

IRAN



## **Introduction**

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until 1935, the country that today is Iran was known as Persia. The name, Iran, derives from an ancient term "a-er-yanem va-ee-jo" in Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians, meaning 'the land of the Aears'.

This term refers to the plateau upon which the Indo-Iranians, a branch of the Aryans, settled. By the passing of time, the term "Aeer" changed to "Er" and later to "Ir", and so the official name of the country during the Sassanid period (400-600 AD) was Iranshatr or Iranshahr. "Shatr" or "Shahr" means country, and so, Iranshahr meant "the country of the Nobles".

Iran comprises of a land area of over 1.6 million Sq m (the 17<sup>th</sup> country in the world by land area). Located in the south west of Asia, Iran is one the middle- east countries. Lying below the northern temperate zone, between latitudes 25 degree north and 39 degree 47' north and between longitude 44 degree 02' east and 63 degree 20' east, the country borders Turkmenistan, Caspian, Azerbaijan and Armenia on the North, Afghanistan and Pakistan on the East, Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf on the south, and Iraq and Turkey on the West. It also shares 740 km Caspian Sea coast line with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Iran was a constitutional monarchy, but turned to an Islamic Republic as desired by the people of Iran in 1979.

Totally, Iran has 8,731km of border, of which 2,700km consist of water borders and 6,031km for land borders. The highest point in Iran is Mount Damavand, which is 5,610m high. The longest river is the Karun River with a length of 890km (the only navigable river). The largest lake is the Orumiyeh Lake with an area of 4,868km and the largest Island is Qeshm with an area of 1,491 square km.

Iran has a very colorful and diversified landscape, ranging from high plateaus to mountain ranges and to plains bordering the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea. The dominant landscape color is a delicate brown, like the coat of a deer, but the countryside can vary enormously according to the altitude and vegetation.

## **Country Profile**

### **Country's Official Name:**

Islamic Republic of Iran

### **Flag Description:**

Three equal horizontal bands of green, white, and red fill the flag from top to bottom. The national emblem, a stylized representation of the word Allah in the shape of a tulip (a symbol of martyrdom), is centered in red within the white band; Allah-O Akbar (God is Great) in white Arabic script is repeated 11 times along the bottom edge of the green band and 11 times along the top edge of the red band.

### **Useful Links**

Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts & Tourism Organization- <http://www.ichto.ir>

Department of Tourism- <http://www.tourismiran.ir>

### **Government**

The form of Iran's government is that of an Islamic Republic, endorsed by the people of Iran on the basis of their longstanding belief in sovereignty of truth and in Quranic justice. The people solidified their support through the

referendum of the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1979 and through an affirmative majority vote of 98.2% of the eligible voters, which was held after the victorious Islamic Revolution led by the late Imam Khomeini.

### **Executive Branch**

**Chief of State:** Supreme Leader (Supreme Leader is appointed for life by the Assembly of Experts; Assembly of Experts are elected by popular vote for an eight year term).

### **Head of Government:**

President

### **Cabinet:**

Council of Ministers selected by the president with legislative approval.

### **Three Oversight Bodies:**

1) **Assembly of Experts**, a popularly elected body of 86 religious scholars, is constitutionally charged with determining the succession of the Supreme Leader (based on his qualifications in the field of jurisprudence and commitment to the principles of the Islamic revolution), reviewing his performance, etc.

2) **Expediency Council** or the Council for the Discernment of Expediency, is a policy advisory and implementation board consisting of over 40 permanent members representing all major government factions and includes the heads of the three branches of government, and the clerical members of the Council of Guardians (see next); Permanent members are appointed by the Supreme Leader for five-year terms; temporary members, including Cabinet members and Majlis committee chairmen, are selected when issues under their jurisdiction come before the Expediency Council; the Expediency Council exerts supervisory authority over the executive, judicial, and legislative branches and resolves legislative issues on which the Majlis and the Council of Guardians disagree and since 1989 has been used to advise national religious leaders on matters of national policy; in 2005 the Council's powers were expanded, to act as a supervisory body for the government.

3) **Council of Guardians of the Constitution** or "Council of Guardians" or "Guardians Council" is a 12-member board made up of six clerics chosen by the Supreme Leader and six jurists recommended by the judiciary and approved by the Majlis for six-year terms; this Council determines whether proposed legislation is both constitutional and faithful to Islamic law, vets candidates for suitability, and supervises national elections.

### **Legislative Branch**

Islamic Consultative Assembly or Majlis(290 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms).

### **Judicial Branch**

The Supreme Court and the four-member High Council of the Judiciary have a single head and some overlapping responsibilities. Together, they supervise the enforcement of all laws and establish judicial and legal policies. Lower courts include a special clerical court, a revolutionary court, and a special administrative court.

### **Official Language & Local Dialects**

Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Azari and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, others 2%.

## **Capital City:**

Tehran is the capital city of Iran and the heart of the Tehran province. It is situated on the northern fringe of the great central plateau and at the foot of the southern slope of the impressive Alborz mountain chain. The Tehran province has several archaeological sites, which clearly indicate settlements dating back to several thousand years. Until 300 years ago, Ray was one of the most prominent cities of the province. However, the city of Tehran surpassed Ray and gained its special status as the capital of Iran during the reign of the Qajar dynasty (1795-1925), because of the development that occurred there at the time. Since then, it has been the political, cultural, economic, and commercial nucleus of Iran.

During the past 200 years, Tehran has been home to many reputed scholars, writers, poets and artists. The Tehran province enjoys considerable capabilities in terms of the different dimensions of population, employment, production, agriculture, natural resources and infrastructures.

## **Major Cities:**

Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Tabriz

## **Name of the Provinces**

1.Alborz, 2.Ardabil, 3.West Azarbaijan, 4. East Azarbaijan, 5.Bushehr, 6.Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari, 7.Esfahan, 8.Fars, 9.Gilan, 10.Golestan, 11.Hamadan, 12.Hormozgan, 13.Ilam, 14.Kerman, 15.Kermanshah, 16.Southern Khorasan, 17.Khorasan Razavi, 18.Northern Khorasan, 19.Khuzestan, 20.Kohgiluyeh va Buyer Ahmad, 21.Kordestan, 22.Lorestan, 23.Markazi, 24.Mazandaran, 25.Qazvin, 26.Qom, 27.Semnan, 28.Sistan va Baluchestan, 29.Tehran, 30.Yazd, 31.Zanjan.

## **Ethnic Groups**

Persian 51%, Azari 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, others 1%.

## **Country's total area in square kilometers**

1,648,195 million sq km (the seventeenth largest country in the world)

## **Population**

75,149,669 (2011)

## **Climate**

Iran's plateau climate is relatively dry, and despite the country's location in the world's dry climate belt, the Alborz and Zagros mountain ranges prevent the entrance of humid streams from the Caspian and Mediterranean seas into Iran. The country's span across 25 and 40 degree latitude, and the varying height levels allow for a diversity of climates. In the northwest, winters are cold with heavy snowfall and subfreezing temperatures. Spring and fall are relatively mild while summers are dry and hot.

In the south, winters are mild and summers are very hot, having average daily temperatures that exceed 38° C (100° F) in July. On the Khuzestan plain, summer heat is accompanied by high humidity.

## **Holidays & National Days**

March 20: The Nationalization of the Oil Industry

March 21: Eid-e Nowrooz (New Year's Day)

April 1: Islamic Republic Day

April 2: Nature Day (13th day after the New Year, culmination of the Nowrooz festivities)

June 4: Death of Imam Khomeini (1989)

June 5: Revolt of June 5, 1963

February 11: Victory of the Islamic Revolution

Holidays according to the Lunar Calendar (varying dates):

Tasu'a and Ashura of Imam Hussein

Arba'een of Imam Hussein

Death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Martyrdom of Imam Hassan Mojtaba

Martyrdom of Imam Reza

Birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Jafar Sadegh

Martyrdom of Fatima, Daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)& Wife of Imam Ali

Birth of Imam Ali

Mission Receiving of Prophet Muhammad(PBUH)

Birth of Imam Mahdi

Eid-ul Fitr (End of Ramadan)

Martyrdom of Imam Jafar Sadegh

Eid ul-Adha (Sacrifice)

Eid-al Ghadeer

All governmental departments and most business centers throughout the country are closed on Fridays. In the Tehran province, all governmental departments are closed on Thursday as well.

**Time Zone:**

GMT +3:30

***The Silk Road***

The Silk Road was created many centuries ago for the trading of silk and other goods between the eastern and western countries. It also became an important route for the transfer of ideas, languages, literature, science, and technology.

Iran, heir to the ancient traditions of Persia, was located at the crossroads, the center of the route. As a result, the road to Persia became a symbol of humanity's desire to travel, to explore, and to learn. The unique position - geographically and culturally - along the ancient Silk Road provided Persia with a major role in the world. The Silk Road connected the centers of previous Iranian civilizations that were located along the route, and thus, the histories of the Silk Road and Iran were intertwined.

At the beginning of the sixth century BC, the trade route started in Babylon, from where it passed through Opis/Ctesiphone (Baghdad), Ecbatana (Hamadan), and modern Saveh - the site of Marco Polo's stopover to see the tomb of the three Magi who had visited Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ).

