel-Sotun (Forty Column) Palace was constructed as a pleasure pavilion and audience hall for the Safavid kings, who received and entertained foreign dignitaries there. Another palace still left on the palace complex is the Hasht-Behesht (Eight Paradise Palace) recently restored to its former glory. Isfahan also boasts some of the most beautiful bridges in the world, among them the Khajou the Sio-se-Pol and Shahrestan, the oldest in Isfahan, bridges. Shah Abbas moved the Armenians, a Christian minority, from Julfa on the northern border of Iran and settled them in a quarter called New Julfa. The many churches he allowed them to build, including the Vank Cathedral reflects the imperial style of the period.



The mother of Shah Sultan Hossein, the last Safavid ruler, built a madrassah and caravanserai on the Chahar Bagh or Four Garden Avenue. The caravanserai has been restored and transformed into the luxury Abbasi Hotel where guests can drink tea inside a garden courtyard in a traditional chai-khanna with the full view of the Madrassah Chahar Bagh's magnificent yellow and turquoise dome. A masterpiece of Iranian art and architecture, the hotel, while enjoying all the facilities of a modern hotel, gives you the opportunity to see authentic Persian miniatures, paintings and tiles, gilt ornaments, mirror, inlaid and plaster works.

Other sites not to be missed in Isfahan are the Shaking Minarets (Minar-e-Junban) and the Sassanid Atashgah (fire temple).

■ SHIRAZ and Fars Province

Renowned for its Persian lyrics, roses, cypresses and nightingales, Shiraz is the capital of southern province of Fars and a former national capital.

Little is known of Shiraz's pre-Islamic past except that the Sassanian king Ardashir (A.D. 212-241) held court there.

Shiraz's modern history is closely associated with the Zand Dynasty and its founder Karim Khan Zand. The most famous relic of this era is the impressive Vakil Mosque

on the city's old Zand Avenue. Another Shiraz landmark of the Zand period is the Arg-e-Karim Khan, which in the middle of the town, resembles a medieval fortress.



Shiraz is renowned for its many beautiful gardens, including the Eram, Narenjestan and Afif-Abad, each with a richly decorated pavilion set among graceful cypress trees. Shiraz is also the birth place of the nation's two greatest poets, Saadi and Hafez, who are also buried there in two beautiful mausoleums, and who devoted so much of their poetry to the idolization of the city.

Religious activity in Shiraz centres on the glittering Shah Cheragh (King of Light) Shrine, where the remains of Seyyed Amir Ahmad, the brother of the eighth Shi'ite Imam is buried. Nasir-ol-Molk of Qajar period is another mosque not to be missed. The province of Fars has a lot more to offer than its capital Shiraz. Some of Iran's and, indeed, the world's most important archaeological sites are located all over the province:

■ PASARGADAE

The capital and last resting place of Cyrus the Great is situated in Dasht-e-Morgbab, some 110 miles north of Shiraz. Here Cyrus fought and won his last battle against his former suzerain, the Median king Astyages, in or near the year 550 B.C., and Pasargadae, named for the chief tribe of the Persians, was built as Strabo relates, as a “memorial to that epic victory”.



Pasargadae is an extensive site containing the remains of a massive platform, the tall-e-Takhte: the majestic tomb of Cyrus himself, its foundation taking the form of a high plinth of six receding steps, upon which rests a gabled tomb chamber; two palaces; a monumental gate marked by a winged

genius, with Egyptian crown; a royal garden, and an enigmatic stone tower known as the Zendan-e-Sulaiman (Prison of Sulaiman).

■ PERSEPOLIS

Darius I, the great Achaemenian king, created and reorganized and unified an empire which eventually was larger and more efficiently ruled than any other the ancient world had yet seen.



Darius conceived Persepolis, its unmatched splendour still evident today, despite the ravages of foreign invaders and centuries of exposure, as the spiritual hub of the empire. The building program begun by Darius I (522-486 B.C.) was carried on by his two immediate successors. Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), and Artaxerxes (465-424 B.C.), remain a magnificent memorial to the achievements of the Achaemenid kings.

