

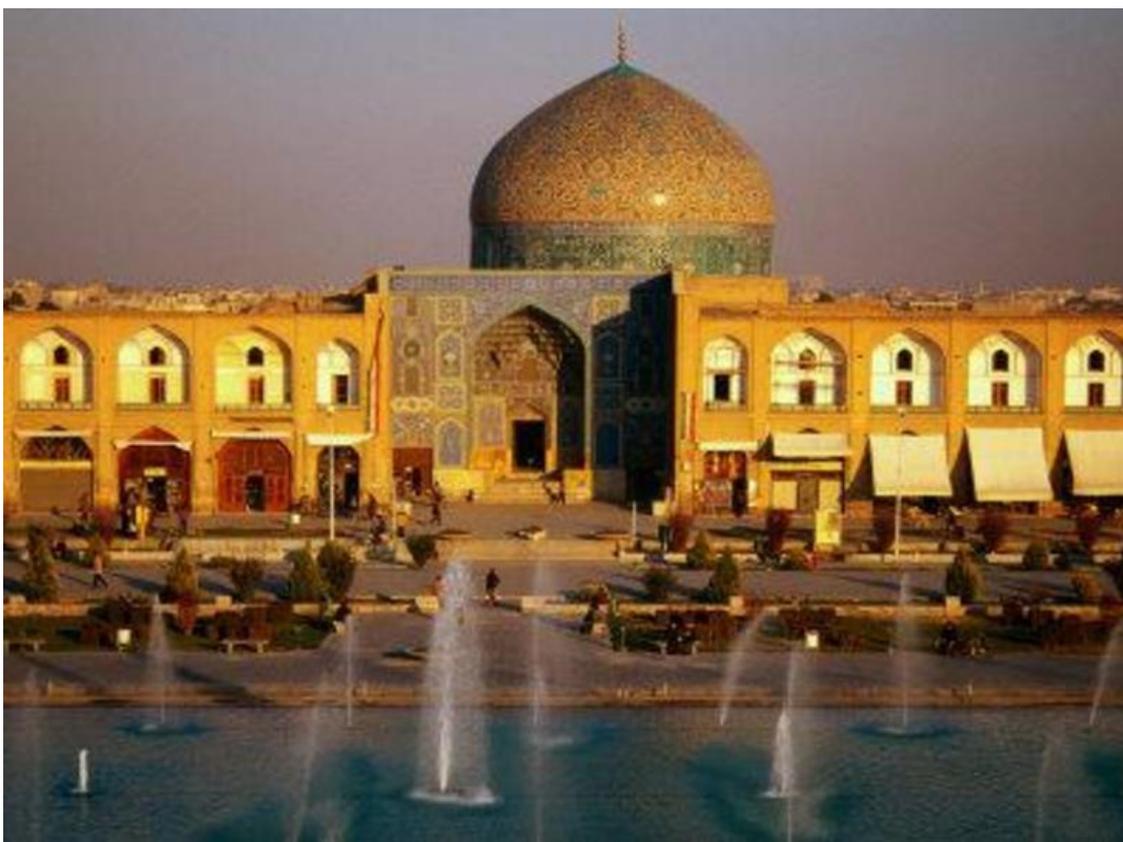


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Tour Notes

Treasures of Ancient Persia

Tour Duration – 15 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●○○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ○○○○○

Tour Pace - Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ The vastness of spellbinding Persepolis with its tangible sense of history.
- ✓ The elegance and beauty of the shrines and gardens of Shiraz
- ✓ The many splendours of the city of Isfahan
- ✓ The great warmth and welcome of the Iranian people





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Tour Map - Iran - Treasures of Ancient Persia



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Comfortable hotel accommodation, one night in a Caravanserai and one night in a local guesthouse.
- Included Meals:** Daily Breakfast (B), plus Lunches (L) and Dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
- Group Size:** Maximum 12
- Start Point:** Tehran
- End Point:** Isfahan
- Transport:** Private minibus or coach.
- Countries:** Iran