Silk would reach the markets of Persia and Rome through this long route, and thus, the road came to be known as the Silk Road. It stretched from the western gates of a Chinese city, which is now called Hsian, in the Shanxi province, and passed through the southern part of the Gobi Desert to reach western Turkistan (Kazakhstan). Then, it passed through Sin Kiang (Xinjiang) and Kashgar to reach Ceyhan in Transoxania (Mawara-an-nahr). After passing through major cities of the time such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Merv, then the Silk Road passed through Fergana Valley (Uzbekistan), Ishkashim, Kunduz (Afghanistan), and reached the Iranian border.

In Iran, the Silk Road connected the cities of Tous, Neyshabur, Damghan, Gorgan and Rey before it entered Qazvin. One of its branches went toward Azarbaijan and Trabzon, and the other branch ran through Hamadan, Baghdad, Mosul, Antakya (Antioch or Kappadokia), and Sardis (near Izmir) to reach Istanbul and then Rome via the Mediterranean Sea. The Road also connected India to Tous via Peshawar, Khyber, Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. A vast part of this route was under the control of the Sogdian and the Uighur caravans.

Some signs dating to 2000 BC point to the knowledge of silk production, however, evidence of silk during the Achaemenan era is limited to the Chinese silk that reached Iran on the way westward. To ensure the safety of the silk trade and the caravans, King Darius the Great established military checkpoints on the trade routes. A route between the city of Shush and Sardis was built as a continuation of the Silk Road to boost the trade of silk between the eastern and western countries. The Silk Road continued as an important route for the exchange of commodities between various countries during the Parthian era.

In this period, Iran, under the Parthian Empire, signed the first trade agreement with China, which was then ruled by the Han dynasty. The Parthians made significant profits from the customs duties levied on the goods transported on the segment of the road that stretched from the Euphrates River to Turkistan (Kazakhstan).

The Parthian dynasty, which was in favor of expanding the trade relations along the Road, closely supervised and secured the routes, and one of its Middle Iranian languages, Sogdian, was the trade language spoken through much of the Silk Road's history. During its Golden Age, in the first millennium, this fabled network was an early link between the world's major cultures - Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian and Chinese.

In the post-Islamic period, new roads connected the Silk Road to the sea and to the great rivers in Transoxania and Mesopotamia through land routes. In western Iran, the Road connected Kermanshah to Tabriz and Tbilisi (Georgia). Parallel to this route, one of the Road's branches connected Hamadan to Ardabil via Tabriz.

In central Iran, towards the north, Ray (which was connected to northern regions through side roads in the Alborz Mountains) reached Siraf, an important Iranian port in the Persian Gulf at that time via Kashan, Esfahan and Shiraz.

Located in the southeastern area of the Caspian Sea, Damghan was the linking point of the route to Urganch in Khorezm (Turkmenistan). The route joined the road to Neyshabur. Another road located in the eastern part of Iran connected Neyshabur to Herat, Zaranj, Kerman and Shiraz.

Diverting the route to another direction, a path from Merv through Termez and Samarkand served as another starting point for the Silk Road in the Far East.

Along these routes there were Caravanserais known as Rabats and Iwans, where travelers could rest, obtain their necessities for the journey ahead, unload their commodities, and conduct trade and business. In order to give bearings and directions to travelers, domes had been built which served as efficient reference points in snowy and stormy weathers.

## **Useful Information**

### **Best Time to Visit the Country**

Being a vast country, Iran has regions with differing temperatures during a given period of time, offering different climates and conditions. Depending on the season and the areas one plans to visit, the weather can be humid, dry, hot or cold.

In the northern coastal areas of the Caspian Sea, the climate is mild and humid. The southern parts and the Persian Gulf region have a hotter climate than Central Iran. Northwestern Iran is about 10 – 15 degrees Celsius cooler than the rest of the country. The north region of the country, especially, the Alborz fozs, are a popular destination in the spring.

Iran's southern regions provide a pleasant spring-weather getaway during the winter. At the same time, in Fars & Esfahan, the cold, the snow, and the torrent change the faces of the cities. The weather of most of Iran is hot during the summer. So, one can enjoy winter and summer sports during the same period within a few hours. More accurately, from mid-April to early June and from late September to early November are the best times to enjoy the matchless beauty of the country.

### **Visa Regulations**

A visa is necessary for entry into Iran for a stipulated period of time for economic, commercial, cultural and industrial purposes. It is issued by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for foreign nationals, after receiving the approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The authorized duration of stay is usually up to 30 days.

### **Types of Visa**

#### **E-Visa**

Tourists can apply for the Iranian E-Visa through the I.R.I. Foreign Ministry's website:

<http://wvisa.mfa.gov.ir>

After filling out the application form and entering the required details, users will be given a reference code to pursue their visa issuance. Once approved, applicants can choose to receive their visa either at Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport or at an official agency in their home country.

#### **Free Industrial & Commercial Zones**

This visa is issued for two-week stays at the ports of entry to the Free Trade and Industrial Zone of Iran (Kish Island), and it may be extended for up to six months at the request of the authorities of these areas.

Note: Foreign nationals, who intend to travel to other parts of the country, should submit their applications to the office of the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the area. The application will be reviewed, and the visa will be issued if approved within 48 hours.

#### **Work Permit Visa**

The visa will be issued for foreign nationals who intend to work in Iran. Iranian employers must obtain work permits in advance from the relevant authorities.

#### **Entry/ Transit Visa for Drivers Carrying Cargo**

This visa is issued to foreign drivers carrying cargo to Iran or other countries.

For these cases, it is necessary to coordinate in advance with the Diplomatic Missions of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### Pilgrimage Visa

A pilgrimage visa is issued to foreign tourists who wish to visit sacred sites and shrines in Iran.

### Tourist Visa

The tourist visa is issued to foreign nationals who are interested in travelling to Iran individually or collectively to visit the country or their relatives. The applicants must fill-out an application form in black ink and bring their passport with one photo (for women with scarf) to the consulate. The process starts when the completed documents are submitted and takes about three weeks.

### Transit Visa

A transit visa is issued for a limited period of time to foreigners for the purpose of passing through Iran to a third country.

### Student Visa

A student visa will be issued to foreign nationals who intend to study in the Islamic Republic of Iran. To obtain the visa, applicants must take the authorization number from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran.

### Press Visa

The press visa applies to foreign nationals who wish to travel to Iran as correspondents representing print or electronic media for news coverage of events.


### Diplomatic & Service Visa

Such a visa applies to dignitaries, governmental officials and foreign nationals who wish to travel to Iran either in connection with their official visit (invitation by Iran) or for the purpose of taking over their permanent/temporary diplomatic/ administrative assignment in a diplomatic/consular mission or an international organization.

### Passport Loss

In case your passport is lost, immediately report to the nearest police station.

Then, go to NAJA's General Department for Foreign Citizens for receiving your exit permit.

 Tel: +98 21 88800000

### Customs Regulations

The government holds the authority over the customs affairs in Iran. Travelers and tourists' importing and exporting goods are duty-free unless they are considered as commercial commodities.

#### A. Arriving Travelers

When arriving in Iran, one should receive a customs declaration sheet, which is distributed in the customs hall, and fill it out, and submit it to the customs' evaluators and inspectors. The following goods are considered as a tourists' personal belongings, and their import into Iran is duty-free: Personal jewelry, personal cameras, non-professional video cameras and other portable video units, binoculars, portable musical instruments, portable radios and cassette players, portable PC's, first aid boxes, camping tents with its basic tools, sporting goods, small boats of less than 5.5



meters, ordinary water and skiing tools, tennis rackets, mountaineering tools, diving tools, bicycles, golf tools, and other similar goods, baby carriages and wheel chairs for the disabled.

Note: Sending up to 80 dollars in foreign goods by post to Iran is duty-free for each person.

## B. Departing Travelers

When leaving Iran, one should fill the customs declaration sheet and submit it to the customs' evaluators and inspectors. Besides the goods one brings to Iran, the following non-commercial goods are permitted duty-free: a carpet or two rugs of utmost 12 sq. meters, handicrafts, musical instruments, industrial products made in Iran, foreign made industrial products of up to 160 US dollars value, dried fruits and gifts, ready-made gold without a gem of up to 150 grams, ready-made silver without a gem of up to 3 kg, and 3 kg of caviar along with the purchase note given by the airport's shop.

Import and export of the following goods is forbidden:

1. Alcoholic beverages
2. Gambling tools
3. Firearms or any other kind of weapon, and explosives
4. Narcotic drugs
5. Pornographic publications, pictures, movies, photos, and any other material which is against Iran's national and religious rules

6. Tourists and citizens of Commonwealth countries, who are traveling to Iran, can export allowed goods equivalent to the amount they have declared to the Iranian bank. For those who possess the qualifications, exporting goods of up to \$1,000 requires no declaration to the bank and neither does it need the currency declaration.