The most important buildings at Persepolis were crowded onto a terrace of natural rock (Takht-e-Jamshid) that rises 12 meters above the plain on three sides and abuts a low mountain on the fourth side. There are about fifteen major buildings, including the Apadana, the Hall of Hundred Columns, the Gate House of Xerxes, the Treasury, the Harem, the so-called central building and the majestic palaces of Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes III.

Persepolis was the site to which the Achaemenid kings came to celebrate the Iranian New Year (Now-Ruz), and the achievements of their ancestors in religious ceremonies, to receive foreign delegations, and to be buried, until it was burnt to the ground by Alexander of Macedonia in 330 B.C. The existing remains consist of stone columns with elaborate bases and capitals, stone door and window jambs, and facades and staircases, many with splendid bas-reliefs and relief sculptures. They make Persepolis one of the most impressive sites, not just in Iran but in the whole of the ancient world.

■ NAGHSH-E-ROSTAM

A monumental fire sanctuary known as Ka'be-e-Zardosht stands facing the great vertical cliff at Naghsh-e. Rostam carved with four Achaemenian tombs of Darius I and three of his successors. From a distance four cuttings into the rock face are visible, marking the tombs which represent the facade of a palace as though fronted by a porch supported by four columns with typically Achaemenid bull capitals.



Another important feature of Naghsh-e-Rostam is a series of eight Sassanian rock-reliefs, some of the greatest ever created, on the lower levels of the cliffs.

■ BISHAPUR

A most interesting site, located west of Shiraz, in Iran's archaeological belt where so much history has been revealed a result of extensive excavations and restoration.



Bishapur, meaning the beautiful city of Shapur was built by Shapur I (241-273 A.D.), the second Sassanian king, who threw back Roman invaders and captured the Emperor Valerian in Edessa. From then until its destruction by the Arabs around 637 AD Bishapur was an important Sassanian city.

The building complex includes a central chamber, a large courtyard, which had been covered with impressive mosaics, plus the remains of a temple dedicated to Anahita, the

goddess of water and fertility.

At Bishapur, on either side of a narrow gorge there are also six Sassanian rock reliefs, commemorating Shapur's victories over the Romans, for which the site is justly famous.

■ FIRUZABAD

In 220 A.D., Ardashir I, having defeated the Parthian king, Artabanus, became king of all Iran. He then needed a new royal residence which he built at a place known today as Firuzabad, calling it Ardashir-Khurra, the "Glory of Ardashir". The walled city was circular in shape, with four gates located at each cardinal point. A square minaret of rubble stone rose to almost one hundred feet in the centre of the city, remains of which is all that survives. Nearby stood the enormous palace of Ardashir, built on the plain with a view over a small natural lake, which has played such a key role on the understanding of the development of Persian architecture. Ardashir also built a fortified residence on top of a mountain, overlooking the plain, at a place known today as Ghal-e-Dokhtar, which is set out on three levels.



KHUZESTAN, Cradle of Civilization

The province of Khuzestan is the cradle of much of Iran's ancient civilization, including the prehistoric Elamite. Because of its geographical position, being an extension of the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia, lowland Khuzestan was sometimes brought within the cultural orbit of Mesopotamia. Today, Khuzestan as well as being one of the most fertile agricultural provinces of Iran because of the Karun River, Iran's widest and sole navigable estuary, is also the hub of Iran's oil industry.

The provincial capital of Khuzestan is Ahwaz, a city located on the flat plain, on the banks of the Karun River. Historians know that a settlement of one type or another has stood on the site of modern Ahwaz for centuries, but the identity of the original founders remain in dispute.

Today Ahwaz is a modern community nestled among the palm groves lining the Karun River. As a focal point of Iran's oil industry, the town is one the country's economic capitals.

■ HAFT-TAPPEH

At Haft-Tappeh, what is believed to be the oldest Elamite temple ever discovered in Iran has been excavated. Haft Tappeh was, apparently, only occupied during the 14th to 15th centuries B.C. Translations of the inscriptions found indicate that the temple was built in approximately 1260 B.C. by the Elamite king, Untash Gal. The most extraordinary feature about the site is that it appears to have been a complex consisting only of religious buildings and tombs, and may have been found specifically as a centre of some funerary cult.



