



Itinerary Brilliant Persia Tour (24 Days)

Day 1: Arrive in Tehran, visiting Tehran, fly to Shiraz (flight time 1 hour 25 min)

Sightseeing: The National Museum of Iran, Golestan Palace, Bazaar, National Jewelry Museum.

Upon your pre-dawn arrival at Tehran airport, our representative carrying our show card (transfer information) will meet you and transfer you to your hotel. You will have time to rest and relax before our morning tour of Tehran begins.

To avoid heavy traffic, taking the subway is the best way to visit Tehran. We take the subway and charter taxis so that we make most of the day and visit as many sites as possible.

We begin the day early morning with a trip to the National Museum of Iran; an institution formed of two complexes; the Museum of Ancient Iran which was opened in 1937, and the Museum of the Islamic Era which was opened in 1972. It hosts historical monuments dating back through preserved ancient and medieval Iranian antiquities, including pottery vessels, metal objects, textile remains, and some rare books and coins. We will see the "evolution of mankind" through the marvelous display of historic relics.

Next on the list is visiting the Golestan Palace, the former royal Qajar complex in Iran's capital city, Tehran. It is one of the oldest historic monuments of world heritage status belonging to a group of royal buildings that were once enclosed within the mud-thatched walls of Tehran's Arg ("citadel"). It consists of gardens, royal buildings, and collections of Iranian crafts and European presents from the 18th and 19th centuries. Then we go for a walk through bazaar. Bazaar, in Iran, is the economic life of the country. Moreover, social relations are formed here and a fairly wide range of people get the chance to socialize more. It is also a logical place for political parties to rule their own policies. Soon after we go to have lunch.

Our Tehran excursion will end at the priceless National Jewelry Museum where we will visit a world of jewels, one of which includes one of the two greatest diamonds; Darya-e-Noor (sea of light). Afterwards we will transfer to the airport for the flight to Shiraz. Stay overnight in Shiraz.

Attention: The priority in sightseeing may be changed due to the time of your arrival, preference of your guide and also official and unofficial holidays of some museum.





Day 2: Visit Shiraz

Sightseeing: Karim Khan Palace, Vakil Mosque, Vakil Bazaar, SarayeMoshir, Nasir Almolk Mosque, the tombs of Hafez and Saadi, Ali-Ebn-e-Hamzeh, Jahan Nama Garden, Eram Garden, and the tomb of Khajoy-e-Kermani .

Shiraz has a reputation for being an enlightened city that has been at the cultural heartland of Iran for more than 2,000 years. It had once been the country's capital.

Shiraz is crowned as the heartland of Persian culture, and this city of sophistication will never fail to conjure up images of roses and nightingales, gardens and poetry.

Early in the morning, relish in the highlights of Shiraz when it was the capital of Iran during the Zand Dynasty.

Be inspired by the glorious Karim Khan Palace, the splendid Vakil Mosque, Vakil Bazaar and SarayeMoshir with its splendid architecture and interesting ethnic souvenir shops, and the Nasir Almolk Mosque.

Next, we will stop for a mouth-watering Iranian lunch at one of the traditional restaurants in Shiraz.

This gorgeous city is home to famous poets such as Hafez and Sa'adi, and historical sites from different eras dating back to 6,000 years ago can be found. Hafez is one of the great poets who impressed everyone with his mastery. His poems give us a special feeling and the peace in his tomb is really outstanding.

Saadi is a poet, philosopher and mystic who is known as the father of tourism. He travelled to different countries and cities about seven centuries ago. Then he collected all his experiences in verse and rhyme prose in two books named Boustan and Golestan. These two books give you lots of inspiration and information. We will get a chance to pay homage to the tombs of these great poets.

In the evening, we will visit Ali-Ebn-e-Hamzeh and be prepared to marvel at its beauties. We will take a stroll through the Jahan Nama Garden and witness its tall and proud cedars.

Finally we will visit the Eram Garden and the tomb of Khajoy-e-Kermani from where the perspective of the mysterious city of Shiraz will remain in our mind. stay overnight in shiraz

Day 3: An excursion to Persepolis & Necropolis, visit Shiraz (the ancient historical-cultural heritage of Sang-e-sia District) (60 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 1 hour and 10 mins)





Sightseeing: Persepolis, Necropolis, Sang-e-sia District, Bibidokhtaran, Mirhadi Mosque, Moshir Mosque, the tomb of Siboooyeh, Niayesh traditional chain hotels.

In the morning, we first pay a visit to Persepolis. Founded by Darius I in 518 B.C., Persepolis was the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. It was built on an immense half-artificial, half-natural terrace, where the king of kings created an impressive palace complex inspired by Mesopotamian models. The importance and quality of the monumental ruins make it a unique archaeological site. It seems that Darius planned this impressive complex of palaces not only as the seat of government but also, and primarily, as a showplace and a spectacular center for the receptions and festivals of the Achaemenid kings and their empire such as Nowruz.

The second place we stop by is Necropolis. Opposite Mount Rahmat, ten minutes to the north, proudly stands the Necropolis, the magnificent burial place of Achaemenid kings. The site also provides seven bas-reliefs dating back to Elamite and Sassanid periods.

Then we return to the hotel and get some rest.