7. Sending goods abroad by post is free if the goods are not considered commercial commodities. These goods should not be among the forbidden items, e.g. antique goods, genuine works of art, manuscript books, gold coins and precious stones. Sending foreign products abroad by post should not exceed \$160 for each person.

Moreover, it is forbidden to send hand-woven carpets by post. For more information on the latest bills and executive bylaws in customs affairs, please visit:

<http://www.irica.gov.ir/EIndex.aspx> (Iran's Customs Administration Office)

## How to get there and away

### By Plane

Most overseas travelers from Europe arrive in Iran by way of the Mehrabad airport in Tehran. Currently, most flights from the Middle East, Central and South

Asia land at the new Imam Khomeini International Airport based 37km southwest of Tehran, where all international flights will land within a few years. There are 70 smaller regional airports, for example, those in Shiraz, Mashhad, and Isfahan, and they have daily flights to many international destinations.

Dubai has scheduled flights to many Iranian cities, including Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Kerman, Lar, Mashhad, Tabriz, Kish Island, Bandar Abbas, Bushher, Zahedan. Flights are operated by Emirates (for Tehran), Iran Air, Iran Aseman Airlines, Mahan Air and other Iranian companies. Fares are relatively cheap on Iranian carriers, depending on the destination and the time of booking. Iran Air connects Tehran with some of the major European cities as well as some of the destinations in Asia and the Middle East. European companies based in Tehran include British Airways, Lufthansa, KLM, Alitalia, Turkish Airlines, Austrian Airlines, Aeroflot and Air France. The Middle-Eastern airlines include: Saudi Arabian Airlines, Emirates, Syrian Airlines and Egypt Air.

There are no direct flights from the U.S.A at present, but one could travel via either Europe or Dubai. Visitors from Australia or New Zealand can consider travelling via Dubai.

### By Train

Iran's railroads area revitalization of the Silk Road, which connects the north, south, west, and east of the country. Tourists can enjoy traveling and can benefit from the cargo transportation and the transit services provided by the following routes: European countries and Caucasias by the Tehran-Tabriz railroad, Central Asian countries by the Tehran-Mashhad-Sarakhs railroad, and the countries in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean regions by the Tehran-Bandar Abbas railroad.

"RAJA" passenger trains provide regular services from Tehran to Turkey, Syria and Turkmenistan. Other routes include:

#### Route No. 1: Tehran-Tabriz-Julfa:

884 kilometers, continued to Nakhjavan, Azerbaijan.

#### Route No. 2: Tehran-Tabriz-Razi:

958 kilometers, continued to Turkey.

#### Route No. 3: Tehran-Bandar Abbas-Turkman:

461 kilometers, continued to Turkmenistan.

#### Route No. 4: Tehran-Mashhad-Sarakhs:

1,047 kilometers, continued to Turkmenistan.

#### Route No. 5: Tehran-Bandar Imam Khomeini (Imam Khomeini Port):

927 kilometers, continued to Persian Gulf region.

#### Route No. 6: Tehran-Bandar Abbas:

1,386 kilometers, continued to Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

#### Iran's Railroad Transit Lines:

1. Bandar Abbas-Sarakhs-Merv-Moscow
2. Bandar Abbas-Sarakhs-Merv-Almaty-Beijing
3. Bandar Abbas -Julfa-Baku-Russia
4. Bandar Abbas -Razi-Bucharest-Belgrade
5. Bandar Abbas-Razi-Ankara-Istanbul-Sophia-Belgrade-Budapest-Vienna

**Trans-Asia train:** The Trans-Asia train connects Tehran, Mashhad, Sarakhs, Mary, Farab, Bukhara, Tashkent, and Almaty. This route continues to Istanbul, Turkey.

Traveling by this train to Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan requires a visa for each country. However, passing through these countries does not necessitate a transit visa.

### Tehran-Istanbul-Tehran train:

The International passenger trains for Iran run weekly to/from Istanbul (Turkey), Damascus (Syria), and Quetta (Pakistan).

The Istanbul service runs via Ankara, includes a ferry over Lake Van, crosses the Iranian border, and then stops at Tabriz before arriving in Tehran.

The journey takes about 70 hours (3nights travelling). The train includes couchettes and a dining car.

The Syria service does not cross Iraq; it stops at Aleppo before crossing the Turkish border, heads to Lake Van, and runs along a route similar to the Istanbul service. This journey takes 54 hours (2nights travelling). Couchettes are available between Lake Van and Tehran, but the Syrian leg between Damascus and Lake Van contains only reclining seats. A dining car is at service occasionally.

The Quetta-Zahedan line connects Pakistan and Iran by rail. There is no connection between the Zahedan railway and the rest of the Iranian Railway system, which means that one must take the bus or other transportation from Zahedan to Bam, the nearest railway. A train leaves twice each month from Quetta to Zahedan, and the journey takes 11 hours.

### By Sea

Passengers can travel by sea to Iran via the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Caspian Sea. The significant ports of the Caspian Sea include Anzali, Astara, Nowshahr, Bandar Gaz, and Bandar Torkaman, which connect Iran to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan.

### By Roads

With more than 51,300km (31,800miles) of paved roads and 490km (304miles) of motorways, the road network is extensive. Tourists can travel from Turkey, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Pakistan and Afghanistan to Iran. The two main roads, the A1 and A2, link the Iraqi and Pakistani borders and the Afghan and Turkish borders, respectively.

Connective ways between the major cities and the country's main ways are asphalt paved and have good quality. You should drive from the right side and observe international regulations. Traffic flows on the right side of the road.

### By Bus

One can find Seir-o-Safar agencies in Istanbul, Antalya and Ankara to buy cheap bus tickets for Tehran. Also, one can enter from Pakistan via the border crossing between Taftan (on the Pakistani side) and Zahedan (on the Iranian side) as long as one has a valid visa for Iran. One can NOT get a visa at the border. The overnight buses leave from Quetta, arriving in Taftan in the early morning. From there, one can hire a taxi to the border. Once across the border, one needs to organize transportation to Zahedan where buses depart for the destinations to Eastern Iranian cities, such as Bam, Kerman and Yazd.

### Traveling Around

#### By Air




Iran Air runs services to Ahvaz, Esfahan, Kish, Mashhad, Shiraz, Tabriz, Tehran and Zahedan and other major cities. Aseman Air and Mahan Air also run services to the major cities. The vast size of Iran makes internal flights the most practical method of transport.

## By Train

RAJA Trains run a fairly comprehensive internal rail network. Major intercity trains operate on five main regional routes: the Azarbaijan route (Tehran-Jolfa), the Golestan route (Tehran-Gorgan), the Hormozgan route (Tehran-Bandar-e-Abbas), the Khorasan route (Tehran-Mashhad), and the Khuzetan route (Tehran-Khorramshahr). There are many locations in the mountains and the deserts, which can only be reached by rail. There are some air-conditioned cars, sleeping cars, and dining cars on many trains. For further details, please visit RAJA website: <http://www.raja.ir/>

## By Bus

Tehran has an extensive bus system. They are widespread, cheap and comfortable. The tickets are bought in advance at kiosks, and the intercity transportation in Iran is made by Benz and Volvo buses under an organization named "Cooperative." Central offices of these cooperatives in Tehran are located in the South, East, and West Terminals.

-  South Terminal: 550047-8
-  East Terminal: 77864010
-  West Terminal: 44659676

## Subway & Tramway

Subway and tramway transportation is possible mainly in Tehran for the time being. The three main tram (electrically driven buses) routes are: Imam Hussein Sq.-Depoy Sharq, Imam Hussein- Khorasan, and Khorasan-Depoy Besat (from 06:00 to 22:00). The subway connects Tehran's easternmost and westernmost points and the southern and northern tips of the city.

## Taxi

Taxis are available in all cities. The urban taxis (orange or green) carry several passengers at a time and are much cheaper than the private taxis. Unofficial taxis should be avoided; use only legitimate taxis or those ordered through legitimate agencies. In most cities, taximeters determine the fare, which is paid in Iran's currency, the Rial. However, the taxis that are not equipped with taximeters do have fixed specified fares.

Note: It is advised to inquire about the fare and reach an agreement with the driver before getting into a private or hired taxi.

## Car Rental

It is available in most cities and from airports. An International Driving Permit is recommended but it is not a legal requirement. Personal insurance is required.

## Money

### Currency

The Iranian Rial (IR) is the official currency of Iran; however, to save time, prices are mostly quoted in Tomans. Generally, written prices are given in Rials and prices quoted in conversation are in Tomans. To confuse shoppers, shopkeepers will often omit the denomination of high prices, so a person may be told a jar of coffee costs 2 Tomans (meaning 2,000 Tomans or IR. 20,000) and that a fine rug will cost 300 Tomans (meaning 3,000,000 Tomans or IR30,000,000). In conversation, 1 Toman denotes IR 10,000.

Most travelers spend the first few days of their trip coming to grips with this mind-boggling system, and money changers on the border may exploit this confusion. So, it is advised to use caution and to always ask a shopkeeper or moneychanger if they are quoting a price in Rials or Tomans.