■ CHOGHA-ZAMBIL

The largest man-made structure in Iran is the ziggurat of Chogha Zambil built about 1250 B.C. by the Elamite king, Untash-Gal. This massive temple and tomb complex located eighteen miles southwest of Susa (Shush), recreates on the flat plain the traditional awe man has always had for its mountains as a sacred place. The foundation was 346 feet (105 meter) square, out of which rose five concentric towers, one set inside the other to the height of 174 feet (53 meter). From excavations at Chogha-Zambil many inscriptions and architectural ornaments such as wall plaques of glazed pottery, as well as interesting cylinder seals have been found.



■ SUSA

Susa is the site of one of the oldest civilizations in the Middle East; dating back to 5,000 B.C. Archaeologists have worked at Susa for well over one hundred years, excavating the extensive remains which stretched from the 4th millennium B.C. to the early Islamic period. On the ruins of the Elamite capital that was destroyed by the Assyrians, Darius built his winter capital. The ruins of the Achaemenian palaces are still visible as are the remains of the Apadana, which lent its name to the famous Apadana audience hall at Persepolis. At the height of its importance Susa claimed to be the capital of the world.



The names of Darius and Susa are inextricably linked and it is here that his now famous headless statue (now at Iran's National Museum) with Egyptian hieroglyphics on the base was found. A broken bull capital is one of the few surface remains at Susa that recalls the magnificence recorded in foundation tablets recovered from the palace of Darius on the Apadana mound. Other artifacts, clay inscriptions and pottery found at Susa are on display at a very good local museum.

Another notable site in the city of Shush is an Elamite-style structure which is the tomb of the Old Testament prophet Daniel. Restored several times, it is still a place of pilgrimage for Jews, Christians and Moslems alike.

■ SHUSHTAR

A large town perched on limestone cliffs above the Karun River, whose past can be traced through a remarkable series of interconnecting canals, dam bridges and irrigation works. The Gargar dam in central Shushtar, whose purpose was not irrigation but the generation of water power to run thirty mills which in the not-too-distant past ground the barley and wheat of Shushtar into flour is an outstandingly unique feature of the town.



■ Detailed itinerary for 7-night/8-day classic tour of Iran

DAY 01: DEPARTURE
(Pre-booked hotel room)

DAY 02: ARRIVAL TEHRAN-SHIRAZ
Arrival in Tehran. Half day city tour of Tehran. Fly to Shiraz, Overnight

DAY 03: SHIRAZ (EXCURSION PERSEPOLIS & NAGHSH-E-ROSTAM)
Half day excursion to Persepolis and Naghsh-e-Rostam. Half day visit of Shiraz. Overnight.

DAY 04: SHIRAZ-PASARGADAE-ISFAHAN
Drive to Isfahan, en route visit Pasargadae. Overnight Isfahan.

DAY 05: ISFAHAN
Full day city tour of Isfahan, to visit the famous bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou, and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter including the important Cathedral of Vank; in the afternoon visit the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan, Ali Qapu Palace, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and Imam's Mosque. Overnight.

DAY 06: ISFAHAN
Full day city tour of Isfahan to visit Masjid-e-Jame and Chehel Sotoun Palace and spending the rest of the day in the Bazaar of Isfahan. Overnight.

DAY 07: ISFAHAN-NATANZ-KASHAN-TEHRAN
Morning drive to Tehran, with en-route stop at the charming town of Natanz to visit Islamic Complex (Friday Mosque/Monastery/Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani); continue to Kashan and visit the historical garden of Fin and Taba-Tabai House; continue to IKA's Novotel Hotel for overnight stay.

DAY 08: DEPARTURE-TEHRAN
Walk across the sky bridge from Novotel Hotel to the IKA departure terminal.

■ Detailed itinerary for 9-night/10-day classic tour of Iran

DAY 01: DEPARTURE
(Pre-booked hotel rooms).