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Treasures of Ancient Persia

Enough has been written about Iran to fill library shelves and overheat most Kindles. Much is far from complimentary. However, Iran's educated and worldly population is not reflected by TV footage of chanting crowds. While extremist ideologies in other regions have instigated the wholesale destruction of important and irreplaceable cultural heritage, Iran conserves its own pre-Islamic sites as valuable chapters in the historic record of Persian civilisation. Ancient capitals reflect the sophistication of their inhabitants who constructed cities of palaces, fountains and gardens, beloved of Sufi poets such as Hafez. From Tehran to Shiraz, this tour explores an exceptional ancient history, along the way facilitating cultural exchange with contemporary Iranians, a surprising people who deserve to have their voices heard.

Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Tehran

Arrive in Tehran and transfer to hotel accommodation. Depending upon flight arrival schedules there may be time to explore the city. Overnight Hoveyzeh Hotel or similar.

Tehran

Established as the capital of Persia just over 200 years ago, this huge, modern and heavily populated city, does not have the romance or the ancient sites which attract visitors to many other parts of Iran, but it is the place to find the country's best museums, restaurants and shopping. Tehran is vast and can be daunting, yet this giant capital was only a village until the end of the 18th century. Although it is not an ancient city like Shiraz or Isfahan, Tehran offers something else – forbidding murals of Ayatollah Khomeini gaze down at you from high rise buildings and it is of course home to the American Embassy, now known as the 'den of espionage' in which numerous diplomats and other US citizens were held during the infamous hostage crisis.

Day 2 – Tehran

Today there's a guided city tour of Tehran. Highlights include Golestan Palace, the city's main bazaar, the Treasury of National Jewels, known for the Darya-e-Nur, the world's largest pink diamond. Overnight Hoveyzeh Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 3 – Tehran - Qom – Kashan – Abyaneh

This morning we drive to the holy city of Qom, home to the 17th century shrine of Fatima and other sacred monuments. Afterwards we drive to Kashan and visit Bagh-e Fin Persian Gardens and Khaneh Borujerdiyah, a much photographed 19th century house once belonging to a local merchant. From here we continue to the





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mountain village of Abyaneh, one of the oldest settlements in Iran, and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Overnight Hotel Abyaneh or similar. (BD)

Day 4 – Abyaneh - Natanz – Na'in – Yazd

Leaving Abyaneh behind, we drive to Yazd, stopping on the way at the shrine of Imamzadeh Abdolsamaad in Natanz, a significant example of traditional Persian architecture. Later we visit Na'in and explore the Jame Mosque and the nearby ethnological museum. Overnight Fahadan Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 5 – Yazd

Today we explore the desert city of Yazd, for centuries a stronghold for Zoroastrianism. We visit the Zoroastrian fire temple, the eerie 'Towers of Silence', the Jame Mosque, and the city's remarkable wind towers, examples of ancient refrigeration technology. Overnight Fahadan Hotel or similar. (BL)

Yazd

The ancient city of Yazd is unique for its intriguing architecture which has been perfectly adapted to the harsh weather conditions of its desert location. The famous wind towers, a feature of most buildings in the old city, are designed to trap even the smallest of draughts and direct them into the dwellings below for cooling. It is a fascinating place to wander around and there are 12 different bazaars dotted around the city which make for some wonderful exploring. Yazd is also Iran's centre of Zoroastrians - one of the world's oldest religions, and the state religion in Persia until the advent of Islam. It is possible to visit Artashkadeh, the fire temple of the Zoroastrian community and to see a flame that the Zoroastrians claim has been burning for more than 1,500 years. Outside the city are the fascinating Towers of Silence, an old Zoroastrian burial ground where the dead bodies of the believers were left to be devoured by vultures before burying the remaining bones. It is a poignant place to visit.