### Currency Exchange

The main foreign currency in Iran is the US Dollar and the Euro. However, the English Pound, Japanese Yen, Persian Gulf countries' Rial, Drachma and Dinar, as well as other foreign currencies are changeable to Iran's currency in the banks and exchange shops. It is recommended that money be changed to the US Dollar or Euro before arriving in Iran.

After arrival, one can go to Melli Bank at the airport terminal and change the money to the Iranian Rial. This bank works 24 hours a day. Other currency branches of the Iranian banks, as well as the banks located in the hotels can do the changing.

Authorized exchange shops do the changing as well. The "exchange rate" of the foreign currency to Iran's Rial in the banks is unanimous, so there is no discrepancy between the rates in the banks. The foreign currencies' official rates in Rial are announced in the banks daily.

Note 1: It is highly recommended to not change money anywhere other than the banks and the authorized exchange shops.

Note 2: It is highly recommended to keep the receipt of a monetary exchange until leaving the country. This receipt not only indicates the legality of a purchase, but also enables the exchange of extra Rials in the bank and the exchange of the desired currency.

### Obtaining Cash

There is no limit to the amount of cash one can bring into the country. One can also go to one of the branches of the foreign currency banks in Iran during one's stay, and open a foreign currency bank account or change money to Iran's currency and receive traveler's checks.

### Credit Cards

Presently, International credit cards are not accepted in Iran. For more information please call Melli Bank's Card Service Office: 33922690-1, 33900298, and 33912813.

### ATM card

ATM cards will be issued for all international tourists and travelers at their request by the Iranian Bank branches located in Iran's international airports. The cards are accepted by all hotels, restaurants and shops equipped with POS sets. For more information please visit: <http://en.itoa.ir/>

### Currency Restrictions

There is no restriction for entering any amount of foreign currencies into Iran. After declaring the amount of the foreign currencies to the clerk at the entrance spots, the clerk writes it in the passport. This is done to avoid facing any problem in the customs when taking currency or goods that were bought outside of the country.

### Safety & Security

Iran is one of the most secure countries in the world. The Interior Ministry is responsible for maintaining domestic security, and the police are the executive arm of this Ministry.

### Uniform color and class:

The color of the police uniform is green (dark green). The traffic policemen wear a white hat. The color of the police cars is dark green, and the traffic policemen cars are white with a dark strip on the car body. In case of an emergency, one can go to the nearest police station or contact 110.

## Arts and Crafts

### Decorative Arts

#### Jewelry

Local jewelry is one of Iran's traditional handicrafts, which is made in various shapes in the country's northern and southern provinces. The primary substances of these products consist of such metals as brass, copper, silver, etc. and such stones as turquoise, agate, jasper, etc. To make them, first, the metal is melted in a furnace, and then it is molded into a specific shape, e.g. circle, square, triangle, bush, fish, etc.

Finally, the precious stones are placed on these handicrafts to form such beautiful jewelries as a bracelet, ring, hairclip, necklace, earring, etc. Local jewelries are often made by the Torkamans in the Golestan Province, as well as in some parts of the Khorasan Province, Sistan va Baluchestan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah.

#### Ceramics

The word is derived from the Greek term, "Kermose." Clay made objects were called "Kermose" in ancient Greece. Compound soils (primary soils) are molded, baked in a furnace, enameled, and baked again. The product is called "ceramic." Today, Iran's popular ceramics are in such different shapes as vases and plates with different cuts and painted enamels. The main centers for producing ceramic products are Meybod in Yazd, Estahban in Fars, Zanuz in Azerbaijan, etc.

#### Ceramic Exterior Painting

Ceramic exterior painting, also called enamel painting, is one of Iran's beautiful and traditional handicrafts. In this art, the earthenware vessels are baked, enameled, and then painted. This work is much simpler than ceramic interior painting, because it is easy to correct or change the painting.

#### Enameled Ceramic

Enameled ceramic is a traditional Iranian handicraft. In this art, the earthenware vessels are made using different techniques, such as painting on the enamel, seven-colored, and gold-plated techniques. The production process is similar to that of the gold plated ceramic. The only difference is that in ceramic vessels, seven colors, e.g. azure, turquoise, red, brown, black, yellow, and white, are used for ornamenting the product. Rey, Kashan, Gorgan, and Soltan-Abad are the main centers for producing this handicraft.

#### Pottery

In this art, different objects, for example a bowl, pitcher, or other tools and utensils are made from baked mud. The products are called pottery if no enamel is used. Pottery is usually made from secondary soils, the ever moving soils; therefore, they are less purified and more adhesive. The main soil used in this art is clay. This type of soil has different colors, from buff to red.

The main centers for producing pottery in Iran are: Laljin in Hamadan, Shahreza in Esfahan, Juybar in Mazandaran, Siyahkal in Gilan, Mond Gonabad in Khorasan, Estahban in Fars, Kalpurgan-e Saravan in Sistan va Baluchestan, Shahvar in Minab, Tehran and Qom.

## Carpet Weaving

The art of carpet weaving in Iran has its roots in the culture and the customs of its people and their instinctive feelings. Weavers mix elegant patterns with a myriad of colors. The Iranian carpet is similar to the Persian garden: full of flora, birds, and beasts. The colors are usually made from wild flowers, and are rich in colors such as burgundy, navy blue, and accents of ivory.

The proto-fabric is often washed in tea to soften the texture, giving it a unique quality. Depending on where the rug is made, patterns and designs vary. And some rugs, such as Gabbeh, and Gelim have variations in their textures and the number of knots. Silken textile caught the attention of famous travelers and explorers such as Xuanzang, Jean- Baptiste Tavernier, and Jean Chardin. Iranians were among the first carpet weavers of the ancient world.

## History of the Pazyryk Rug

In a unique archaeological excavation in 1949, the exceptional Pazyryk carpet, the oldest known surviving carpet in the world, was discovered among the ice of the Pazyryk Valley in the Altai Mountains in Siberia. It was discovered in the grave of a Scythian prince by a group of Russian archaeologists under the supervision of Professor Rudenko. Radiocarbon testing revealed that the Pazyryk carpet was woven during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Just how the rug remained intact is very interesting. The rug had been preserved in the permafrost since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Soon after the rug had been placed in the burial mound of a Scythian chieftain, grave robbers raided the tomb. Fortunately, the robbers ignored the rug, and in their pursuit, they actually helped to protect the rug from decay. Through the opening, which the robbers left behind, water poured into the mound and froze, and thus protected the rug from decay.

This rug is 180 X 198 (5'11" X 6'6") meters, and it has a velvety woolen pile, finely knotted (an average of between 200 to 270 symmetrical knots to the square inch). The rug's central field is a deep madder red color, and it has five borders. The primary, widest border contains horsemen. Each horse has an embroidered saddlecloth with a design that resembles the actual Pazyryk rug. The secondary inner border contains rows of deer. The central field depicts repeating quatrefoils, which can be found in the stonework entrances of some of the Assyrian Palaces. The design suggests an Achaemenian Persian origin (Achaemenians were a Persian dynasty, who reigned from 559 BC to 330 BC). The advanced weaving technique used in the Pazyryk carpet indicates a long history of evolution of and experience in this art. Most experts believe that the Pazyryk carpet is the final achievement of at least one thousand years of experience and history. According to this theory, the art of carpet weaving in Iran is at least 3500 years old. The carpet is now kept in the Hermitage Museum of Leningrad. Although there have been fragments of older and finer examples of hand-knotted rugs discovered, these pieces were too tattered to be successfully identified. The Pazyryk Rug has been reproduced in a 100% Worsted Wool Machine made Wilton rug. The Royal Kashan Pazyryk Rug is available in two color ways and various sizes.

## Traditional Cloth Weaving

This type of cloth is woven, designed, and patterned by the Zoroastrians of the Yazd province. In traditional cloth weaving, the plain cloth is skillfully designed by making small ties on the surface of the cloth to make small or large circles similar to the sun, and then the cloth is dyed. The sizes of these ties vary: some are smaller than the tip of a needle, and some of them are like big circles. A chain of stars or circles forms around the design. Today, the traditional cloth weaving is rarely done. This art is used for making Islamic clothing and coverings, scarves, and belts. The products are usually rectangular in brick-red background color with some citrons in the middle or in the corners. Yellow and light dots are used in the dark background to make the pattern seem embossed. The main center for producing these products is the Pashki Village in Gilan.

## Traditional Printed Cloth

This art is used for patterning and designing cloths. The designs and patterns are transferred onto the cloth by using a stamp which is usually made of hard wood. A design may have five different colors. The colors used in this art are usually black, red, green, blue and yellow. The cloth is used for table covers, tablecloth, dresses, etc. Esfahan and Damghan are the main centers for producing this type of cloth.

## Calligraphy

Calligraphy has long been at the center of attention of Persian art among Iranian cultures in different periods, and it continues to be one of the most reputable and famous arts in Iran. The importance of the art of calligraphy among Iranian arts is such that without decorative calligraphy, some arts seem to be imperfect. Iranians, more than any other people, have used various types of calligraphy to enrich and beautify earthenware, metallic vessels, and historic buildings.