In the evening, we take a walking tour of the historical and cultural district of Sang-e-sia (black stone), visit the shrine of Bibidokhtaran with its unique architecture which is a sample of the well-known Dome of Soltaniyeh in Zanjan (the third largest dome in the world after the domes of Florence Cathedral and Hagia Sophia, its importance in the Muslim world may be compared to that of Brunelleschi's cupola for Christian architecture.), visit the historical cypress in Mirhadi Mosque, visit Moshir Mosque and walk past an Armenian church (as a Christian, you may get the chance to pay a visit if you ask for), visit the tomb of Siboooyeh, visit Niayesh traditional chain hotels which include the historical houses of Moayedi, Mostafavi, and Nematollahi. You will see the evolution of the Iranian architecture from 200 years ago to the Qajar era and the present time. You will get to know some elements of the architecture in the interior decoration of the ancient Pahlavi houses such as backyard, courtyard, and chambers around the courtyard, guesthouse, pool, shahneshin, orsi, panjdari, and gushvareh. We will make our day by having Shirazi dinner and drink at Delgosha restaurant. Stay overnight in Shiraz.

Day 4: Drive to Abarkuh, visit Pasargadae on the way (288 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 3 hour and 50 mins)

Sightseeing: Pasargadae, Abarkuh (the ancient living cypress tree, Icehouse, Gonbad-e Aali, Nizamiyyah School, desert).

Today we leave Shiraz for Abarkuh in the morning.





On the way, we will stop by Pasargadae which was the capital of the Achaemenid Empire in ancient Persia under Cyrus the Great who had issued its construction (559–530 BC). We will visit the most majestic monuments there of which the tomb of Cyrus the Great, the great founder of the Achaemenid Empire, is the oldest. The wonderful architecture of the tomb and the huge fertile land over there inspire the visitors. It was the worshiping place for the followers of several religions and is today an archaeological site and one of Iran's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Afterwards we continue all the way to Abarkuh, a historical city located at an altitude of 1510 meters.

We will visit an ancient living cypress tree (4500 years old) in Abarkuh. Old trees in any region are the symbol of archaism and tell the truth that appropriate weather and nice conditions are quite helpful to lead a long life. Abarkuh Icehouse is the next attraction to which we will pay a visit. Icehouses are buildings used to store ice throughout the year, commonly used prior to the invention of the refrigerator. Some were underground chambers, usually man-made, close to natural sources of winter ice such as freshwater lakes, but many were buildings with various types of insulation. Then we will visit Gonbad-e Aali (Aali Dome) which is the oldest structure remained in the town since 11th century, Dailamite period. It is one of the earliest tomb towers in Iran located on top of a hill just at the outskirts of the town.

The last place we will stop by in the day is the Nizamiyyah School, which is one of a group of the medieval institutions of higher education established by Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk in the eleventh century in Iran. The name Nizamiyyah derives from his name. Founded at the beginning of the Seljuk Empire, these Sunni Islam theological schools are considered to be the model of later Islamic religious schools.

Finally we will make an evening excursion to the desert and stay overnight in Abarkuh.

Day 5: Drive to Yazd, Visit Yazd (161 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 2 hour and 30 mins)

Sightseeing: Zoroastrian Towers of Silence & Fire Temple, Amir Chakhmaq Complex, Yazd Water Museum, Jame Mosque, Old City, Alexander's Prison, Tomb of the 12 Imams, Dowlatabad Garden, confectionary and handicraft workshops Yazd, the oldest adobe city in the world which is surrounded by the 4000m summit of Shirkooch and two majestic deserts of Iran, Dasht-e-Kavir and Kavir-e-Loot. This ancient city is furnished with mosques of stunning beauty. The co-existence of the splendid fire temples and the holy sites of different religions astonish every visitor.





Today's tour begins with visiting Zoroastrian Towers of Silence; circular raised structures built by Zoroastrians for excarnation (for dead bodies to be exposed to carrion birds), and Fire Temple; the place of worship for Zoroastrians.

Next, we will visit Amir Chakhmaq Complex; a prominent structure noted for its symmetrical sunken alcoves. It is a mosque located on a square of the same name. It also contains a caravanserai, a tekyeh (a place where Shiites gather for mourning of Muharram), a bathhouse, a cold water well, and a confectionery. Then we head for Yazd Water Museum. This 124-year-old Museum displays the tools, techniques used for the past 4000 years in Iran in creating underground waterways (called qanats) and connecting them to the city and field locations for agricultural and other uses. Yazd water museum was set up in 2000 in the wake of the first international conference on qanat in Yazd. The museum building has once been a merchant's house built in 1929. Two qanats are running beneath the museum at different levels, which are reachable through a special stairway called Payab. This museum has put on display a variety of water objects from qanat to water ownership documents. The museum is one of the best tourist destinations in Yazd, which receive hundreds of visitors every day. Afterwards we pay a visit to the Jame Mosque, the old city of Yazd, the 15th-century domed school known as Alexander's Prison because of a reference to this apparently dastardly place in a Hafez poem. Whether the deep well in the middle of its courtyard was in fact built by Alexander the Great and used as a dungeon seems doubtful, no matter what the guide says. The building is worth a look for the small display on the old city of Yazd, but mostly the fee covers access to a warren of craft workshops.