Day 6 – Yazd – Zeinodin

After the morning in Yazd we drive to Zeinodin and check-in to a beautifully restored 16th to 18th century the Safavid-era caravanserai. Overnight Zeinodin Caravanserai. (BD)

Please note: *The caravanserai's sleeping areas are separated solely by curtains. Traditional Iranian style mattresses on a platform are employed rather than western-style beds. Bathroom facilities are shared.*

Day 7- Zeinodin – Shahdad

Leaving Zeinodin, we drive through the surreal UNESCO World Heritage landscapes of the Lut Desert, considered to be the world's hottest. Among towering sand dunes and sculpted rock formations, known as kalouts, this is a land devoid of life. We cross the 2,600m Sirch mountains en route to Sirch village, home to a 1000-year-old cypress tree. In Shahdad we explore the impressive Haj Mohammad Taghi cistern and its wind towers, as well as a nearby Sassanid-era adobe fortress. Afterwards we continue to Shafiabad for lunch at a traditional guesthouse, later visiting the village's underground qanat water channels. After lunch we drive to some fascinating nearby sand formations, taking a walk in the surreal, sculptural landscape. Overnight local guesthouse in Shahdad. (BLD)

Please note: *Guesthouse rooms have traditional Iranian-style mattresses on platforms rather than western-style beds. Bathroom facilities are shared.*

Day 8- Shahdad - Mahan - Rayen – Kerman

Today's journey takes us to Mahan where we explore Bagh-e Shahzade, one of the country's most beautiful Persian-style gardens, replete with fountains and terraces. Afterwards we visit the mausoleum of Sufi poet-saint, Shah Nematollah. Later we drive to Rayen, set among the desert and surrounded by mountains. The town was recorded by Marco Polo during his epic travels in the Middle Ages, and its well-preserved citadel, possibly dating from the 3rd to 7th century, Sassanid-era, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Leaving Rayen,



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we drive to Kerman and explore the 17th – 18th century, Safavid-era Ganajalikhhan complex. Overnight Tourist Inn or similar. (BLD)

Day 9- Kerman - Sarvestan- Shiraz

Today there's a long drive to Shiraz, stopping at the impressive 5th century Sassanid-era archaeological site of Sarvestan Palace. From there we continue to Shiraz, a city known for the shrines to its famous poets and its pretty gardens. Overnight Arg Hotel or similar. (B Picnic Lunch D)

Shiraz

This city encapsulates the image of ancient Persia - exotic gardens, lavish mansions, rich red wine, silky woollen rugs, philosophy and poetry. Shiraz has also always been a renowned centre of learning, boasting many of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. Known as Iran's "Poetic Capital", it was also home to two of Persia's most famous poets of the 13th and 14th centuries, Saadi and Hafez, whose mausoleums are here in Shiraz. Free time in Shiraz can be spent exploring at your own pace. Wander the maze of narrow streets and alleyways of the old city filled with traditional handicraft workshops and local markets. For avid sightseers the splendid mansion of Ghavam Orangery, the sumptuous Garden of Paradise, and the impressive intricately decorated Karim Khan Citadel are each worthy of a visit.

Day 10- Shiraz - Persepolis- Naqsh-e Rostam- Naqsh-e Rajab - Shiraz

This morning we drive to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Persepolis, one of the ancient world's greatest cities. Built from 515 BC by Darius the Great, fourth Persian King of Kings, Persepolis was capital of the Achaemenid Empire. History suggests that around 330 BC the city was set ablaze by Alexander the Great following his invasion of Achaemenid Persia. We spend time exploring the magnificent site before heading to the nearby breathtaking necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam and the impressive carved reliefs of Naqsh-e Rajab, archaeological sites dating from the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods. Overnight Arg Hotel. (BL)

Persepolis

Persepolis is one of Iran's many UNESCO World Heritage Sites and rightly so. Building of this extraordinary site began under the Achaemenid king Darius the Great in 515 BC, and was continued under his successors before being destroyed when the armies of Alexander swept through the region two hundred years later. What remains though is spectacular – ruins of enormous buildings decorated with elaborate and well preserved relief carvings of warriors, horses and chariots. Several places contain numerous pillars and staircases, and the site is a joy to explore.