It is believed that this ancient Persian script was invented between 600-500 BC to provide monumental inscriptions of the Achaemenian kings. These scripts consisted of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal nail-shape letters, and hence, it is called "Script of Nails" or "Khat-e-Mikhi" in Farsi.

After the introduction of Islam in the 7th century, the Persians adapted the Arabic alphabet to the Farsi language. Broadly speaking, there were two distinct scripts in the early centuries of Islam: cursive script and Kufic script. For the day-to-day work, a cursive script was employed while Kufic script was used for religious and official functions only. Kufic went out of general use in the 11th century though it continued to be used in the decoration of monumental religious buildings.

About 1000 AD, a new script – Naskh - was established. This has remained the most popular script in the Arab world. The other main styles were Tholth, Reyhan, Mohaqqaq, Towqi and Reqa. The Arabic script was adopted in Iran soon after the Muslim conquest and was vastly improved by the Persians.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Iranian scribes invented Taliq, and in the next century, Mir Ali Tabrizi, the most famous calligrapher of the Timurid period, created Nastaliq, a combination of Naskh and Taliq. Nastaliq is closely connected to Persian poetry and has played an important role in communicating poetic concepts to poetry lovers.

Under the Timurid and the Safavid rulers, calligraphy experienced its highest stage of development. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Shiraz was among the forerunners of calligraphic study and usage in the Islamic world. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was followed by Esfahan and then by Qazvin. The most famous calligraphers of the Safavid court were Mir Emad and Alireza Abbasi.

## Developmental Trend of Persian Script

The philologists have divided the historical development of the Iranian languages into three stages by studying the characteristics and lingual peculiarities of the oldest remaining evidences of and documents on Iranian languages, as follows:

1. The Ancient period (1000-331 BC)
2. The Median period (331 BC-867AD)
3. The New period (867 AD- present time)

Therefore, it could be said that the Farsi language, one of the oldest Iranian languages, has left behind three stages of development; from ancient to median and new periods, since the development of its oldest version until the development of Dari Farsi language. The ancient Farsi language was written in scripts, called Mikhi (Nail shape),



because of its similarity to nails. This script was created for the ancient Farsi language by the decree of Darius the Great. The Farsi alphabets were derived from the Sumerian alphabets.

For the Median period, the Iranian languages are divided into two main categories of an Eastern and Western group. The language of the Sassanid is considered as part of the Mid-Western languages of Iran, and it is the immediate successor to the Ancient Farsi language. The script used for writing during this period is known as the Pahlavi script, the origin of which is Aramaic. Reading Pahlavi scripts involves great complexities. For example, some of its alphabets correspond to multiple sounds, and sometimes one piece of writing may have two or more meanings. During this period, other scripts, such as Avesta of Zoroaster and Manichaeism were also used.

The New period Farsi language (Dari) is the extension of the Median period Iranian language. This language is considered as an administrative and literary language of the period. The New period Farsi is often referred to as Farsi Dari when used for governmental or administrative purposes, and sometimes it is simply called Farsi.

After the advent of Islam, the Iranians created new Farsi alphabets according to their needs in order to read the Holy Qur'an. The origin of these alphabets is Syriac, and therefore it is similar to Arabic, but the Farsi scripts have special characters, which makes it distinctively.

The four letters of pe, che, zhe and ge are specific to Farsi alphabets, because there are no corresponding letters in the Arabic alphabets for such letters. Furthermore, the shape of some of the Farsi writing is different from the Arabic equivalent. For example, the Farsi ke (~), when used at the end of a word or by itself, is written with a symbol at the top, whereas the same alphabet in Arabic has no such symbol in either case. The word ye (?) in Arabic, unlike the Farsi character, holds two dots at the bottom of the letter.

Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AH (10<sup>th</sup> century AD), during the reign of the semi-sovereign and sovereign rules in eastern and northeastern Iran, great attention was paid toward the Farsi language. The Samanid rulers promoted the Farsi language as part of their administrative policy. The Samanid played a great role in promoting the Farsi language by: encouraging and supporting the poets and writers, having translated important Arabic books to Farsi, and making Farsi the official language in governmental correspondences.

From this period onward, because of the popularity of governmental correspondences, the Manichaeism and Pahlavi scripts were gradually replaced by the Farsi alphabets. At the beginning of its development, the Farsi alphabets were organized on the basis of Abjad. To facilitate the learning of the alphabets, Iranians tried to group the Farsi alphabets on the basis of the similarity of their shapes and the proximity of their sounds, which led to the naming of the system, the Piramooz alphabets.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, Ibn Moghla Beizavi- Shirazi, established the rules and structure, called "The Twelve Major Principles of Calligraphy" in order to develop six distinct styles, collectively called the Aghlame Setteh, which included the Mohaghigh, Reyhan, Thulth, Naskh, Regha and Towghi. They were distinguished from each other based on the shape of the letters and the ratio of the surface areas and their perimeters.

Concurrent with the development of the above mentioned style of calligraphy, Hasan Farsi Katib created yet another style of calligraphy called Taaligh, which was also called Torsal by combining Naskh and Regh.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD, Mir Ali Tabrizi, created a new style called Nastaaligh by combining the two styles of Naskh and Taaligh. This style became widely popular, revolutionized the art of calligraphy, and was well received in other countries. Owing to its elegance and beauty, it was named the "Bride of Islamic Calligraphy".

After Mir Ali Tabrizi, many other famous calligraphers strived towards elevating the art of calligraphy, which culminated with the emergence of the renowned Iranian calligrapher, Mir Emad, who came into view during the

reign of the Safavid Shah Abbas. After the passage of 400 years, his impact on the Nastaaligh style of calligraphy still inspires the calligraphers.

Later, Iranian calligrapher Morteza Gholi Khan, created another innovative style of calligraphy called Broken Nastaaligh. The reason for the creation of such a style could be the need to write easier and faster, similar to the creation of the Broken Taaligh after the emergence of Taaligh. The Broken Nastaaligh was developed by Mirza Shafi Harati, and its rules and standards were established by Darvish Abdul- Majid Taleghani.

### Music and Musical Instruments

Since Iranian traditional music can only be played by special Iranian instruments, these instruments have been and are still being made by Iranians. The paintings on the Chehel Sotun walls show women playing musical instruments; serving as an historical indication of the high regard which Iranians reserved for their music.

Some of the musical instruments made by artists are: the lute, the tar, the dotar, the setar, the rebec, the dabdab, the Kamanche, the tonbak, the santur, etc. For ornamenting the musical instruments, such artistic works as inlaying, calligraphy and painting are used.

### Glass Blowing Work

The discovery of many glassware shows that the history dates back to the time of Parthians and the Sassanids. Glass is a transparent, fragile substance composed of alkaline silicones produced by the process of glass blowing. It consists of the processes of shaping the melting mineral by heating it in a furnace at 1,400 centigrade, blowing into it using a special tube and other simple manual tools, and then, ornamenting it by painting, cutting, purifying, opaque making, etc. Tehran is one of the main centers for producing glassware. Meybod in the Fars Province is another region where glass blowing has been in vogue since the past centuries.

### Painting on Back of a Glass

In this art, the back of the glass is painted. Artist history goes back to the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (lunar calendar). The artist makes use of small pieces of glass and draws inverted designs and colors. For painting on back of the glass, first, the artist draws the design on a piece of kerk paper, and then transfers it onto the glass using a paintbrush and black ink.

It is very important to follow the principles. After drawing the specific design, the artist starts coloring the glass with oil paint, and finally, he uses stabilizers to fix the color and to give a beautiful glossy appearance to the glass work. Shiraz and Qazvin, and Tehran are the main centers for making this product.

### Wood Carving

In this art, the wood is cut and carved using a horizontal cutting machine. Some well known historical objects display the antiquity of the art, for example, some engraved designs on the throne, on the legs, and on the joss stick holder belonging to Persepolis. The primary substance used in this art is aspen wood, which is shown in hookahs, the legs of sofas and table lamps.

### Wood Engraving

In this art, embossed designs are engraved on the wood to make such useful tools as a box, a chess piece, a dervish bowl, gates of sacred places, etc. Historians consider wood engraving as one of the grand old industrial arts of Iran, especially from the time of the Arab conquest of Iran. Mazandaran province is one of the main centers for making this product.

## Delicate Woodwork

Delicate woodwork is a traditional handicraft in northern Iran. In this art, the woodenware is veneered with a specific design, and so, the delicate woodenwares, such as spoons, forks, chess boards, various dishes, etc. are made with great care, beauty and delicacy. Delicate woodwork is popular in Urmia, Sanandaj and Rasht.

## Traditional Printing

This kind of art is used on a large, patterned, silk handkerchief, which is used in local women's dresses as a headband or a ribbon worn round the waist, and sometimes, it is used for keeping a baby on a woman's back. Usually, batik, or traditional printing is used for patterning these handkerchiefs.

## Stone Carving

In this art, the stone is engraved into the desired size and dimensions for specific purposes, e.g. designing stones for decorating the walls of the mosques, memorial monuments, and pedestals. The art is mostly used for making such tools as stone pots, ornamental frames, fireplaces, and chess board pieces. Great masterpieces like the walls in Achaemenian palaces in Persepolis, delicate works like the engraved ring gems, and engraved verses of the Holy Quran on the agate rings are outstanding examples of this ancient art in Iran.