We move on to the Tomb of the 12 Imams; the early-11th-century brick Tomb forming one side of Zaiee Sq, in the heart of Yazd's historic old city. The once-fine, but now badly deteriorated inscriptions inside bear the names of the Shiite Imams, though none are actually buried here. The tomb was closed at the time of writing.

We continue our tour with Dowlatabad Garden; an authentic Iranian garden that annually attracts thousands of domestic and foreign tourists. This is a complex built according to the original Iranian architectural style and consists of a large garden and some buildings. Finally we pay a visit to confectionery and handicraft workshops. Stay overnight in Yazd.

Day 6: Drive to Isfahan, visit Meybod, Nain & Varzaneh on the way (325 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour)

Sightseeing: Narin Castle in Meybod, abaya-weaving workshop in Nain, Jame Mosque in Varzaneh





Today we leave Yazd for Isfahan (around 300 kms) at 8 in the morning. On the way, first we will visit Meybod; an ancient city that goes back to pre-Islamic era and is the home to many ancient points of interests. It was the capital of Iran during the Mozaffarid period. Mozaffari kingdom originated from Meybod where the first king was born. One of the oldest castles in Iran is Narin Castle in Meybod, which dates from the Sasanid. It is one of the most important relics of the province dating back to the period before the advent of Islam to Iran, and has been recorded as one of the national buildings. This ancient castle has been constructed on the top of Galeen hill and overlooks the city. Abbasi Caravansary is another example of the historic buildings from Safavid era.

Then we drive to the beautiful city of Nain. More than 3,000 years ago, the Persian learned how to construct aqueducts underground (qanat in Persian kariz) to bring water from the mountains to the plains. In the 1960s this ancient system provided more than 70 percent of the water used in Iran. Nain is one of the best places in all the world to see these qanats functioning. We will stop by an abaya-weaving workshop in Nain. The abaya "cloak", sometimes also called an aba, is a simple, loose over-garment covering the whole body except the head, feet, and hands, worn by clergymen and some women in parts of the Muslim World.

Unique to Nain are some of the most outstanding monuments in all of Iran: the Jame Mosque; one of the first four mosques built in Iran after the Arab invasion, the Pre-Islamic Narenj Castle, Pirnia traditional house, the Old Bazaar, Rigareh; a qanat-based watermill, and a Zurkhaneh (a place for traditional sport).

In the end, we move to Varzaneh which is famous regionally and all over the world for its spectacular desert having the highest sandy dunes. Here we will pay a visit to Jame Mosque of Varzaneh, go for a walk along the river, have lunch in a local house, and finally hit the road to Isfahan.

Stay overnight in Isfahan.

Day 7: Visit Isfahan

Sightseeing: Imam Square, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Imam Mosque, Ali Qapu, Chehel Sotoun, Hasht Behesht, Bazaar .

Isfahan, the legendary city which never fails to enchant its visitors, is the pearl of traditional Islamic archeology. This city is revived by the works of contemporary artists. Isfahan prides itself in having fascinating historical garden palaces. Legend has it that the city was founded at the time of Tahmoures or Keykavous and because of its glories has been entitled "Half the World".





Today we start our tour with the famed Imam Square (Naqsh-e-Jahan), a huge square second in the world to Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Then we pay a visit to the architectural marvels of Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam Mosques, Aliqapu Palace, Chehel Sutoon and Hasht Behesht Palaces, and finally visit one of the most famous bazaars in Iran, where we can purchase the arts & crafts for which Isfahan is so well renowned. Stay overnight in Isfahan.

Day 8: Visit Isfahan, drive to Golpayegan (265 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour)

Sightseeing: Jame' Mosque, Vank Cathedral, Menar Jonban, Si-o-seh pol, Gouged Stronghold.

Isfahan's Jame' Mosque holds in itself the passage of several centuries of historical Islamic evolution. This mosque is a gallery of Islamic architecture in which the progress of the architecture from the outset of Islam till recent times is evident. Then we will visit Vank Cathedral which is one of the most beautiful Armenian churches in the world and will undoubtedly capture the attention of every Christian. Afterwards, we will stop by Menar Jonban; the tomb of a Sufi with its shaking minarets and some historical bridges.

Our day will conclude with a visit to Allahverdi Khan Bridge popularly known as Si-o-seh pol; the bridge of thirty-three spans. It is one of the most famous examples of Safavid bridge design and the longest bridge on the Zayanderud (the largest river of the Iranian Plateau in central Iran) with the total length of 297.76 meters. We leave for Golpayegan in the afternoon. We will visit Gouged stronghold and stay overnight there. In the peace time, the stronghold was used as a caravansary, but during the war time or when the bandits attacked, it was used as a castle. At present, the stronghold is used as a traditional three star hotel. The Gouged stronghold is one of the biggest adobe and mud structure in Iran. It was built approximately 400 years ago. The only document related to this structure dates back to 140 years ago. stay overnight in Golpayegan.

Day 9: Drive to Hamadan (296 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour and 30 mins)

Sightseeing: Ali-Sadr Cave Today we leave Golpayegan for Hamadan in the morning. Upon our arrival in Hamadan around noon, we have lunch and soon after hit the road (about 100 kilometers north of Hamadan) to stop by the amazing Ali-Sadr Cave, the world's largest water cave which attracts thousands of visitors every year. Excavations and archeological studies of the cave have led to the discovery of ancient artworks, jugs and pitchers dating back to 12,000 years ago.





