

Iran: Magic Carpet to Persian Splendors

November 12 to 23, 2009 (arrival/departure Tehran)

Modern Iran is a place that has been much in the news lately. There is far more to the experience of this complex country than the the news of the past 30 years and its most recent turmoil would indicate. Fundamentally, a visit there astonsihes and delights for the warm degree of welcome and hospitality that awaits the visitor from the west, and particularly from the United States. Just as experiencing this country today is enlightening and informative, an immersion in traditional Persian culture of the past offers the key to understanding the winds of cultural change and innovation that have swept through this pivotal bridge between the east and the west.



Isfahan: Shah Mosque viewed from the Maidan (all watercolors by Stephen Harby)

Our twelve night expedition has been crafted by Pasargad Tours (the travel agency of choice for all the best cultural and educational groups) to begin and end in Tehran and to encompass a wide range of the country's outstanding sites of artistic, archaeological, architectural and cultural significance. Taking a

single internal flight to Shiraz and then traveling in a circle by land back to Tehran, we will experience the great landmarks and places of this region, most of which would be on any dedicated traveler's life list of key world sites. Persepolis of the Achaemenid kings Cyrus and Darius; and Isfahan

of Shah Abbas were the greatest places on earth in their times. Yazd, Abyaneh and Kashan provide rich offerings of indigenous construction, mosques, gardens and traditional urban settings. It will be a memorable journey!

Itinerary

DAY 01 (Wed., 11 Nov.): DEPART EUROPE

Departure from a European destination for Tehran (rooms will be booked this night to accommodate potential early morning arrivals).

DAY 02 (Thu., 12 Nov.): ARRIVAL TEHRAN

Arrival at IKA airport, meet and transfer to hotel; later in the morning visit to some of Tehran's museums: Iran's National Museum (Archaeological Museum only as Islamic Museum is currently under renovation), displaying an authentic collection of pre-historic and ancient artifacts with pottery dating back to 6-7 millennium B.C.; the Abguineh (Glass and Ceramics) with a wonderful and delicate collection of ancient and Islamic glass and pottery; and the Carpet Museum, with an extensive collection of old and new Persian carpets and rugs from the major carpet-weaving centers of Iran.

DAY 03 (Fri., 13 Nov.): TEHRAN-SHIRAZ

Further visits in Tehran to include the Golestan Palace/Museum Complex, dating from the 18th to the early 20th century, to include the Marble Throne Hall and other galleries, and the former residence of the last Royal Family of Iran at Sa'ad-Abad Palace/Museum Complex, where the White and Green Palaces, will be visited; afternoon transfer to airport for flight to Shiraz.

DAY 04 (Sat., 14 Nov.): SHIRAZ

Full day city tour of Shiraz to visit some of the famous gardens of this city of "roses and nightingales",



including the Eram Garden, the tombs of Iran's greatest lyric poets, Hafez and Sa'adi, both with beautiful gardens; the pink tiled 19th-century Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, the Arg-e-Karim Khan (18th-century citadel), the Madrassa Khan (Theological School), to have interaction with teachers and students, the Qajar-period Narenjestan Garden/House, the Vakil Bazaar of Shiraz, and the Holy Shrine of Shah-e-Cheragh (not open to non-Moslems and can only be seen from outside).

DAY 05 (Sun., 15 Nov.): SHIRAZ/ EXCURSION PERSEPOLIS



Top: Tomb of Darius, near Persepolis
Above: Persepolis

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; 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 Sassanian reliefs; return to Shiraz.

DAY 06 (Mon., 16 Nov.): SHIRAZ-YAZD

Drive to Yazd, enroute visit Pasargadae, the site of the simple, but impressive, tomb and remains of the palaces of Cyrus the Great (the Founder of the Persian Empire); also stop over at the small desert town of Abarkuh, and have tea under the shade of a 4000-year old cypress tree; continue to Yazd.

DAY 07 (Tue., 17 Nov.):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 50-60 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 are the Friday Mosque (1324 A.D.) with the highest portal and minarets in Iran and

the Mirchachmagh Maidan and Mosque. Other notable Islamic monuments in the old Fahadan area of Yazd are the Seljuk shrine dedicated to the Twelve Shi'ite Imams; and Ziaieyeh Theological School, known as Zendan-e-Eskander or Alexandar's Prison. There are also many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat-Abad Garden, with an 18th century feudal hexagonal house.

DAY 08 (Wed. 18 Nov.): YAZD-ISFAHAN

Drive to Isfahan, en route visit the early Islamic period Friday Mosque in the town of Na'in, and the Pirnia House/Ethnographic Museum, a beautiful example of a Safavid period private house with delicate monochrome painted plaster decoration, close to the mosque; continue to Isfahan.

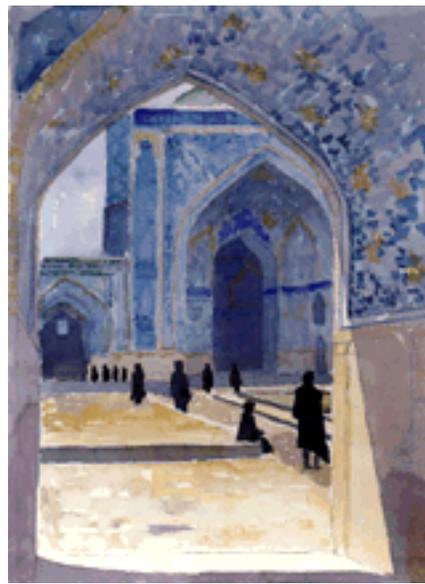
DAY 09 (Thu., 19 Nov.): ISFAHAN

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 texts. We will 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 tilework), finishing with a visit to the Qeisariyeh Bazaar with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts

for which Isfahan is world-famous.

DAY 10 (Fri., 20 Nov.): 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. Also visit the Harun-e-Velayat Shrine and the Ali Minaret. From here drive to the 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'. The final stop of the day is at the Hasht Behesht pavilion built in 1670 by Shah Solayman and known as the Pavilion of Eight Paradises or the Palace



Both images: Isfahan, Shah Mosque

of Nightingales. The small but intricate building is set amongst tree-lined alleys, a reflecting pool and water rills.

DAY 11 (Sat., 21 Nov.): ISFAHAN-ABYANEH

Morning drive to the village of Abyaneh, en-route stop over at the charming town of Natanz to visit a beautiful Islamic Complex (Friday Mosque/Monastery/Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani), continue to Abyaneh, hidden in Karkas Mountains, and enjoy walking in this ancient village which was 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 clothes. O/N stay at hotel.

DAY 12 (Sun., 22 Nov.): ABYANEH-TEHRAN

Morning drive to Tehran, via Kashan, to visit the historical garden of Fin, which was 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. You will also visit a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Borujerdi House with its beautiful stucco dome and inlaid mirror work, with some of the best examples of existing "badgirs" (wind-catchers); on to Tehran, and drive by the Mausoleum of Imam Khomeini.

DAY 13 (Mon. 23 Nov.): DEPARTURE TEHRAN

Transfer to IKA airport for departure flights.