DAY 02: ARRIVAL TEHRAN-SHIRAZ
Arrival in Tehran. Half day visit to some of Tehran's major museums; in the evening transfer to domestic airport for flight to Shiraz (as available); overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 03: SHIRAZ/EXCURSION PERSEPOLIS & NAGHSH-E-ROSTAM
Full day excursion to Persepolis also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam; return to Shiraz to visit the tomb of Hafez; overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 04: SHIRAZ
Full day of visits in Shiraz to include the Eram Garden, the Pars Museum, the Arg-e-Karim Khan (18th-century citadel), Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, the Qajar-period Narenjestan Garden/House; and the Vakil Bazaar (closed on Fridays); overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 05: SHIRAZ-PASARGADAE-YAZD
Drive to Yazd, en route visit Pasargadae; continue to Yazd for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 06: YAZD-NA'IN-ISFAHAN (300 km)
Spend the morning in Yazd to visit the Dowlat-Abad Garden; also visit the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, and the Friday Mosque; drive to Isfahan via Na'in, to visit the 10th century Friday Mosque, and Pirnia House/Ethnographic Museum (closed on Mondays), with a walk through the old part of the town; continue to Isfahan for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 07: ISFAHAN

Full day tour of Isfahan, bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou, and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter including the important Cathedral of Vank; in the afternoon visit the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan and its sites, finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar (closed on Fridays); overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 08: ISFAHAN

Another full day sightseeing of Isfahan to visit the Friday Mosque, Chehel Sotun Palace & Hasht Behesht.; overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 09: ISFAHAN-ABYANEH-KASHAN-TEHRAN

Drive to Tehran, with en route stop in Abyaneh; next en route stop in Kashan to visit Persian Garden of Fin. Visit of merchant residence known as Taba-Tabai House; continue to IKA’s Novotel Hotel for overnight stay.

DAY 10: DEPARTURE TEHRAN

Walk across the sky bridge from Novotel Hotel to the IKA departure terminal for your return flight.

■ ***Detailed itinerary for
11-night/12-day classic tour of Iran***

DAY 01: DEPARTURE

(Pre-booked hotel room).

DAY 02: ARRIVAL TEHRAN-KERMAN

Arrival in Tehran; later in the day visit to some of Tehran’s major museums; early evening flight to Kerman (as available) for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 03: KERMAN/EXCURSION TO RAYEN & MAHAN (Return 250 km)

Morning drive to the village of Rayen, to visit the Arg, or Citadel, of Rayen, visit the Shahzadeh Garden; and the blue-tiled Mausoleum of Shah Nematollah-e-Vali; return to Kerman for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 04: KERMAN-YAZD (350 km)

Half day visits in Kerman to include the Ganj-Ali-Khan Complex, the Hammam-e-Vakil, and Friday Mosque; afternoon drive to Yazd, en route, visit the Zein-ed-Din Caravanserai; continue to Yazd for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 05: YAZD

Full day sightseeing in Yazd. Visiting Towers of Silence; also visit the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, the Friday Mosque and walk around the historical district also visit the Water Museum of Yazd, located in a restored mansion; overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 06: YAZD-PASARGDAE-SHIRAZ (450 km)

Morning drive to Shiraz with en route stop at Abarkuh to see the 4000-year old cypress tree; continue to Pasargadae and view the remnants ruins of the palaces; on to Shiraz for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 07: SHIRAZ

Full day of visits in Shiraz to includ the Eram Garden, the Pars Museum, the Arg-e-Karim Khan (18th-century citadel), Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, the Qajar-period Narenjestan Garden/House; and the Vakil Bazaar (closed on Fridays); overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 08: SHIRAZ-PERSEPOLIS-ISFAHAN (480 km)

Early morning drive to Persepolis; also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam; continue to Isfahan for overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 09: ISFAHAN

Full day tour of Isfahan, bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou, and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter including the important Cathedral of Vank; in the afternoon visit the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan and its sites, finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar (closed on Fridays); overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 10: ISFAHAN

Another full day sightseeing of Isfahan to visit the Friday Mosque, Chehel Sotun Palace & Hasht Behesht Pavillion. Overnight stay at hotel.

DAY 11: ISFAHAN-NATANZ-KASHAN-TEHRAN (450 km)

Drive to Tehran, with en route stop in Abyaneh; next en route stop in Kashan to visit Persian Garden of Fin. Further visit of a merchant residence known as Taba-Tabai House; continue to IKA’s Novotel Hotel for overnight stay.

DAY 12: DEPARTURE TEHRAN

Walk over the sky bridge to IKA departure terminal for your return flight home.

■ ***Detailed itinerary for
14-night/15-day classic tour of Iran***

DAY 01: ARRIVAL TEHRAN

Arrival at Tehran’s IKA airport; meet and transfer to hotel.