Animals, hunting scenes and bows and arrows are depicted on the walls and passages of the exit section. These images suggest primitive man used the cave as their abode. The cave was known during the reign of Darius I (521-485 BC) which can be verified by an old inscription at the entrance of the tunnel. However, the knowledge of the existence of the 70-million-year-old cave was lost, and it was only rediscovered in 1963 by Iranian mountaineers. Because of the cave's proximity to large cities such as Hamadan, it is a highly recommended destination for tourists from all corners of the world. You can have a tour of the cave by sitting in a boat and watching the view.

In the summer of 2001, a German/British expedition surveyed the cave, finding to be 11 kilometers long. The main chamber of the cave is 100 meters by 50 meters and 40 meters high.

The cave walls can extend up to 40 meters high, and it contains several large, deep lakes. The cave has a river flowing through it and most travel through the cave system is done by boat. More than 11 kilometers of the cave's water canals have been discovered so far. Some routes are 10 to 11 kilometers long and all lead to "The Island", a centrally located large atrium. At the end of the day, we drive back to Hamadan and stay overnight there.

Day 10: Visit Hamadan

Sightseeing: Esteroo Mord Khay Tomb, Ganj Nameh, Avicenna Mausoleum, Hegmatane Archeological Palace, Gonbad-e Alavian, the tomb of Baba Taher .

Hamadan is believed to be among the oldest Iranian cities. It is possible that it was occupied by the Assyrians in 1100 BCE; the Ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, states that it was the capital of the Medes, around 700 BCE. Hamadan has a green mountainous area in the foothills of the 3,574-meter Alvand Mountain, in the Midwest part of Iran. The special nature of this old city and its historic sites attract a good number of tourists during the summer. The majority of the population is Persian; however, there is a considerable Azerbaijani minority.

Today we begin with a visit to Esteroo Mord Khay (Ester and Mord Khay) Tomb. Located in the city center, the structure has been constructed of brick and stone. This is the tomb of Ester the Queen of Shoosh (the wife of Khashayar Shah of Iran). Mordecai (Mord Khay) was her uncle. The structure was originally constructed about 11 centuries ago in order to pay homage to these two personalities. There is a probability that the current structure has been built on the original site in the 7th century AH. This vicinity is a place for pilgrimage by the Jewish sect, and is also held in respect by Moslems.

The second place we stop by is Ganj Nameh (literally: Treasure epistle), an ancient inscription, 5 km south-west of Hamadan, on the side of Alvand Mountain in Iran. The inscriptions were carved





in granite in two sections. The one on the left was ordered by Darius the Great (521-485 BC) and the one on the right by Xerxes the Great (485-65 BC). Both sections were carved in three ancient languages: Old Persian, Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Elamite. The inscriptions start with praise of the Zoroastrian God (Ahura Mazda) and describe the lineage and deeds of the mentioned kings.

Then we pay a visit to the Avicenna Mausoleum. Dedicated to the Iranian polymath Avicenna, the complex includes a library, a small museum, and a spindle-shaped tower inspired by the Ziyarid-era Kavus Tower. We pay tribute to Avicenna by visiting his tomb. He was a Muslim Persian physician and philosopher who wrote almost 450 treatises on a wide range of subjects, of which around 240 have survived. In particular, 150 of his surviving treatises concentrate on philosophy and 40 of them concentrate on medicine.

Afterwards we go on to visit Hegmatane Archeological Palace dating back to the 6th century BC. The said structure is from the times of the Medes. 'Kiyakesar Madi' and 'Nabopolasar Baboli' were responsible for its construction in the year 614 BC. The decorative pieces used in this palace were ransom from earlier battles. The famous Greek historian has mentioned this palace in his records. In latest archeological excavations many discoveries related to the Achaemenian period have been found.

The next fascinating site will be Gonbad-e Alavian, one of the best masterpieces in architecture and stucco work after Islam in Hamadan. This dome is related to the end of Seljuk in the 6th century which was first built by Alavian clan as a mosque. In the other eras because of cellar in the underground, it was changed to the tomb of that clan. On the exterior, it resembles the Gonbad-e Sorkh of Maragheh.

Our final site to visit in Hamadan is the tomb of Baba Taher which is located in a park, surrounded by flowers and winding paths. Baba Taher is known as one of the most revered and respectable early poets in Iranian literature. He was known by the name of Baba Taher-e Oryan (The Naked), which suggests that he might have been a wandering dervish. His poetry has touched many souls. stay overnight in Hamadan.

Day 11: Drive to Kermanshah, visit Kangavar & Bistoon on the way, visit Kermanshah (188 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 3 hour)

Sightseeing: Kangavar, Bistoon, Taq-e Bostan (The Garden Arch)





Today we leave Hamadan for Kermanshah. On the way, we will have a stop in Kangavar. In the small town of Kangavar, ruins of a majestic historic site start to appear by the roadside. Kangavar was mentioned by the Greek geographer Isidore of Charax in the first century AD, as Konkobar in the ancient province of Egbatana; its name may be derived from the Avestan Kanha-vara, 'enclosure of Kanha'. The site is known as the Temple of Anahita, built by an Achaemenian Emperor, 404 BC to 359 BC. This temple was built in honor of 'ArdevisurAnahita', the female guardian angel of the waters. Architecture of this temple coincides with palaces and temples built during the Achaemenian period, 550 BC to 330 BC, in western Iran. From Kermanshah the road runs along the bottom of a fine velvety fawn colored cliff.

