

## Iran, a Cultural Journey to the Heart of Ancient Persia

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19 April – 5 May 2019

On a compelling cultural journey through the heart of Iran, we admire the magnificent domes, calligraphy and tilework of the historic mosques of Shiraz and Isfahan; wander through mediaeval Yazd with its wind towers, water gardens and Zoroastrian fire temples; peruse the labyrinthine bazaars selling dried fruits, gold, marquetry and tribal carpets; visit ancient caravanserai along the Silk route; discover Persian poetry and the esteem in which the great poets like Firdowsi, Hafiz and Sa'adi are held; and on foot, explore legendary Persepolis, founded by King Darius c. 515 BC and sacked by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.

Based in comfortable hotels (3, 4 and 5 star), we sample delicious Persian cuisine, experience the warm welcome offered to visitors by the Iranian people and enhance our journey with walks to find wildflowers in the scenic Zagros mountain.

### **HIGHLIGHTS of our Iran walking tour include:**

- Admiring the domes, calligraphy and tilework of the famous mosques of Shiraz and Isfahan
- Discovering Persepolis and wandering through Yazd with its wind towers, water gardens and Zoroastrian fire temples
- Exploring the exotic bazaars, with opportunities to buy silk, ceramics and fine Persian carpets
- Short walks in the Zagros mountains

### **Guests' comments on this trip:**

*'An excellent tour, well led and guided and cleverly designed, starting with a gentle introduction to the mountains and cultural delights in and around Kashan, proceeding via the great highlights of Persepolis, Shiraz and Esfahan and ending with a brief stay in Teheran, where we looked at museums and, on the final day, could see the snow-capped mountains to the North. Our guide was both experienced and knowledgeable and negotiated the religious and political minefields with skill and good humour.'*

*'We enjoyed the trip to Iran enormously. The museums in Tehran were superb. Some of the old mosques were among the most revealing and atmospheric places. The frisson of being somewhere made out to be dangerous, but where everyone was so friendly, added to the atmosphere.'*

### **Itinerary**

#### **DAY 1**

#### **B, L, D included**

After arriving at Tehran airport, we transfer by road (161 km) to Kashan (982 m), once an important oasis between the desert and mountains, where we stay for 3 nights. Traditionally famous for its carpets, we explore the bazaar and visit old merchants' houses. Dinner gives us an opportunity to taste one of the famous *khoresht*, a Persian stew with dried plums, perhaps or a dish of shredded chicken and caramelized onions with barberries.

#### **DAY 2**

#### **B, L, D included**

After a leisurely start, we explore the mosques and the madrasa and search out wind towers and a converted hammam, pausing at the earliest ziggurat dating back 7,000 years. In the afternoon,

we enjoy the charming Bagh-e Fin, a Persian garden that still retains much of its Safavid layout and original water channels.

### **DAY 3**

#### **B, L, D included**

We have a scenic drive (78 km) up into the mountains to Abyaneh (2,500 m), a traditional village. We explore the village on foot with its 11<sup>th</sup> century Jameh Mosque, ruined hammam, and views to a ruined castle and fruit orchards. In the afternoon, there is an optional 2 ½ hour round walk to the castle and up the valley, before we return to Kashan.

### **DAY 4**

#### **B, L, D included**

Travelling southwest into the Zard–Kourg range of the Zagros, we pause to visit Natanz, a town noted for some of the best 14<sup>th</sup> century architecture and tilework in Iran. Our goal is Chelgard (1191 m), set in a sunny bowl in high mountains and a centre of the Baktiari people, a previously nomadic tribe. We stay 2 nights in a modest but welcoming hotel with a good traditional restaurant serving trout and excellent yoghurt.

### **DAY 5**

#### **B, L, D included**

On a scenic morning walk below the snow streaked peaks, we search for *Fritillaria imperialis* and *Fritillaria persica*. We see the source of the Karun river, the longest and only navigable river in Iran, keeping an eye out for Persian robin and Hume's wheatear. Crossing a low pass, we walk in a beautiful wild valley by a river. If we are lucky, we may see the first of the nomads arriving with their flocks for the summer. A further optional walk across the pass returns us to the hotel.

