

A Persian Journey

Day-by-Day Itinerary

September 22-October 2

October 6-16

Day 1/2 –Check your travel documents one last time and arrive at your gateway airport at least two hours before departure. We will depart JFK Airport at 9:35pm on Lufthansa.

Day 3 - We will arrive at Tehran’s Imam Khomeini Airport just after midnight. Plan to be surprised at how friendly everyone is at the airport as you go through passport control, claim your luggage, and pass through customs. However...in a tit-for-tat gesture, the Iranian government requires Americans to be fingerprinted before entering the country. (We hope to expedite this process, but we have no guarantees). You will be met by our in-country tour partner in who will take you to the Laleh Hotel. A few hours sleep will be important. Jet lag is an unavoidable fellow traveler, so we will move slowly for the first half of the day. After a half-day tour of Tehran we will fly to Shiraz and spend the night.



Day 4—Shiraz, the place of poets, offers much for us to see, so we may have to ration the number of places we visit. Certainly we will include the Shah-e Cheragh Museum, and possibly the adjacent mosque, one of the oldest in Iran. And we will include the Church of St. Simon the Zealot, who, according to local tradition, was married in Persia.

Hafez and Saadi, the two most famous Persian poets, were both born in Shiraz, one of the most famous centers for learning and the arts, and we will visit their tombs. Plan to be surprised at the level of devotion still accorded these literary giants. A number of young women (and a few young men) will bring flowers and read their favorite Hafez passages (he wrote much about passionate love) around his tomb. If we’re not behind schedule, the attached garden with two pools is a wonderful place for a cup of tea and watching the locals

smoke the hubble-bubble pipes. The Saadi tomb and its surroundings are not as impressive as the final resting place of Hafez, but we will pay our respects.

Day 5—After breakfast we will motorcoach to one of the most impressive sights of antiquity—Persepolis. Does every guidebook for Iran have a photo of Persepolis (more accurately called



Takht-e-Jamshid) on its cover? It seems so. And once you see it, you will understand its prominence. Darius I initiated the construction but the project wasn't completed until 150 years later. A succession of Persian kings, including Xerxes (Ahaseurus in the Old Testament) intimidated vassal kings with the magnificence of Persepolis, and it is not unlikely that Esther, who saved the Jews in Persia, walked these hallways.

Naghsh-e Rostam, the tomb of the kings, is less than 4 miles away. Hewn from a sheer cliff, the four tombs cut into the rocks, are reputed to hold the remains of Darius I, Artaxerxes, Xerxes and Darius II, but that's one of the topics archaeologists like to argue about, so we'll stay out of the debate and just admire the tombs. Also we'll see as the reliefs that were cut into the rock several hundred years later during the Sassanian dynasty. And of particular interest to our Spiritual Sites Tour, we'll inspect the Zoroastrian fire-temple from the Achaemenian era. (Robert Byron's classic *The Road to Oxiana* is recommended reading prior to this day's journey.)

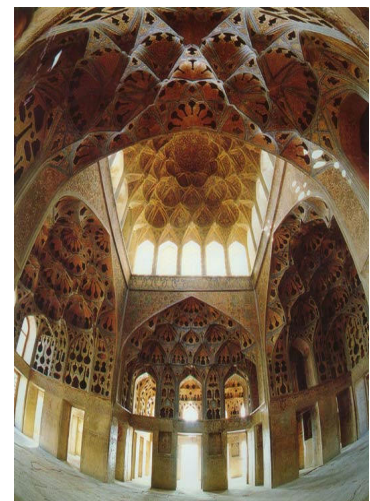
The last site of the day is Passagard and Cyrus the Great's tomb. Little of Passagard remains for us to see, but the cenotaph of Cyrus is still intact, and no doubt we will hear the history (legend?) of why Alexander the Great spared this monument. True or not, it makes a great story.

Late afternoon we will drive to Bavanat for dinner with the nomads and an opportunity to experience the hospitality for which they are famous.

Day 6 - Yazd is our destination today. The city has a reputation as a "city of peace" which has some significance to our tour. Zoroastrianism supposedly developed in Yazd and we will visit the Fire Temple (whose fire has been constant for 2500 years) and the Towers of Silence, the ancient burial site for this religion. A tour of the old city with its interesting architecture and the Dowlat Abaad Gardent are on the itinerary as well.

Day 7 - —"Isfahan nesf-e jahan"... "Isfahan is half the world" according to the ancient half-rhyme. You will be able to decide if you think it is an exaggeration. We will take two full days to explore this special city—but it will not be adequate.

Emam Khomeini Square (still often referred to as Naghsh-e Jahan Square) will be our first destination. It was Shah Abbas' polo grounds a few centuries ago but now serves as a huge courtyard which is ringed by mosques, palaces and the bazaar. We'll visit Ali Ghapu Palace and climb 6 stories to capture the view previously enjoyed only by royalty. Then we'll walk across the



courtyard to see what many consider the most magnificent mosque in Iran—Masjed-e Emam. Completed in 1638, the image of its pale blue tiled dome finds itself featured significantly in travel brochures. It's truly one of the most majestic mosques in the Muslim world. Also on the square is the smaller Lotfollah Mosque, where the exquisite tile-work is unsurpassed anywhere in the world. The bazaar around the square is extensive—Persian rugs, hand-printed tablecloths, metalwork (silver, brass and copper) are among the most interesting products. We'll allow you time to bargain with the shopkeepers for that special souvenir.

Day 8 - Our second day in Isfahan will allow us to visit Vank Cathedral, one of the most interesting Christian edifices in Iran. Built in the mid-1600's, there is an attached museum with a very impressive display of ancient Bibles and other documents, including what supposedly is the first book ever printed in Iran.

Isfahan has an impressive string of bridges, some of which are more than 800 years old. We will take some time to investigate this ancient engineering as we explore the environs of Isfahan, including the Zoroastrian fire temple perched on a hill just outside of town. Also we plan to attend Zoor Khaneh, the traditional sport-house, where the participants exercise to the admonition of a drummer.

Day 9 - Today we drive to Tehran via the quaint villages of Abyaneh (famous for its gardens) and Kashan (famous for its carpets), taking some time to learn more about village life in Iran.

Day 10 - Our last day in Iran will allow us to visit a few more of the many palaces and gardens of the city. In the afternoon we will visit the Velanjak area at the north edge of Tehran for a farewell dinner. Just before midnight (which is not late by Iranian standards) we will transfer to the airport for the return flight to JFK.