The next place we stop by on the way is Bistoon which clusters around a source nearby a vertical rock wall. The carvings at Bistoon are set high in the rock facing by an important trade route for all travellers to see. The site is 30km from Kermanshah city near the village of Bistoon.

Then we head for Kermanshah which was one of the cities for recreation during the Sassanid era. It has a moderate and mountainous climate. The province has a rich Paleolithic heritage. Many caves with Paleolithic remains have been surveyed or excavated there. Some of these cave sites are located in Bistoon and north of Kermanshah. There is only one vestige to which we will pay a visit; the remarkable Taq-e Bostan (The Garden Arch). It is a group of rock sculptures, several of them protected by a porch roof which forms a grotto. Motifs date back to the great Sassanid period (3rd century A.D. until Islam). We stay overnight in Kermanshah.

Day 12: Drive to Oramanat Takht (200 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour and 30 mins due to mount road)

Sightseeing: uramanat Takht Village, The tomb of Peer Shahriar Urami

Today we leave Kermanshah for uramanat Takht village. The uramanat Takht Village is one of the attractive rural areas of Kurdistan which besides its panoramic views has valuable tourism capacities because of the annual performance of an ancient and wonderful ceremony of Peer Shahriar. The SirvanRiver flows in the deep valleys of this region and enter Iraq. Here the lands are covered with walnut, pomegranate, fig and mulberry trees.

The tombs of Peer ShahriarUrami, writer of the book Acquaintance of Peer Shahriar are one of the creditable pilgrimage sites of the people, which was a Zoroastrian celestial before the advent of Islam. Stay overnight in uraman Takht village.



Day 13: Drive to Sanandaj, visit Zarivar Lake on the way, visit Sanandaj (155 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 3 hour and 15 mins)

Sightseeing: Zarivar Lake, Old Bazaars of Sanandaj, Hajar Khatoon Mosque

Today we leave Oramanat for Sanandaj. On the way, we will stop by Zarivar Lake, a lake in the Zagros Mountains, within Kurdistan Province around 3 kilometers west of Marivan. It has a length of 5 km (3.1 mi) and a maximum width of 1.6 km (0.99 mi). The lake's water is fresh and has a maximum depth of 6 meters (20 ft). Zarivar Lake is a major touristic attraction in the region. There is a great deal of folklore about the origins of this lake amongst the Kurdish people of the area.

Then we continue the way to the beautiful city of Sanandaj. Sanandaj is the capital of Kurdistan province. The economy of Sanandaj is based upon the production of carpets, processing hides and skins, milling rice, refining sugar, woodworking, cotton weaving, metalware and cutlery.

For sightseeings, we will visit Old Bazaars of Sanandaj and Hajar Khatoon Mosque which is architecturally a unique and ancient Muslim mosque (now a tourist destination) in the city. Hajar Khatoon Mosque was built more than hundred years ago by Haj Sheikh Shokrollah who was a very prominent Sunni cleric or Sheikh in that region. We stay overnight in Sanandaj.

Day 14: Drive to Zanjan, visit Takab on the way (260 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour)

Sightseeing: Takht-e Soleyman Complex, Anahita Temple

Today we drive to Zanjan which lies 298 km north-west of Tehran on the main highway to Tabriz and Turkey and approximately 125 km from the Caspian Sea. It is a strategic city that connects Iran's central plateau to Azerbaijan region. Dating back to the Sassanid era, it used to be one of Iran's major centers in the illkhanate era.

Zanjan is known for its beautiful handicrafts such as knives, traditional sandals, called charoogh, and malileh, a handcraft made with silver wires. Zanjan artists make many things like various decorative dishes and their special covers as well as silver jewelry.

In ancient times, Zanjan was known for its stainless and sharp knives. Many villagers today are traditional carpet weavers, perhaps Zanjan's most popular handicraft.

We will visit Takab on our way to Zanjan. It is an ancient city and a major economic center for the Medes, ancient Iranian people who lived in an area known as Media (northwestern Iran) and who spoke the Median language. World Heritage Sites of Takht-e Soleymān known as



AzarGoshnasp(the Fire of the Warrior Kings) and Zendan-e Soleyman (Prison of Solomon) lie very near the present-day town of Takab. The complex includes a natural lake, the remains of a Zoroastrian fire temple eulogizing water and fire built during the Sassanid period and partially rebuilt during the Ilkhanid period, Anahita Temple, chartaqi (four arches); an architectural unit consisted of four barrel vaults and a dome, and a royal palace to which we will pay a visit. These ancient monuments portray the glory of the region in the ancient times. We stay overnight in Zanjan.