Day 11 – Shiraz

After breakfast we spend a full day touring the sights of Shiraz itself. Highlights include the tombs of famous Persian poets Hafiz and Sa'di, the well-preserved Naranjestan – a traditional and well-preserved Persian house, Nasir al Mulk mosque, and the Khan Madrassa. Overnight Arg Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 12- Shiraz - Pasargadae – Isfahan

Today we visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Pasargadae, first capital of the Achaemenid Empire during the 6th century BC, under Cyrus the Great. The site includes the tomb of Cyrus the Great, the fortress of Toll-e Takht as well as palaces and gardens. Afterwards we drive to Isfahan. Overnight Piroozi Hotel or similar. (BL)

Isfahan

This is without doubt Iran's most enchanting city. The magnificent capital of Safavid King Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) on the banks of the Zayandeh Rud River, was often described by the words: "Esfahan nesf-e Jahan" (Esfahan is half the world) and has long attracted travellers from all over the world. It is here where one can really appreciate the true grace and beauty of Persian heritage.



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Imam Square

Built in 1612 as a royal polo ground, and situated in the heart of the Safavid Capital, Imam Square is one of the largest and finest public spaces in the world. Historically a hive of activity - filled with entertainers, storytellers, preachers and silk route caravans- it has entranced travellers throughout the generations.

The Bazaar

The atmospheric bazaar captures the ambience of ancient Persia. It's easy to spend many hours strolling here. The pungent scent of exotic spices, clang of coppersmiths at work, cries of merchants selling gold, carpets and handicrafts, all fill the series of long alleys radiating from Imam Square.

Forty Column Palace

There are only twenty elegant columns at the front of Shah Abbas' royal reception hall, but their reflection in the pool gives the inspiration for the name. Inside the visitor is treated to a superb display of frescoes and paintings, which cover the walls and depict scenes from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Armenian Quarter

While Iran is for all intents and purposes, an Islamic nation, there are various other religious minorities free to practice their faith. Vank Cathedral in Esfahan's Armenian Quarter is a testament to the fact that Muslims and Christians have lived together peacefully here for centuries. While the exterior of the cathedral observes traditional Christian designs, the interior decorations are a curious combination of time honoured Christian images and ancient Persian art.

Imam Mosque and Sheik Lotfullah Mosque

Built between 1612 and 1638 these majestic structures, lavishly adorned with exquisite tile work in hues of blue, turquoise and green, represent the culmination of over 1,000 years of Islamic art and architecture. The former was built as Esfahan's central place of worship and Islamic learning. The latter, named in honour of the great Lebanese Sheikh Lotfullah, was the private place of prayer and meditation for Shah Abbas.

Ali Qapu Palace

Literally called "the sublime gate" in Farsi, this seven-storey palace, situated on the western side of Imam Square, was principally the centre of government during the Safavid Period. The interior is wonderfully decorated with fine carvings, murals and mosaics and the main balcony gave the Shah and his family a commanding view of the polo matches held in the square and the daily life of the city.

Days 13-14 - Isfahan

Isfahan is perhaps the most beautiful of all Iran's cities, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of noted for its abundance of Perso-Islamic architecture, ancient mosques, minarets, shrines and palaces. Ascendant from the 11th century, at the confluence trade routes, Isfahan became the Safavid capital of Persia from the 16th and 17th centuries. For a city proverbially known as 'Half the World' the two full days we have to explore may seem not nearly enough. Overnight at Piroozi Hotel or similar. (Day 13 – BD, Day 14 – B)

Day 15 – Tour ends

The tour ends today after breakfast when airport transfers depart to meet onward flights. (B)



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Tour Inclusions / Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers. If you are booking pre and/or post tour accommodation then transfers for those dates will be at an additional cost.

Transport throughout

All accommodation

Services of English speaking guide / tour leader

Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)

Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Exclusions:

International flights

Any airport taxes

Travel Insurance

Visas

Drinks

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). At the time of writing the FCO has no travel advisories or warnings against travel to any of the areas we generally visit on our tours, including our group itinerary.