DAY 02: TEHRAN

Full day of visits to some of Tehran’s major museums to include Iran’s National Museum, Carpet Museum, Glass and Ceramic Museum. Overnight.

DAY 03: TEHRAN-SHIRAZ

Morning flight to Shiraz, to see tomb of Hafez, Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque and Narenjestan Garden/House and the bazaar (Closed on Fridays). Overnight.

DAY 04: SHIRAZ-EXC. PERSEPOLIS

Full day excursion to Persepolis; also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam and Royal Tombs and Naghsh-e-Rajab (a nearby grotto with more Sassanid reliefs), return to Shiraz. Overnight.

DAY 05: SHIRAZ- KERMAN

Drive to Kerman, en route visit the Sassanian Palace at Sarvestan. Overnight.

DAY 06: KERMAN-EXC.

Morning drive to the village of Rayen, to visit the Arg, or Citadel, of Rayen, visit the Shahzadeh Garden; and the blue-tiled Mausoleum of Shah Nematollah-e-Vali; return to Kerman overnight stay.

DAY 07: KERMAN-YAZD

Brief morning visit in the city of Kerman to see Ganj-Ali-Khan Complex (bazaar, bath, and caravanserai), and the Friday Mosque, drive to Yazd, en route visit Zeineddin Carravanserai, continue to Yazd, overnight.

DAY 08: YAZD

Full day sightseeing in Yazd, to include the Towers of Silence, the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, the Friday Mosque and walk around the historical district also visit the Water Museum of Yazd, located in a restored mansion; overnight.

DAY 09: YAZD-ISFAHAN

Spend the morning in Yazd to visit the Dowlat-Abad Garden; the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, and the Friday Mosque; drive to Isfahan via Na’in, to visit the 10th century Friday Mosque, and Pirnia House/Ethnographic Museum (maybe closed on Mondays), with a walk through the old part of the town; continue to Isfahan for overnight.

DAY 10: ISFAHAN

Full day tour of Isfahan, to see the bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou, and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter including the important Cathedral of Vank; in the afternoon visit Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan and its sites, finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar (closed on Fridays); overnight.

DAY 11: ISFAHAN

Another full day sightseeing of Isfahan to include the Friday Mosque, Chehel Sotun Palace & Hasht Behesht Pavillion; overnight.

DAY 12: ISFAHAN-NATANZ-ABYANEH-KASHAN

Morning drive to Tehran, en-route stop over at Natanz to visit the Friday Mosque/Monastery/Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani; drive to Abyaneh. Continue to Kashan for overnight stay.

DAY 13: KASHAN-TEHRAN

Visits in Kashan to include the garden of Fin and visit a fine example of a 19th-century merchant residence known as Borujerdi House; countinue to Tehran, with drive by the Mausoleum of Imam Khomeini; overnight.

DAY 14: TEHRAN

Full day city tour with visits to Sa’adabad Palace/Museum Complex, in north Tehran; also visit the fabulous Crown Jewels Museum (open from 14.00-16.30, Saturday to Tuesday), displaying the most dazzling and precious collection of jewels and gems in the world; return to the hotel for overnight stay.

DAY 15: DEPARTURE TEHRAN

Transfer to IKA airport for departure flight.

■ **Detailed itinerary for special 21-day classic tour of Iran (option #1)**

DAY 01: ARRIVAL TEHRAN

Morning/midday arrival at IKA Airport, meet and transfer to hotel for rest, time-permitting a short city tour of Tehran, overnight.

DAY 02: TEHRAN–RASHT–BANDAR-E-ANZALI

Drive to Rasht, lunch en route, visit village of Massuleh near Fouman, return to Rasht and continue to Bandar-e-Anzali on the Caspian Sea for bvernight stay at hotel.

DAY 03: BANDAR-E-ANZALI–ARDEBIL–TABRIZ

Drive via Astara and Heyran Pass to Ardebil, lunch in Ardebil and continue to Tabriz for dinner and overnight.

DAY 04: TABRIZ-EXCURSION

Full day excursion to Khoy/Maku to visit the Black Church/Ghare Klissa (or the St. Thaddeus Church), with en-route lunch, return to Tabriz, dinner at the hotel and overnight.