Day 15: Visit Soltaniyeh, drive to Tabriz, visit Kandovan (320 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour and 40 mins)

Sightseeing: Soltaniyeh, Kandovan village

Today's excursion begins with a visit to Soltaniyeh, located 240 kilometers (150 mi) to the north-west of Tehran. It was built as the capital of Mongol Ilkhanid rulers of Iran in the 14th century. Its name refers to the Islamic ruler title 'Sultan'. In 2005, UNESCO listed Soltaniyeh as one of the World Heritage Sites. The city flourished in Öljaitü period in which it was rebuilt and for this reason lots of artists, craftsmen, and merchants were summoned to cooperate. The central magnet of Soltaniyeh's several ruins is the Mausoleum of Ilkhan Öljeitü traditionally known as the Dome of Soltaniyeh. The structure, erected from 1302 to 1312 AD, has the oldest double-shell dome in Iran. Its importance in the Muslim world may be compared to that of Brunelleschi's cupola for Christian architecture.

The Dome of Soltaniyeh paved the way for more daring Iranian-style cupola constructions in the Muslim world, such as the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasavi and the Taj Mahal. Much of its exterior decoration has been lost, but the interior retains superb mosaics, faience, and murals. People have described the architecture of the building as "anticipating the Taj Mahal." Visiting the dome, you will get to know part of the historic glory of the region.

Then we drive to Tabriz and visit the beautiful village of Kandovan; a village in Sahand Rural District, in East Azerbaijan Province. This village exemplifies manmade cliff dwellings which are still inhabited. The homes, excavated inside volcanic rocks, are locally called "Karaan". Karaans were cut into the Lahars (volcanic mudflow or debris flow) of Mount Sahand. stay over night in tabriz .

Day 16: Visit Tabriz



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Sightseeing: the oldbazaar, Blue Mosque, Azerbaijan Museum, Iron Age Museum, El Goli, Serkis church .

Iranian Azerbaijanis home to one of the most cultured and bravest races in Iran, the Azeris. And Tabriz is the most populated city in Azerbaijan, one of the historical capitals of Iran and the present capital of East Azerbaijan. The city is famous for its handicrafts, including hand-woven rugs and jewelry. Local confectionery, chocolate, dried nuts and traditional Tabrizi food are recognized throughout Iran as some of the best. Tabriz contains many historical monuments, representing Iran's architectural transition throughout its deep history. Most of Tabriz's preserved historic sites, which we will visit, belong to Ilkhanid, Safavid and Qajar.

Today's tour begins with a visit to the exotic bazaar which is one of the oldest bazaars in the Middle East and the largest covered traditional bazaar in the world. It was inscribed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO in July 2010.

Then we pay a visit to the Blue Mosque, a famous historic mosque built in 1465 upon the order of Jahan Shah, the ruler of Kara Koyunludynasty which made Tabriz the capital of his Kingdom. In close proximity of the mosque, we will visit the Azerbaijan Museum; the major archaeological and historical museum in Tabriz. The museum consists of three major halls, a side yard, office rooms and a library. It mostly contains objects discovered from excavations in Iranian Azerbaijan, also some artworks and sculptures of artists. Then we walk to the Iron Age Museum; an archaeological site in the north, northeast and northwest of the Blue Mosque including cemeteries and traces of Iron Age pottery.

Afterwards we will stop by El Goli; a large park in Tabriz that has a square artificial lake surrounded by sidewalks in four sides. There is also a building in the middle of the lake, with traditional architecture of Iranian Azerbaijan. In the South of the lake there is a hill covered by trees. Two beautiful stairways connect the sidewalks to the top of the hill. At the top of the hill there is a building with modern architecture (ParsHotel building). Finally we will visit the holy Serkis church constructed by 'Petrossian' in the Banvan neighborhood of Tabriz in the year 1821 AD. We stay overnight in Tabriz.

Day 17: Drive to Julfa, visit Julfa (135 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 2 hour)

Sightseeing: Julfa city, the ancient St. Stepanos Monastery, Arasbaran forests.

Today's excursion includes the historical border city of Julfa, located near the Aras River, and the fascinating forests of Arasbaran. Julfa is the stronghold of the Armenian Christians who possess a rich and unique culture of their own. We will visit the ancient churches there. The St. Stepanos



Monastery (Maghartavank) is an Armenian monastery about 15 km northwest of Jolfa city, East Azarbaijan Province northeast Iran. It is situated in a deep canyon along the Aras River on the Iranian side of the border between Azerbaijan and Iran. It was built in the 9th century and rebuilt in the Safavid era after several earthquakes damaged it.

Julfa also has a nice waterfall. Arasbaran is a large mountainous region stretching from the QūshāDāghmassif, south of Ahar, to the Aras River in East Azerbaijan Province of Iran. Since 1976, UNESCO has registered 72,460 hectares of the region as biosphere reserve with the following general description: This biosphere reserve situated in the north of Iran at the border to Armenia and Azerbaijan belongs to the Caucasus Iranian Highlands. In-between the Caspian, Caucasus and Mediterranean region, the area covers mountains up to 2,200 meters, high alpine meadows, semi-arid steppes, rangelands and forests, rivers and springs. Arasbaran is the territory of about 23,500 nomads who are mainly living in the buffer and transition zones (2000). Economic activities in the biosphere reserve are mainly agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, apiculture, handicrafts and tourism, but business activities can also be found in urbanized areas. We stay overnight in Julfa.