## Traditional Tile Working

Using enameled bricks has been one of the great changes in the history of architecture, which led to the production of beautiful tile. Over the years, changes in tile production have led to its evolution and its present form. It's been used in traditional, religious buildings, e.g. mosques, and memorial monuments of the past. Currently, it is used much in modern buildings.

In this art, small pieces of tiles are put together, which is the method applied in façade construction because it prevents the expansion and contraction of tiles in cold and hot environments. This way, the enamels rarely fall or break into pieces.

The designs vary from vertical, horizontal, and oblique straight lines of 45 degrees as well as checkered patterns. Tile working is also used in Kufi Bannai (architectural Kufi) writings as a part of the decoration in Islamic monumental architecture in Iran.

Based on the type of production, traditional tile working falls into the following categories, each described above under a separate entry: gold-plated tile, inlaid tile, enameled tile, and seven-colored tile.

Perhaps the history of enameled brick (tile) dates back to the time of Babel in the 2nd century BC. What has been found from this type of tile belongs to the Achaemenian period, which has been found in most of the buildings on the Iranian Plateau, especially those of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Susa and Persepolis. Nowadays, this product is made in most of the Iranian cities, including Esfahan, Mashhad, Tehran and Qom.

## Khatamkari

A delicate and meticulous marquetry produced since the Safavid period, khatam, was so popular in the courts that princes learned this technique at the same learning level of music or painting. "Khatam" means "incrustation", and so, "Khatamkari" is "incrustation work". This craft consists of the production of incrustation patterns (generally star shaped) with thin sticks of wood (ebony, teak, ziziphus, orange and rose woods), brass (for golden parts), and camel bones (for white parts). Ivory, gold, or silver can also be used.

Many objects can be decorated in this fashion, such as: jewelry/ decorative boxes, chessboards, cadres, pipes, desks, frames or musical instruments. Combined with Persian miniature, Khatam leads to a fascinating work of art. This craft has existed for more than 700 years and is still perennial in Shiraz and Esfahan.

### Minakari

"Minakari," or enameling, is the art of painting, coloring and ornamenting the surface of metals by fusing brilliant colors of an intricate design over the surface. The Iranians invented the art of enamel or minakari, and the Mongols spread it to India and other countries.

Historically, gold has been used for minakari as it holds the enamel better, it lasts longer, and its lustre brings out the colors of the enamels. Silver, a later introduction, has been used for artifacts like boxes, bowls, spoons, and art pieces. Meanwhile, copper has been used for handicraft products, and it was introduced after the globally enforced Gold Control Act, which compelled the minakari-makers to look for a material other than gold.

### Traditional Bookbinding

Iranians are excellent in the art of bookbinding, because they reserve high values for books. In this art, which is now used for binding old manuscripts, the binder fungicides the book, presses it using a press machine, lines it, and then sews the book.

After lining, single sheets are pasted to the beginning and ends of the book, and then, the band is pasted to the back of the book. When the process is done, the book is sent to a cover maker. Today, traditional bookbinding is used for restoring the old books in the precious manuscripts archive of the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

### Inlaid Leather

In the art of inlaid leather, covers of books are made from patching pieces of leather. For making inlaid leather, appropriate types of leathers such as goat leather and ewe leather are used. Then, embossed designs of flowers, bushes, birds ; other delicate and elaborate geometrical figures such as citrons, semi-citrons, ovals, and circles; and animals' pictures are cut, arranged and pasted on leather. Sometimes, the margins are covered by embossed, gold-plated designs or different colors. There is another kind of inlaid leather in which strips of narrow, delicate leather are carefully pasted on the specific cover. Mostly, the artists of Tabriz and Herat use this method to create fantastic inlaid leather book covers.

### Persian Miniature

A Persian miniature is a small painting whether a book illustration or a separate work of art intended to be kept in an album of such works to comprise a part of the visual element of a classical literature. The techniques are broadly comparable to the Western and Byzantine traditions of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts, which probably had an influence on the origins of the Persian tradition.

Although there is an equally well established Persian tradition of wall painting, the survival rate and state of preservation of miniatures is better, and the miniatures are the best-known form of Persian painting among western countries.

Miniature painting became a significant Persian form in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the highest point in the tradition was reached in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tradition continued under some influence from western countries and has many modern exponents. The Persian miniature was the dominant influence on other Islamic miniature traditions, principally the Ottoman miniatures of Turkey and the Mughal miniatures of the Indian sub-continent.

The themes of Persian miniatures are mostly related to Persian mythology and poetry. Western artists discovered the Persian miniatures around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Persian miniatures use pure geometry and a vivid palette. The allure of Persian miniature painting lies in its absorbing complexities and in the surprising way it relates to the nature of art and the perception of its masterpieces.

#### **Prominent Persian miniaturists include:**

Kamal ud-Din Bihzad Herawi: Leading miniaturist of the Timurid era, and founder of the Safavid School.

Reza Abbasi: One of the most renowned Persian painters of the Safavid era.

Hossein Behzad: Famous contemporary miniaturist.

Mahmoud Farshchian: Famous contemporary miniaturist.

#### **Metal-Working**

Different types of metals are used in the various types of handicrafts produced in Iran. The most popular of these items are made out of copper, which are commonly used in Iranian kitchens. The chief centers of the art of metal workings are Esfahan, Shiraz, Kashan, Yazd and Kerman.

Copper kitchen articles include: pots, pans, pails, large spoons, and trays. The second category of copper items consists of picture frames, jewelry boxes, water-pipe pots and statues of various animals, which have special artistic value.

#### **Architecture & Archaeological Objects**

Iran's history remains visible in the country's many intriguing and important archaeological sites, its ancient and historical monuments, and its cities, which possess some of the world's most magnificent examples of Islamic art and architecture.

Archaeological findings in Iran have traced the record of human settlement in prehistoric time to the Neolithic age when human beings started to gather and to store food and later to the age of agriculture.

Earthenware that has been found dating back 10,000 years indicates that people living in the area at the time had already invented the craft of pottery. Objects found in Chogha Mish in Khuzestan Province indicate that about 8,000 years ago, people in Iran could already navigate and produce textiles. In Sialk, near Kashan, remnants of buildings have been discovered dating back to 5,000 years, which display remarkable architecture. At that time, Iranians were already producing copper and using copper objects. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, Aryans migrated to Iran and soon developed writing and signs. Architecture made great progress, and Iranians became familiar with brass.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, iron was produced in this region, and circa 1250 BC, glass was used in the building of Chogha Zanbil, not far from Susa in Khuzestan region of southwestern Iran.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, Iranians made great progress in architecture and town planning, as well as building dams, roads and irrigation systems including Qanats (underground construction for channeling and reserving waters).

The Achaemenian era was the zenith of ancient Iranian civilization as illustrated by the splendor of Susa and Persepolis (Takht-e-Jamshid). Stone work and stone carving became very popular and continued through the outstanding period of Iranian history and architecture, which began with the era of the Sassanids in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

During the 400 hundred years of Sassanid rule over Iran, colossal bridges were built, a few of which remain and are used today. Dam building was very common in this era, as well as the construction of splendid palaces and cities. Most of the archaeological sites and objects that can still be seen in Iran remained from this period. Tagh-e-Bostan in Kermanshah, Bishapur Palace, and Firouz Abad Palace are a few examples of innovative monumental architecture from Sassanid Iran. After the emergence of Islam, the development of art and architecture continued among the Iranian people. They expressed their dependence and love to their faith and culture through building magnificent mosques and sacred shrines, madrassas (traditional Islamic academies) and mausoleums of prominent personalities.

The Mongol and Timurid invasions were catastrophes that disrupted the cultural and academic progress. However, the successors of these conquerors tried to amend the damages, and Iranian culture witnessed its revival again.

The Soltaniyeh Dome from the Ilkhanid and the Shrine of Imam Reza and Gawhar Shad Mosque in Mashhad are distinguished examples of Iranian Islamic architecture in those eras.

The Safavid era was a period for the revival of arts and crafts. Ornamental arts, architecture, carpet weaving and etc. made stunning progress. Many of Esfahan's surviving architectural masterpieces were also built in this era; such globally renowned monuments as the Imam and Lotfollah Mosques, Khaju and Allahverdikhan Bridges, the Alighapu Palace etc, are the reminders of this golden age of arts and crafts. It was during the Safavid era that the first political contacts with western countries were made, and the western influence gradually appeared in the face of Iranian art and architecture. The process of industrialization had resulted in a growing middle class, which sought a modern rather than traditional life. The middle class urban areas required a whole new stock of buildings, from dwellings to social institutions. Industrialization brought about the manufacture and importation of all types of building materials and techniques, and it provided the economic mechanism to finance large amounts of construction. These were the practical conditions that prevailed and supplied the ingredients for a productive aesthetic condition.

## **Ecotourism**

Iran is a vast country with great natural beauty and a rich history.

Due to its beautiful natural setting, it can offer a lively and interesting environment to the nature loving tourists.