### **DAY 6**

#### **B, L, D included**

A long but impressive mountain drive (6 hrs), with stops en route, takes us south through mountains covered in Persian oak, through gorges and below snowy peaks. We stay in Yasuj (1861 m), near to where Alexander of Macedon is reputed to have stormed the Persian Gates. Our 3-star modern hotel has fine views over the town.

### **DAY 7**

#### **B, L, D included**

This morning, after a 2 hr drive, we visit the celebrated archaeological site of Bishapur, to admire the magnificent Sassanian rock reliefs and walk in the ruined palace complex built in 266 AD. We picnic by a river before driving (2¼ hrs) to Shiraz (1600 m), where we spend 3 nights based in a 4-star hotel. As we approach the city, we see citrus and pomegranate orchards. Famous in past times for 'nightingales, roses and wine', Shiraz remains one of the great cities of the Islamic world.

### **DAY 8**

#### **B, L, D included**

We spend much of the day at Persepolis, one of the most important sites of the Ancient World. The ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings, Persepolis is renowned for its ruined palaces and stone bas-reliefs depicting kings, courtiers and gift-bearing representatives of the satrapies of the Persian Empire. 3 km northwards lies Naqsh-e Rostam where high up in the cliffs can be found the impressive tombs of Darius the Great (died 486 BC), Darius II, Xerxes and Artaxerxes. On our return, we visit the tomb of Hafez, Persia's greatest 14<sup>th</sup> century poet. Most Iranians can quote verses from his lyrical love poems.

### **DAY 9**

#### **B, L, D included**

Today we visit the tomb of the celebrated 13<sup>th</sup> century poet Sa'adi, known in particular for two

epic works, the Golestan and the Bustan. We walk in the Garden of Heart's Ease with its elegant pavilion and the Eram gardens, where we stop for an ice-cream (perhaps pistachio and rosewater), and then explore the Vakil Ethnographic Museum housed in an atmospheric hammam and on to a charming mosque, the Masjed-e Nasir al Molk. We take in the perfumed air of the Orangery (Naranjestan), before heading for the Vakil Bazaar to shop for rose petals and saffron. Tonight, we dine in a lively restaurant serving traditional food such as *fesenjan*, a meat stew with walnuts and pomegranate juice.

#### **DAY 10**

##### **B, L, D included**

Today's drive (6 hrs) heading out into the desert brings us to Yazd (2 nights), once a famous mediaeval trading centre, noted for its wind towers and traditional mud brick houses. En route, we visit Pasargadae, the site of the tomb and ruined palaces of Cyrus the Great, and the Seljuk tombs near Abarkooh.

#### **DAY 11**

##### **B, L, D included**

A full day exploring Yazd, partly on foot. We climb to one of the Zoroastrian abandoned Towers of Silence, visit the active Fire Temple, with a flame that has burnt for about 1500 years, and learn about the ancient beliefs of Zoroasta. We visit the water museum, the magnificent Friday Mosque (1324 AD) and the Ziaieyeh Theological School, known as Alexander's Prison. We conclude with a visit to the bazaar and then the peaceful Dowlat-Abad Garden with pomegranate orchards and vines.

#### **DAY 12**

##### **B, L, D included**

En route to Isfahan (5 1/2 hrs), we pause in the mud brick city of Maybod with its fascinating icehouse, caravanserai, and traditional blue and white pottery. In Na'in, an ancient town on the desert route, we visit the 10<sup>th</sup> century Friday Mosque and walk through the old part of town. We undertake a short climb to the atmospheric ruined Sassanian castle before continuing to Isfahan (1585 m) for 3 nights and settling in to our 5-star hotel, a converted 18<sup>th</sup> century caravanserai with a charming courtyard garden and indoor pool. We dine at a nearby restaurant noted for its grilled quail and *khorest-e mast* (saffron flavoured yoghurt with shredded chicken and pistachios).

#### **DAY 13**

##### **B, L, D included**

Isfahan boasts one of the world's largest squares, the Maidan-e Imam and we explore it on foot, visiting perhaps the world's most beautiful tiled mosques, the Lotfollah and the Shah Imam, along with the Qapu Palace and its music rooms. The artisans of Isfahan are world-renowned and, on our exploration of the bazaar, we see small shops displaying carpets and handicrafts under the arcades. Four famous bridges span the river and are popular meeting places for the locals. We stroll across the bridges in the early evening absorbing the atmosphere.