Day 18: Drive to Kaleibar, visit Babak Castle & Arasbaran jungle (320 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour and 40 mins)

Sightseeing: natural attractions of Kaleibar, Babak Castle

Today we drive to Kaleibar. The county Kaleibar is noted for the Arasbaran forests protected area and the BazzGalasi, the fortress of Babak Khorramdin. Babak Fort or Babak Castle is a large citadel and National Symbol of Iranians on the top of a mountain in the Arasbaran forests, which is located 6 km southwest of Kaleibar City in northwestern Iran about 3200 m above sea level with a fantastic landscape. It has been identified as the stronghold of Babak Khorramdin, the leader of the Khurramites in Azarbaijan who fought the Islamic caliphate of Abbassids.

The Khorramdin rebellion of Babak spread to the Western and Central parts of Iran and lasted more than twenty years before it was defeated. Iranian Azarbaijanis gather at Babak Castle during the first weekend in July for the annual commemoration of Babak Khorramdin. To access the castle you have two options: you can leave the car in an entertainment area near the town and climb up towards the castle through dense forests or drive to the point the road extends, leave the car there and have an hour trekking to the castle. We stay overnight in Kaleibar.

Day 19: Drive to Ardebil, visit Sarein (160 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 3 hour) Night stay in Sarein





Sightseeing: the mausoleum of Sheikh Safi-ad-Din-e-Ardabili, Archeology Museum, Sarein

Ardabil is a historical, beautiful and unforgettable city which is located in the skirts of Sablan Mountain (the bride of Iran Mountains). In this city the Safavid dynasty took up residence.

We will visit the mausoleum of Sheikh Safi-ad-Din-e-Ardabili. It is an impressive ancient monument, comprising the following components: the mausoleums of Sheikh Safi and Shah Isma'il, Chinikhaneh (meaning the house of chinaware), a mosque, Jannat Sara (meaning the house of paradise), Khanqah (the house of Dervishes), CheraghKhaneh (the house of lamps), Shahid khaneh (the house of martyrs) and ChellehKhaneh (the place where devotees shut themselves up during the forty days of Lent). The mausoleum of Sheikh Safi, the famous dome of which is called "Allah-Allah" has an octagonal interior. Archeology museum will be also seen.

Next we transfer to Sarein. Near Ardabil (25 KM) is the city of Sarein which is well-known for its spas. There we can enjoy the remedial miraculous benefits of those spas, which have therapeutic attributes for some skin diseases, some internal illnesses, and joint problems. We stay overnight in Ardebil.

Day 20: Drive to Fuman, visit Heyran region on the way (315 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 5 hour and 30 mins)

Sightseeing: Heyran region, the statue of Anahita

Today we drive to Fuman in Gilan Province. Rice has been cultivated in this region for many years, where some indigenous cultivars were conventionally bred by farmers. Fuman also produces popular cookies known as koluche. The city is also known for its statues, including the statue of Anahita, an ancient Iranian goddess, and the statue of the Four Girls. On the way to Fuman, we will visit Heyran region, a cluster of three villages in the eastern Alborz mountain range, within Astara County of Gilan Province in far northeastern Iran. Heyran is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Iran, due to the beautiful and accessible scenery. Because of its desirable microclimate at summertime, many villas have been built in the neighborhood. The main road is crowded on the weekends.

Another major attraction of the region is Heyran Gondola lift (Télécabine). Construction of Heyran Gondola lift is an important step towards the development of tourism in Gilan Province. It has 30 ordinary cabins with six seats and also there are three special VIP cabins. The gondola lift is 1,500 meters (4,900 ft.) long through a beautiful landscape of the Alborz. It has: views east of the Caspian



Sea; views southwest to the Fandog Loo forests in the Alborz, and views north to the Azerbaijan border area in the Alborz.

Day 21: Visit Rudkhan Castle, Masooleh, and Anzali Lagoon

Sightseeing: Rudkhan Castle, historical village of Masooleh, Anzali Lagoon

We begin the day with a visit to the Rudkhan Castle, a brick and stone medieval castle in Iran. Located 25 km southwest of Fuman city north of Iran in Gilan province, it is a military complex which had been constructed during the Sasanian era (224-651), and later rebuilt during the Seljuq era by the Nizari Ismailis. The castle is built on two tips of a mount, with an area of 2.6 hectares (6.4 acres). Its architects have benefited from natural mountainous features in the construction of the fort. After crossing a mountainous winding route with dense forests, the first thing that one notices about the castle is its big entrance gate.

Then we will visit the historical village of Masooleh. Its architecture is one of the inquests in the world which is registered in UNESCO. Masooleh architecture is unique. The buildings have been built into the mountain and are interconnected. Courtyards and roofs both serve as pedestrian areas similar to streets. Masooleh does not allow any motor vehicles to enter, due to its unique layout. It is the only village in Iran with such a prohibition. However, the small streets and many stairs simply also wouldn't make it possible for vehicles to enter. Yellow clay coats the exterior of most buildings in Masooleh. This allows for better visibility in the fog.

Afterwards we have an excursion to the Anzali Lagoon, a coastal lagoon, in the Caspian Sea near Bandar-e Anzali, in the northern Iranian province of Gilan. The lagoon divides Bandar-e Anzali into two parts, and is home to both the Selke Wildlife Refuge and the Siahkesheem Marsh. It is one of the biggest and most beautiful lagoons in the world. Although the lagoon suffers from pollution, it is known as a good place for watching unique birds and beautiful flowers such as water lily. Its water ranges from fresh near the tributary streams to brackish near the mouth into the harbor and the sea. Studies indicate that in the 19th and early 20th centuries the lagoon had a much higher salinity. We stay overnight in Masooleh.