It has various natural attractions, such as temperate forests in the north with high humidity and rainfall (1,700mm), deserts and salt lakes in the central part of Iran, and high mountains (such as 5,604 meter high Mount Damavand), glaciers and coastal areas.

Considered as one of the five countries in the world with the highest biodiversity, Iran is home to 519 different birds, 172 varying mammals, 199 various reptiles, 20 diverse amphibians, 173 assorted fish and 9,000 distinctive plant species. There are also 9 biosphere storages, 50 interior lakes, 548,000 km of coastal lines in the north and south, including the islands, 23 national parks, 35 wildlife refuge and 111 protected regions.

Popular ecotourism activities in Iran include mountain and desert treks, bird watching in coastal areas and wetlands, and diving. There are a number of natural parks and protected regions, such as, Golestan, Kavir, Lar, Khosh Yellagh, Bakhtegan and Bamoo, which offer ecotourism attractions.

The Bakhtegan Lake is a place that must be visited by tourists especially in winter when the migrating flamingoes and birds from Russia accommodate themselves there. Also, Iran boasts of Qeshm Geopark, which is the largest geopark in the Middle East.

### **Golestan Forest (National Park), Gorgan**

As one of Iran's most attractive forest parks, Golestan Forest Park is situated between the cities of Gonbad Kavooos in the Golestan province and Bojnourd in the northern region of the Khorasan province.

The park possesses many different kinds of plants and animal species and a very pleasant natural environment.

It was the first area to be designated as a national reserve in Iran. The park, which has a unique situation in the mountain terrain, spans in the bunchgrass steppe.

Being in the eastern edge of the contiguous Caspian Forest, it provides the abundant wild life that one would expect to find in mountains, foothills & valleys with steppe and deciduous forest vegetation.

Kavir National Park is a protected ecological zone in northern Iran. It has an area of 4,000 square kilometers (about 1,500 square miles).

The park is located 120 kilometers south of Tehran, and it sits on the western end of one of Iran's two major deserts, the Dasht-e Kavir (Great Salt Desert).

Siahkuh (Black Mountain), a large, semi-circular rock outcropping, sits roughly in the park's center.

The park encompasses desert and steppe landscapes and it is also known as "Little Africa" for its safari like wildlife, including native goats, sheep, hyenas, wolves, gazelles, leopards, the rare Asiatic Cheetah, and the Persian Leopard.

### Dizin ski resort

Dizin is a ski resort situated to the north of Tehran in the Alborz mountain range.

It is considered as the most important ski resort in Iran and the Middle East.

The long stretch of mountain ranges with peak altitudes of over 4,000m, and the other mountains of Alam Kuh (4,850m), and the volcanic peaks of Sabalan (4,811m) and Damavand (5,671m) provide the main attractions for foreign mountain climbers.

### Rock Climbing

Among the many available locations for this activity, the Alam Kuh wall (over 650m) is very popular among foreign tourists and is situated at the altitude of 4,200m.

### Rafting

Long rivers that stretch from the mountains to the fields offer the chance to kayak, canoe, and raft during mid-spring to mid-summer.

### Scuba Diving

The limpid coastal water of the Persian Gulf, which is the result of the coral coasts and islands, offers excellent opportunities for professional and amateur scuba divers.

### Trekking

The vast difference in the temperatures of the mountain ranges, deserts, vast fields, and low plains near the equator, make it possible to do trekking during all the seasons in Iran.

### Desert Safari

Pure silence, absolute peace, contrasting brown and white salty land, and innumerable stars in the vivid desert sky are some of the remarkable characteristics of the Iranian deserts.

The deserts types consist of swampy, salty, clay, gravel, and running sands.

Taking a stroll within these vast spaces, watching the wonders of the moving sands, the burning and dry salt marshes, historical monuments, brick colored buildings of simple and harsh styles, shadows of scattered villages, as well as the old ancient inns and caravansaries are charming and worth visiting for every tourist.

For this purpose, Yazd Province is the best choice. The Yazd - Bafq route runs along the ancient Fahraj Mosque on the fringes of the desert, spread to the limits of Bafq. En route are the tamarisk forests, and the beautiful Ahan Shahr Park, extending over 20 hectares which appears at the end of this route.

The other route is Yazd - Khanaraq - Bayazeh which continues to Khor and Biyabaneh.

Along this route one can see domeshaped sandy hills, covered by desert bushes.

All through the route there are ancient and beautiful inns with arched windows and unique architecture, the most noteworthy of which is the military castle of Bayazeh which is placed beside the beautiful gardens of Khor Biabanak village.

Another site to visit is the ancient olive tree which is over a thousand years old.

Yazd province boasts of many fantastic deserts, the most important ones being Ardakan Desert, Abar Kooh Desert, Daranjir Desert area.

### The Caspian Coast

Caspian Sea, the largest landlocked lake in the world, is located in northern Iran. The Iranian Caspian coast including the three littoral provinces of Gilan, Golestan and Mazandaran, with their thick forests and large scale rice paddies present a striking contrast to the dry inner plateau of Iran.

A four-hour drive from Tehran, the Caspian is Iran's Riviera, with a narrow plain of paddy fields and orchards separating the sea from forested mountains where bears and leopards roam around ruined Mongol castles.

There are several roads connecting Tehran to the three provinces, all through breathtakingly beautiful scenery, across the mountains or alongside rivers such as the world renowned "Chalous Road" winding north across the rugged Alborz mountains to reach the Caspian Coast.

With their tropical climate in summer and mild winters, beautiful sandy beaches, scenic beauty and proximity to the capital the three provinces are very popular among Iranians as a holiday and weekend resort. Numerous holiday and residential complexes, private villas, leisure facilities and holiday homes dot the landscape.

### Other Iranian National Parks and Natural Reserves:

Sisangan National Park, the Hara Forests near Qeshm Island in southern Iran, Kharturan National Park, Wildlife Refuge and Biosphere Reserve, Naybandan Wildlife Refuge, Bafq Protected Area, Dar-e Anjir Wildlife Refuge, Oshtoran Mountain Protected Area, Hamoon Wetlands, Tandooreh National Park, Hara Protected Area, Gano Protected Area, Lar Protected Area, Central Alborz Protected Area, Khojir and Sorkhe Hesar National Park, Bakhtegan National Park, Anzali Lagoon, Port Anzali of the Caspian Sea, Arasbaran Protected Area, Arjan Protected Area, Lake Urmia National Park, Miankaleh Protected Area, Touran Protected Area, Nazhvan Suburban Natural Park near Esfahan, and Bambo National Park near Shiraz.



## **15 Described Sites on UNESCO World Heritage List**

### **1- Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran**

The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran, in the north-west of the country, consists of three monastic ensembles of the Armenian Christian faith: St Thaddeus and St Stepanos and the Chapel of Dzordzor. These edifices - the oldest of which, St Thaddeus, dates back to the 7th century – are examples of outstanding universal value of the Armenian architectural and decorative traditions. They bear testimony to very important interchanges with the other regional cultures, in particular the Byzantine, Orthodox and Persian. Situated on the south-eastern fringe of the main zone of the Armenian cultural space, the monasteries constituted a major centre for the dissemination of that culture in the region. They are the last regional remains of this culture that are still in a satisfactory state of integrity and authenticity. Furthermore, as places of pilgrimage, the monastic ensembles are living witnesses of Armenian religious traditions through the centuries.

### **2- Bam and its Cultural Landscape**

Bam is situated in a desert environment on the southern edge of the Iranian high plateau. The origins of Bam can be traced back to the Achaemenid period (6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC). Its heyday was from the 7th to 11th centuries, being at the crossroads of important trade routes and known for the production of silk and cotton garments. The existence of life in the oasis was based on the underground irrigation canals, the qanāts, of which Bam has preserved some of the earliest evidence in Iran. Arg-e Bam is the most representative example of a fortified medieval town built in vernacular technique using mud layers (*Chineh*).

### **3- Bisotun**

Bisotun is located along the ancient trade route linking the Iranian high plateau with Mesopotamia and features remains from the prehistoric times to the Median, Achaemenid, Sassanian, and Ilkhanid periods. The principal monument of this archaeological site is the bas-relief and cuneiform inscription ordered by Darius I, The Great, when he rose to the throne of the Persian Empire, 521 BC. The bas-relief portrays Darius holding a bow, as a sign of sovereignty, and treading on the chest of a figure who lies on his back before him. According to legend, the figure represents Gaumata, the Median Magus and pretender to the throne whose assassination led to Darius's rise to power. Below and around the bas-reliefs, there are ca. 1,200 lines of inscriptions telling the story of the battles Darius waged in 521-520 BC against the governors who attempted to take apart the Empire founded by Cyrus. The inscription is written in three languages. The oldest is an Elamite text referring to legends describing the king and the rebellions. This is followed by a Babylonian version of similar legends. The last phase of the inscription is particularly important, as it is here that Darius introduced for the first time the Old Persian version of his *res gestae* (things done). This is the only known monumental text of the Achaemenids to document the re-establishment of the Empire by Darius I. It also bears witness to the interchange of influences in the development of monumental art and writing in the region of the Persian Empire. There are also remains from the Median period (8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) as well as from the Achaemenid (6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) and post-Achaemenid periods.