DAY 05: TABRIZ-TAKAB

Brief visit in Tabriz to see the Blue Mosque (or the Turquoise of Islam, and the Azarbaijan Museum (interesting coin collection), drive along the Urmieh Lake, and via Shahin Dej, to Takab (a small town with a Kurdish-Turkish population), with en-route picnic lunch, dinner and overnight.

DAY 06: TAKAB-KERMANSHAH

Visit the site of Takht-e-Suleiman, lunch and drive to Kermanshah for overnight stay and dinner at hotel.

DAY 07: KERMANSHAH-EXC. TAGH-E-BOSTAN

Visit the magnificent Sassanian rock-carvings of Tagh-e-Bostan, continue to Kangavar to visit the Anahita Temple; return to Kermanshah and, time-permitting, visit the colourful and glittering bazaar, overnight.

DAY 08: KERMANSHAH-AHWAZ

Drive to Ahwaz via Islam-Abad Gharb, lunch en route, on to Ahwaz via Andimeshk for overnight.

DAY 09: AHWAZ-EXC. CHOGHA ZANBIL

Full day excursion to Chogha-Zanbil; also visit Haft-Tappeh or Seven Mounds (Elamite Necropolis); and Susa, lunch at Susa, also visit the Tomb of Daniel. Ovenight and dinner Ahwaz.

DAY 10: AHWAZ-SHIRAZ

Drive to Shiraz, en-route visit a single Sassanian relief of Sarab-e-Bahram, and Bishapur; on either side of a narrow gorge, there are also six Sassanian rock-reliefs at Tang-e-Chogan, Overnight.

DAY 11: SHIRAZ-EXC. PERSEPOLIS

Full day excursion to Persepolis; also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam to see Ka’be-Zardosht (fire temple/sanctuary), and Royal Tombs (also Achaemenid); and Naghsh-e-Rajab, a nearby grotto with more Sassanid reliefs; Return to Shiraz for overnight.

DAY 12: SHIRAZ

Full day city tour of Shiraz, to visit tomb of Hafez, the Eram Garden, Narenjestan, Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, and other Zand and Qajar monuments, plus the Vakil Bazaar (Closed on Fridays) of Shiraz, overnight.

DAY 13: SHIRAZ-YAZD

Drive to Yazd, en route visit Pasargadae, and drive through Abarkuh (a typical desert town), and stop over for tea

under the shade of a 4000-year old Cyprus tree, continue to Yazd for overnight stay.

DAY 14: YAZD

Full day sightseeing in Yazd, to visit the Towers of Silence (Dakhma) and the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple. Among Yazd’s Islamic sites is the Friday Mosque; and Ziaieyeh Theological School, known as Zendan-e-Eskander or Alexander’s Prison. There are, also, many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat-Abad Garden. overnight.

DAY 15: YAZD-ISFAHAN

Drive to Isfahan, en route visit the early Islamic period Friday Mosque in the city of Na’in and the Pirnia House/Ethnographic Museum; continue on to Isafahan for overnight stay.

DAY 16: ISFAHAN

Full day city tour of Isfahan, to visit the famous bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou and 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, finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar (Closed on Fridays) with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world-famous, overnight.

DAY 17: ISFAHAN

Full day sightseeing of Isfahan to visit the Friday Mosque, the Harun-e-Velayat Shrine and the Ali Minaret; also visit Chehel-Sotun (Forty Columns) Palace and Hasht-Behesht (Eight Paradise) Palace, both set in beautiful gardens/parks, with further visit to the Maidan and shops, overnight.

DAY 18: ISFAHAN-TEHRAN

Early morning drive to Tehran, en route visit town of Natanz to see Friday Mosque/Monastery/Tomb Complex, on to Kashan to visit the Tappeh Sialk (one of the most important archaeological sites in central Iran), the Fin Garden, continue on to Tehran with drive by the Mausoleum of Imam Khomeini, 30 Km. to Tehran!; overnight.

DAY 19: TEHRAN

Full day sightseeing in Tehran to include Iran’s National Museum; the Abguineh Museum, and the Carpet Museum; Overnight stay in hotel.

DAY 20: TEHRAN

Visit the Golestan Palace/Museum Complex, to include the Ethnological Museum. Also visit the former residence of the last Shah of Iran at Sa’ad-Abad Palace/Museum Complex. In the afternoon visit the Reza Abbasi. Overnight stay in hotel.