Day 22: Drive to Gazorkhan, visit Rudbar & Manjil on the way (300 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 5 hour and 20 mins)

Sightseeing: Rudbar, Manjil, the ancient Gazorkhan village





Today we leave for the ancient village of Gazorkhan early in the morning. On the way, we will visit Rood barandManjil. Rudbar is 268 kilometers (167 mi) from Tehran and with a variable climate. It is located on the fringes of a valley through which the Sefid River flows. Rudbar can be considered as a gateway to the Gilan Province from central Iran. Its name (meaning "by the river" in Persian) is a reference to the river named Sepid Rood that passes by the town. Rudbar's local economy notably includes olives and olive-based products. Groves of olive trees surround the city. Olive oil is produced locally. Rudbar is also known for its cream-hued, handcrafted carpets of fine quality. Despite the olive gardens that may suggest presence of a Mediterranean climate, the winters are very cold in the area. People of Rudbar city are Tats and they speak Tati language.

Manjil is a city in the Central District of Rudbar County, Gilan Province. It is known as the windy city of Iran, a reputation it owes to its geographical position in the Alborz mountain range at a small cleft in Alborz that funnels the wind through Manjil to the Qazvin plateau. The biggest wind farm of Iran, the Manjil and Rudbar Wind Farm, is located near Manjil. Manjil is known for the river Sepid Rood (Sefid Rood). It passes by the town and is formed in Manjil by two joining rivers. Since 1960, it has been the site of the Manjil Dam that significantly contributes to Gilan's agriculture, such as its olive groves, while generating electric power. The reservoir impounded by the Manjil Dam adds to the beauty of the area. We stay in one of the memorable hotels in the middle of the mountain forests in the north of Iran. stay overnight in Gazorkhan .

Day 23: Drive to Tehran, visit Alamut Castle on the way (245 k.m. nonstop drive approx. 4 hour and 35 mins)

Sightseeing: Alamoot Castle

Today we leave for Tehran. On the way, we will pay a visit to the historic monument of Alamoot Castle near Ghazvin. Alamut was a mountain fortress located in Alamut region in the South Caspian province of Daylam near the Rudbar region in Persia. The origins of the Alamut fortress can be traced back to the Justanid ruler Vahsudan who chose the site for the construction of a fortress.

Alamut remained under Justanid control until the arrival of the Ismaili chief da'i (missionary) Hasan-e Sabbah to the castle in 1090 AD, marking the start of the Alamut period in Ismaili history. Between 1090 and 1256 AD, under the leadership of Hasan-e Sabbah, Alamut became the site of intense activity for the Shi'a Ismailis, functioning as the headquarters of their state, which consisted of a series of unconnected strategic strongholds scattered throughout Persia and Syria, surrounded by huge swathes of hostile territory (the Seljuq Empire). In 1256, Ruknu-d-Din Khurshah surrendered the fortress to the invading Mongols, and its famous library holdings were destroyed. Sources on the history and thought of the Ismailis in this period are therefore lacking





and the majority extant are written by their detractors. After the Mongol destruction, the castle was of only regional significance, passing through the hands of various local powers.

Today, it lies in ruins, but because of its historical significance, it is being developed by the Iranian government as a tourist destination. We go on to arrive in Tehran and stay overnight in Tehran.

Day 24: Visit Tehran, depart from Iran

Sightseeing: Carpet Museum, Sa'ad Abad Complex, Reza Abbasi Museum, Milad Tower, Nature Bridge (by choice, at an extra cost)

Today we get an early start to visit the Carpet Museum which houses more than 100 spectacular pieces from all over Iran. Here we will get a chance to see a variety of Persian hand-woven carpets and rugs. We will also be given an insight into the history of these carpets.

Then we pay a visit to Sa'ad Abad Complex with an immense area of 1,100,000 square meters and 18 magnificent historical palaces two of which we will visit. The complex was first built and inhabited by Qajar monarchs in the 19th century. After an expansion of the compounds, Reza Shah of the Pahlavi Dynasty lived there in the 1920s, and his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, moved there in the 1970s. After the 1979 Revolution, the complex became a museum. It will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression on us. Soon after we go to have lunch; a tasty Iranian dish in a traditional restaurant.

Afterwards we stop by the Reza Abbasi Museum located in Seyed Khandan. The museum was named after Reza Abbasi; one of the artists in the Safavid period. It is home to a unique collection of Persian art dating back to the second millennium BC, from both the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras.

Finally we make a visit to Milad Tower; the sixth-tallest tower in the world standing at 435 meters from the base to the tip of the antenna (if it is open). At night we can take a tour of the Nature Bridge by choice (at an extra cost). It is the largest pedestrian overpass built in Iran. The 270-metre (890 ft.) bridge connects two public parks—Taleghani Park and Abo-Atash Park—by spanning Shahid Modarres Avenue, one of the main highways in northern Tehran.

What comes last is our transfer to IKA and depart from Iran, the land of history, culture, nature, beauty and hospitality, of which you will have fond memories forever. (In “Brilliant Persia”, we didn’t consider it necessary to book a hotel for this night. On request, we can book the hotel at IKA for some hours or a whole night in accordance with your departure time).