#### **DAY 14**

##### **B, L, D included**

We stroll in the Armenian quarter and visit the richly frescoed Cathedral of Vank along with the Museum of the Armenians – their important presence in the city was encouraged by Shah Abbas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when international trade flourished. The Friday Mosque is considered a museum of a thousand years of Persian religious architecture and one of the world's greatest mosques. After our visit, we drive to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Chehel Sotun Palace containing vivid paintings of royal events. There is free time in the afternoon to return to the bazaar and buy handicrafts and miniatures or sit and enjoy the garden at the hotel.

## **DAY 15**

### **B, L, D included**

An early start for the drive back to Tehran (5 ½ hrs), Iran's busy capital, where we stay two nights in a central 5-star hotel. We set off to see the astonishing collection of the National Jewel Museum, that includes the dazzling collection of crowns and the world's largest uncut diamond, the pink Darya-ye Noor (Sea of Light). Dinner tonight will be in a local restaurant perhaps starting with a tangy soup and warm bread and fresh herbs.

## **DAY 16**

### **B, L, D included**

We complete our Iran explorations visiting some of the city's major museums and the Golestan Palace. The Carpet Museum has a beautiful collection of old and new Persian carpets and rugs. The National Museum has pre-Islamic artefacts including Lorestan bronzes and Islamic artefacts beautifully displayed. The Reza Abbasi Museum has an exceptional collection of Achaemenid gold drinking vessels and ceramics.

## **DAY 17**

### **B included**

A morning private transfer to the airport ends our journey.

### **Temperatures**

In late April/early May temperatures are likely to range from 11 to 26° C during the day, but note that the temperatures will drop in the mountains at night. Humidity is very low.

### **Activity Level**

#### **Standard**

This is primarily a cultural journey rather than a walking tour. There are some long drives and early starts may be necessary. Walking in cities, on sites or in the countryside most days, often on rough, stony and uneven ground – in the mountains there are longer walks.

### **Accommodation**

- 3 nights in Kashan
- 2 nights in Chelgard, in a modest but welcoming hotel with a good traditional restaurant serving trout and excellent yoghurt
- 1 night in Yasuj, in a 3-star modern hotel with fine views over the town
- 3 nights in Shiraz, in a 4-star hotel
- 2 nights in Yazd, in a renovated traditional khan (a private house)
- 3 nights in Isfahan, in a 5-star hotel, a converted 18th century caravanserai with a charming courtyard garden and indoor pool
- 2 nights in Tehran, in a central 5-star hotel

### **Trip Price**, per person sharing

**£4,800.75** until 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018

**£4,930.50** until 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**£5,060.25** until 18<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**£5,190** after 18<sup>th</sup> January 2019

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

**£820** single supplement

**£600** deposit per person

*Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable.*

### **Price includes**

- all accommodation for Days 1 to 17, based on 2 people sharing
- all meals with soft drinks as listed in the daily notation (please note that alcohol is totally illegal in Iran)
- iced water, tea and coffee, dried fruit etc. on coach journeys
- all land transportation in private air-conditioned minibus, except during free periods
- all entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- services of Kudu tour leader, specialist local guide and driver throughout
- tips for driver, specialist guide and local guides, porters, restaurant and hotel staff (appreciation for Kudu tour leader is entirely at your discretion)

### **Price does not include**

- flights to and from Tehran
- trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- passport, visa and health documentation
- personal expenses (laundry, free time activities, etc.)
- meals noted as excepted in the daily notation, if any
- transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Iranian departure tax, if any

### **VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED**

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

### **Visa and Health Requirements**

Visitors from EU countries, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand require a valid passport and a visa for entry to Iran. A single-entry tourist visa for British passport holders costs from £ 165 and the process of applying for visa can take up to 8 weeks.

At present, there are no compulsory health requirements for entry to Iran. Please consult your doctor in good time (at least 6 weeks before departure) about updating your immunisation against Hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid, or anything else they consider advisable. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health ([www.dh.gov.uk/travellers](http://www.dh.gov.uk/travellers)) and the FCO ([www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)).

### **Insurance**

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please ask our office or visit our website.

### **Size of Party**

This trip will run with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 guests.