### **4- Gonbad-e Qābus**

The 53-metre high tomb built in 1006 A.D. for Qābus Ibn Voshmgir near the ruins of the ancient city of Jorjan on the Gorgan River in northeast Iran, bears testimony to the cultural exchange between Central Asian nomads and the ancient civilization of Iran. The tower is the only remaining evidence of Jorjan, a former centre of arts and science that was destroyed during the Mongols' invasion in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is an outstanding and technologically innovative example of Islamic architecture that influenced sacral building in Iran, Anatolia and Central Asia. Built of unglazed fired bricks, the monument's intricate geometric forms constitute a tapering cylinder

with a diameter of 17 to 15.5 metres, topped by a conical brick roof. It illustrates the development of mathematics and science in the Muslim world at the turn of the first millennium A.D.

### **5- Masjed-e Jāmé of Isfahan**

Located in the historical centre of Isfahan, the “Friday mosque” can be seen as a stunning illustration of the evolution of mosque architecture over 12 centuries, starting in 841 A.D. It is the oldest preserved edifice of its type in Iran and a prototype for later mosque designs throughout Central Asia. The complex, covering more than 20,000m<sup>2</sup>, is also the first Islamic building that adapted the four-courtyard layout of Sassanid palaces to Islamic religious architecture. Its double-shelled ribbed domes represent an architectural innovation that inspired builders throughout the region. The site also features remarkable decorative details representative of stylistic developments over more than a thousand years of Islamic art.

### **6- Meidan Emam, Esfahan**

Built by Shah Abbas I the Great at the beginning of the 17th century, and bordered on all sides by monumental buildings linked by a series of two-storeyed arcades, the site is known for the Royal Mosque, the Mosque of Sheykh Lotfollah, the magnificent Portico of Qaysariyyeh and the 15<sup>th</sup> century Timurid palace. They are an impressive testimony to the level of social and cultural life in Persia during the Safavid era.

### **7- Pasargadae**

Pasargadae was the first dynastic capital of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus II the Great, in Pars, homeland of the Persians, in the 6th century BC. Its palaces, gardens and the mausoleum of Cyrus are outstanding examples of the first phase of royal Achaemenid art and architecture and exceptional testimonies of Persian civilization. Particularly noteworthy vestiges in the 160-ha site include: the Mausoleum of Cyrus II; Tall-e Takht, a fortified terrace; and a royal ensemble of gatehouse, audience hall, residential palace and gardens. Pasargadae was the capital of the first great multicultural empire in Western Asia. Spanning the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt to the Hindus River, it is considered to be the first empire that respected the cultural diversity of its different peoples. This was reflected in Achaemenid architecture, a synthetic representation of different cultures.

### **8- 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.

### **9- Sheikh Safi al-din Khānegāh and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil**

Built between the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this place of spiritual retreat in the Sufi tradition uses Iranian traditional architectural forms to maximize use of available space to accommodate a variety of functions (including a library, a mosque, a school, mausolea, a cistern, a hospital, kitchens, a bakery, and some offices). It incorporates a route to reach the shrine of the Sheikh divided into seven segments, which mirror the seven stages of Sufi mysticism, separated by eight gates, which represent the eight attitudes of Sufism. The ensemble includes well-preserved and richly ornamented facades and interiors, with a remarkable collection of antique artefacts. It constitutes a rare ensemble of elements of medieval Islamic architecture.

### **10- Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System**

Shushtar, Historical Hydraulic System, inscribed as a masterpiece of creative genius, can be traced back to Darius the Great in the 5th century B.C. It involved the creation of two main diversion canals on the river Kârun one of which, Gargar canal, is still in use providing water to the city of Shushtar via a series of tunnels that supply water to

mills. It forms a spectacular cliff from which water cascades into a downstream basin. It then enters the plain situated south of the city where it has enabled the planting of orchards and farming over an area of 40,000 ha. known as Mianâb (Paradise). The property has an ensemble of remarkable sites including the Salâsel Castel, the operation centre of the entire hydraulic system, the tower where the water level is measured, dams, bridges, basins and mills. It bears witness to the know-how of the Elamites and Mesopotamians as well as more recent Nabatean expertise and Roman building influence.

### **11- Soltaniyeh**

The mausoleum of Oljaytu was constructed in 1302–12 in the city of Soltaniyeh, the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty, which was founded by the Mongols. Situated in the province of Zanjan, Soltaniyeh is one of the outstanding examples of the achievements of Persian architecture and a key monument in the development of its Islamic architecture. The octagonal building is crowned with a 50 m tall dome covered in turquoise-blue faience and surrounded by eight slender minarets. It is the earliest existing example of the double-shelled dome in Iran. The mausoleum's interior decoration is also outstanding and scholars such as A.U. Pope have described the building as 'anticipating the Taj Mahal'.

### **12- Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex**

Tabriz has been a place of cultural exchange since antiquity and its historic bazaar complex is one of the most important commercial centres on the Silk Road. Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex consists of a series of interconnected, covered, brick structures, buildings, and enclosed spaces for different functions. Tabriz and its Bazaar were already prosperous and famous in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the town, in the province of Eastern Azerbaijan, became the capital city of the Safavid kingdom. The city lost its status as capital in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but remained important as a commercial hub until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the expansion of Ottoman power. It is one of the most complete examples of the traditional commercial and cultural system of Iran.

### **13- Takht-e Soleyman**

The archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman, in north-western Iran, is situated in a valley set in a volcanic mountain region. The site includes the principal Zoroastrian sanctuary partly rebuilt in the Ilkhanid (Mongol) period (13<sup>th</sup> century) as well as a temple of the Sasanian period (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) dedicated to Anahita. The site has important symbolic significance. The designs of the fire temple, the palace and the general layout have strongly influenced the development of Islamic architecture.

### **14- Tchogha Zanbil**

The ruins of the holy city of the Kingdom of Elam, surrounded by three huge concentric walls, are found at Tchogha Zanbil. Founded c. 1250 B.C., the city remained unfinished after it was invaded by Ashurbanipal, as shown by the thousands of unused bricks left at the site.

### **15- The Persian Garden**

The property includes nine gardens in as many provinces. They exemplify the diversity of Persian garden designs that evolved and adapted to different climate conditions while retaining principles that have their roots in the times of Cyrus the Great, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Always divided into four sectors, with water playing an important role for both irrigation and ornamentation, the Persian garden was conceived to symbolize Eden and the four Zoroastrian elements of sky, earth, water and plants. These gardens, dating back to different periods since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, also feature buildings, pavilions and walls, as well as sophisticated irrigation systems. They have influenced the art of garden design as far as India and Spain.

## **5 Major Cities**

### **Tehran**

Tehran is the capital, the largest city of Iran, and the administrative center of the Tehran Province. Tehran is a sprawling city at the foot of the Tochal mountain range with an immense network of highways unparalleled in Western Asia. The city is famous for its numerous resorts on the Alborz slopes, large museums, art centers and palace complexes. Tehran is the largest city in the Middle East, the 16<sup>th</sup> most populated city in the world with a population of 8,429,807, and one of Iran's largest urban areas. Most Iranian industries have headquarters in Tehran, including the manufacturing of automobiles, electrical equipment, textiles, sugar, cement, and chemical products; it is a leading center for the sale of carpets and furniture; the capital city also contains an oil refinery located in the south.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tehran faced a large migration of people from all around Iran. Currently, the city contains various religious minorities and has many historic mosques, churches, synagogues and Zoroastrian fire temples. Contemporary Tehran is a city featuring many tall structures, of which the Azadi Tower and the Milad Tower have become the symbols. Globally, it stands 14<sup>th</sup> by city population, 56<sup>th</sup> by the GDP size, and 29<sup>th</sup> by the metropolitan area population. Due to the long history of Iran, there have been many instances of capital city relocations over the ages, and currently, Tehran is the 31<sup>st</sup> national capital of Iran.

### **Esfahan**

Esfahan, the capital city of the Esfahan province is one of the prominent cities of Iran in regards to industrial activities, beauty, cultural and historic monuments and arts and crafts. It was chosen as the capital of Iran twice; first, during the reign of the Sejuk and Deylaman, and second, during the Safavid era in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Mashhad**

It is the capital city of the Khorasan-e Razavi province, which lies 970m above sea level and 924km from Tehran, and is one of the most important cities of Iran. The Holy Shrine of Imam Reza Complex is located in Mashhad, making it a pilgrimage destiny for Muslims around the world.

### **Shiraz**

Situated 1.54 m above sea level and lying 895km from Tehran, Shiraz is the capital city of the Fars province. Cyrus the Great, the first Achaemenian king of Persia, established his capital near this ancient city in 553 BC.

### **Tabriz**

Tabriz, the capital city of the East Azarbaijan province, lies 1,366 meters above the sea level and 642km from Tehran. Some historians claim that the city predates the pre-Christian era, and some believe that the city flourished only after the conquest of Islam. However, the archaeological excavations date 5,000 years ago.