

From Persepolis to Isfahan: exploring Iran (8 days)



Tehran is a living and growing capital city and as in the recent two centuries, the most important events in the history of the whole country take place here. Tehran with its numerous museums houses the most important collection of recent and remote Persian art and culture. **Shiraz**, the city of nightingales, poetry and roses is the center of Fars Province. Fars has had a role of great significance in the Iranian civilization. This province is greatly indebted to the settlement of the Achaemenid and Sassanian dynasties for its glorious cultural heritage. Scattered all over the territory of Fars are monuments materializing the rapid progress of the province in both pre-Islamic and Islamic era.

A visit to the ruins of the ancient city of **Persepolis** is one of the highlights of any trip to Iran. Persepolis is the best preserved of Persia's ruined cities and the finest legacy of the great Achaemenid Empire which ruled Persia between 559 and 330 BC. The most impressive features of the ruins are the splendid bas-reliefs, which adorn many of the staircases and palaces on the site and provide a rich treasure house of ancient history. At **Necropolis** you will find the tomb of the three powerful Achaemenian Kings carved into huge rocks overlooking one of the oldest Zoroastrian fire temples. At **Pasargad**, the first structure you'll come across is the tomb of Cyrus the Great. Legend has it that when Alexander the Great arrived at Pasargad, he was greatly distressed by the destruction of the tomb and ordered its restoration.

Yazd is still home to Iran's largest community of Zoroastrians, and the best place to visit an Ateshkadeh (House of Eternal Fire) and the Towers of Silence, the Zoroastrian burial grounds. Although the temple is modern (built in the 1940s), the sacred fire has been burning since 470 AD. Yazd is also an ancient city with its unique desert architecture and its "Badgirs", the wind towers designed to catch and circulate the merest breath of wind. The mosques of Yazd are like no others and the magnificent Jame Mosque dominates the old city. Its remarkably high, tiled entrance, flanked with two magnificent minarets and adorned with an inscription from the 15th century, is simply superb. This city has always been a great weaving center, known for its silks and other fabrics even before Marco Polo passed through along one of the Silk Routes in the late 13th century.

Isfahan is Iran's masterpiece, the jewel of ancient Persia and one of the finest cities in the Islamic world. The exquisite blue mosaic tiles of Isfahan's Islamic buildings, its expansive bazaar and the city's gorgeous bridges demand as much of your time as you can spare. The history of the city dates back to 2700 years ago. It was the capital of Iran in a number of the post-Islamic periods, but its golden age was during the Safavid dynasty in 17th century. Isfahan with numerous monuments for which it is world-famous has the greatest attractions for tourists. It is really a museum in the open air.

Day 1. London-Teheran

Evening Flight with British Airways.

Day 2. Tehran

Arrival Tehran by BA at 06.20 AM, meet & assist services at airport and transfer to hotel Laleh (5*), overnight Tehran. After lunch city tour of Tehran: a visit to the **National Museum of Iran**, including prehistoric, historic and Islamic sections. This museum houses a marvelous collection including ceramics, potteries, stone figures and carvings dating from around the 5th millennium BC. A visit to **Ceramic & Glassware Museum (Abgineh)** followed by visiting **Carpet Museum**. By visiting Carpet Museum, you will have access to many of the masterpieces woven in the important carpet-weaving centers of Iran. The beautiful architecture and façade of the museum resembles a carpet-weaving loom.

Day 3. Tehran-Shiraz

Morning transfer to airport for flight to Shiraz. Overnight Shiraz, Hotel Homa or Pars (5*). City tour of Shiraz including a visit to **Narenjestan or Orange Garden** built in 1879-1886 as a reception hall for visitors and was also used as the governor's residence during the late Qajar period. On to **Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, Khan Theological School (Madraseh), Bazaar and the mausoleum of the famous Iranian poet Hafez and its traditional teahouse.**

Day 4. Shiraz (Persepolis)

Morning excursion to Persepolis (Takht-e Jamshid), Necropolis (Naghsh-e-Rostam) and Naqsh-e Rostam (about 70 km per way). Afternoon more visits in Shiraz including Sadi Tomb and free time to explore bazaar. Overnight Shiraz, Hotel Homa or Pars (5*).

Day 5. Shiraz – Pasargad – Yazd

Drive to Yazd, en route stopping at Pasargad and Abarqu. At **Pasargad**, the first structure you'll come across is the tomb of Cyrus the Great. Legend has it that when Alexander the Great arrived at Pasargad, he was greatly distressed by the destruction of the tomb and ordered its restoration.

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Day 6. Yazd - Nain - Isfahan

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Day 7. Isfahan

Full day tour of Isfahan magnificent buildings; some of the greatest examples of Islamic architecture including **the Royal (Naqsh-e-Jahan) square, the Imam & Sheikh Lotfullah mosques, Ali-Qapu Palace & Bazaar** spanning 5 km. **Chehel Sotun Palace** (forty column) with its beautiful frescos located in a pretty garden is our next stop. Shah Abbas II originally built it as a pleasure pavilion and reception hall. On to **Jame Mosque**, a veritable museum of Islamic architecture, displaying styles from the 11th to the 18th centuries. On to Armenian quarter to visit **Vank Cathedral**, built between 1606 and 1655. Overnight Isfahan, at hotel Abbasi (5*).

Day 8. Isfahan – Abyaneh – Kashan – Tehran

Drive to Tehran via Kashan. This attractive small oasis city was once a favourite of Shah Abbas I who beautified it and asked to be buried here. Kashan is also home to some of the best traditional houses such as **Brujerdi House (a Samovar merchant)**, as well as beautiful gardens such as **Fin Garden**. En route to Kashan we will visit Jame Mosque in Natanz and Abyaneh Village. Farewell dinner/Overnight Tehran, Hotel Laleh (5*).

Day 9. Tehran – London

Breakfast, transfer to airport for flight back home

Services:

- Visa invitation letter (excluding consular fee)
 - Meet & assist services at airport on arrival & departure
 - All APT/HTL/APT transfers escorted by English speaking guide
 - Expert English speaking guide throughout trip
 - Modern A/C Vehicles (group 10 or more Volvo or Scania bus)
 - 7 nights hotel accommodation at mentioned hotels or similar (standard rooms) with breakfast
 - Excursion and sightseeing tour as per suggested program
 - Entrance fees
 - Mineral water and refreshments during long transfers
 - Full board (no meal on day 1 and day 8)/ total of 14 Lunch & Dinner
 - Portage at airports & hotels
 - 2 traditional teahouse for refreshments, (one in Isfahan and one in Shiraz)
- Quoted rate does not include domestic flights, tipping or any other item, which has not been mentioned.