DAY 21: DEPARTURE TEHRAN

Transfer to airport and departure flight.

■ **Detailed itinerary for 21-day classic tour of Iran**

DAY 01:

Arrival in Tehran, transfer to hotel, overnight.

DAY 02: TEHRAN

After breakfast, visit some of Tehran’s museums: Iran’s National Museum (including Archaeological and Islamic); and Abguineh (Glass and Ceramics); and Carpet Museum, overnight.

DAY 03: TEHRAN-HAMADAN

Drive to Hamadan via Qazvin to visit Friday Mosque in Qazvin, afternoon sightseeing in Hamadan, overnight.

DAY 04: HAMADAN-SANANDAJ

Drive to Sanandaj via Kermanshah, en route visit the Anahita Temple at Kangavar, Achaemenian inscriptions and reliefs at Bisotoun, and Sassanian rock reliefs at Tagh-e-Bostan, overnight.

DAY 05: SANANDAJ-TABRIZ

Drive to Tabriz via Takht-e-Soleiman to visit the Sassanian fire temple, overnight.

DAY 06: TABRIZ

Full day excursion to St. Thaddeus (Black) church, overnight.

DAY 07: TABRIZ - BANDAR-E-ANZALI

Drive to Anzali via Ardebil to visit the shrine of Sheikh Saffi-eddin Ardebili, overnight.

DAY 08: ANZALI - RAMSAR

Full day visit to the village of Masuleh and Anzali Lagoon, drive to Ramsar, overnight.

DAY 09: RAMSAR-GORGAN

Drive to Gorgan, visit Gonbad-e-Qabus Tower en route, overnight.

DAY 10: GORGAN-MASHAD

Drive to Mashad, en route visit Imam-Zadeh Mahroug shrine, tombs of poets Khayyam and Attar in Neishabur, overnight.

DAY 11: MASHAD

Full day excursion to Torbat-e-Jam, Taeibad, Khwaf and Salame to visit sites, overnight.

DAY 12: MASHAD

Full day excursion to Robat-e-Sharaf and Robat-e-Mahi caravanserais, and Loghman Baba, overnight.

DAY 13: MASHAD-SHIRAZ

City tour of Mashad to visit the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza and the museums, fly to Shiraz by IR.

DAY 14: SHIRAZ

After breakfast, full day excursion to Persepolis; also visit Naghsh-e-Rostam; and Naghsh-e-Rajab; late evening visit to the Shrine of Ali-ibn-Hamzeh (Shi`it Saint, where non-Moslems are welcome), overnight.

DAY 15: SHIRAZ

Full day sightseeing tour of the city. of Shiraz, to see tomb of Hafez, the Eram Garden, the pink-tiled 19th century Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, Vakil Bazaar (Closed on Fridays), overnight.

DAY16: SHIRAZ-YAZD

Drive to Yazd, en route visit Pasargadae; in Yazd visit Towers of Silence, overnight.

DAY 17:YAZD-ISFAHAN

Half day city tour of Yazd to visit Fire Temple, Friday Mosque, the old part of city, Dowlat-Abad Garden and bazaar (Closed on Fridays); drive to Isfahan, en-route visit Jame Mosque and Pir-Nia House in Na'in, overnight.

DAY 18: ISFAHAN

Full day city tour of Isfahan, to visit the famous bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter with several churches, including the important Cathedral of Vank; in the afternoon visit Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan with several sites (the Ali-Qapu Palace with its enchanting music rooms and balcony overlooking the Maidan - the Sheikh Lotfollah and the Imam (Shah) Mosque), finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar (Closed on Fridays) with hundreds of shops displaying the art and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world famous, overnight.

DAY 19: ISFAHAN

After breakfast, full day sightseeing of Isfahan to see Friday Mosque, the Harun-e-Velayat and Ali Minaret; after lunch, visit Chehel-Sotoun and Hasht-Behesht Palaces, overnight.

DAY 20: ISFAHAN-TEHRAN

Drive to Tehran, en route visit Fin Garden, Agha Bozorg Mosque and Tabatabaee House in Kashan, overnight Tehran.

DAY 21: DEPARTURE

Transfer to airport and departure.