As with all of our tours it is the clients' responsibility to ensure that they hold full travel insurance which includes medical repatriation.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation. On this tour you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or cafe.



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The sleeping areas in the Caravanserai are separated by curtains only and you will be sleeping on a traditional mattress on a platform in the Iranian style, not a bed. The facilities are shared.

In the local house in Shahdad each room has its own bathroom and toilet. Instead of a bed there is a traditional sleeping mattress and pillow.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Please note that it is illegal to drink alcohol in Iran, or to bring it into the country.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch or Dinner £7- £15

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide for those purchased in a restaurant.

Water £1

Tea/Coffee £2

Soft drink £0.75

Please note that it is illegal to drink alcohol in Iran, or to bring it into the country.

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Iran. The amount is at your discretion but a guideline is \$40-50 per day between the group for the guide and about half this for the driver.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATM machines will not accept most non Iranian cards.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Non Iranian debit and cash cards are not accepted, and credit cards are not widely accepted.



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Local Currency: Iranian rial (IRR)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euros, US Dollars and Sterling are all accepted

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

Most nationals need a visa to travel to Iran. Since April 2016 tourist visas can be obtained from the Iranian Consulate in London. Please be advised that British citizens **MUST** apply in person. Generally the processing time is less than a week, but we recommend that you apply at the earliest opportunity. Before the Consulate can issue your visa, authorisation must be obtained from the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in Tehran. This will be requested through our local partner in Iran and generally will be issued by the Ministry no earlier than 3 to 4 weeks before the start date of your tour. Accordingly it is essential that you are in possession of your passport and will be available to travel to the Consulate at this time.

Around three months before departure, we will send you a form for completion, required by our partner for submission to the MoFA. We will also require a scanned copy of your passport and a scan of a passport sized colour photograph. Please note that women, and girls over the age of nine, should wear a headscarf in their visa application photos. British, Canadian and US citizens will also be required to provide a curriculum vitae and a list of countries visited in the last ten years. Once the authorisation code has been issued it will be sent directly to the Consulate, as well as to you, and after that you can make your visa application in person.

Please note that once the process of obtaining the authorisation code has begun there will be a charge of £115 in the event of cancellation.

The current price is £195 and £250 for an express visa; cash is the only form of payment accepted. You should bear in mind that this can change at any time.





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For non-UK nationals please check the current procedure with your nearest Iranian Embassy or Consulate. An 'e-visa' may be available for nationals from certain countries, including some EU states, but not the UK.

Anybody obtaining a visa on arrival will be asked to pay \$20 per person at the airport for health insurance.

Please check the expiry date of your visa before travelling. If you overstay you may have to remain in Iran until the situation is resolved.

Entry to Iran will be refused if your passport contains evidence of travel to Israel, even if you have been granted an Iranian visa. Note this is not confined to an Israeli visa stamp and also includes Egyptian and Jordanian entry or departure stamps obtained at the land border with Israel.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

We strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Iran can be bitterly cold in its winter months and fiercely hot during the summer. The best time to visit is generally accepted to be the spring and autumn months.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing light garments are recommended for during the day, while you should take a jumper or something warmer to wear on some of the evenings, such as in Abyaneh. It is also advisable to wear a hat during the day to protect from the sun, and you should also bring something waterproof for any rainy days.





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Iran is a very conservative country in terms of clothing. Men should wear long trousers and shirts – although short sleeved shirts are generally acceptable, you may be required to wear long sleeves when entering certain religious buildings.

Under Iranian law, all women must observe the hijab, which means modest dress (a thigh length loose fitting garment, with at least three quarter length sleeves) and a headscarf also covering the neck, which can be any colour. Many Iranian women wear western clothing under an inexpensive coverall called a manteaux which can be purchased locally. However, standards have relaxed considerably, and long, loose fitting blouses worn over trousers or a full length skirt are now acceptable. A headscarf must still be worn in public.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack and one small rucksack as hand luggage are acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V and plugs usually have two round pins like most European countries.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 24TH September 2019.

