

EXPLORE!



Highlights of Iran
9 days

Iran - Trip code HIR

Highlights of Iran

On this trip we visit the most important and impressive sights and cities of Iran. We explore the beautiful cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, uncover Persian history at the impressive Persepolis and stay in a traditional hotel in Kashan. Though the real highlight of any trip to Iran is meeting the locals, arguably the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth, always ready to welcome visitors with a smile.

Trip highlights

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:**12 - 18**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Shiraz

Our trip starts this evening in Shiraz.



Accommodation: Arg Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Explore the sights of Shiraz, visit Nasir-Al-Molk and Arg Citadel

This morning we will meet our fellow travellers who arrived on the late flight and head out to explore the treasures of Shiraz, the friendliest city in Iran. We start at the Arg 250 year old citadel situated in the heart of the city, now housing art and photographic exhibitions. From here we move on to one of the highlights of the day and possibly the trip - Nasir-Al-Molk, also known as the pink mosque. Upon entering you are struck with a feeling of entering a surreal and tranquil space, beautiful colours filling the room as sunlight shines through pink and brightly coloured glass. We spend some time here, peacefully sitting in the corner and enjoying the ambience of such a wonderful setting. Our next stop is the Shah Cheragh shrine, an impressive and contrasting complex featuring a beautiful courtyard with fountains and Islamic architecture. We will have a guided tour of the mosque and mausoleum, where we will see locals queuing to touch the tomb of Sayid Amir Ahmed, brother to the 8th Imam. Shiraz is also famous for its gardens and we visit the Narenjestan Gardens, a peaceful haven loved by locals. Tonight is our first opportunity to try Persian food and a must try in Shiraz is a shirazi salad, made of tomatoes and onions which is delicious in its simplicity.



Accommodation: Arg Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Tour of ancient Persepolis and the Necropolis of Darius the Great

Today we start our day by driving to the legendary city of Persepolis, former capital of Darius the Great and founded in 512 BC. There was no more impressive construction in the ancient world, except perhaps Karnak in Egypt. Darius built the terrace, the Apadana (great audience hall), the Tachana (palace), the monumental staircases and his son, Xerxes, added the harem and the Hall of 100 Columns. Alexander the Great entered Persepolis in January 330 BC and then committed an uncharacteristic act of wanton destruction that still mystifies historians today, burning the mighty city to the ground. Though a shadow of its former self, the soaring pillars, terraces and sculptures of Persepolis still remain, but probably most impressive are the bas reliefs which line the site, telling the story of ancient governors and kings that came to Persepolis to pay tribute to the Persian Emperors. From here we will drive a couple of miles to Naqsh-e-Rustam, the Necropolis where Darius and his successors are buried. Carved into the side of a cliff, the site is extraordinary in its magnitude and sheer ambition and does not disappoint even after the impressive Persepolis. We will head back to Shiraz from here where there will be some time to wander through the city and meet the locals. Shiraz is known as being a very friendly city and you will find people will come and talk to you and say hello and welcome you to Iran, though this happens all over Iran it is even more noticeable and enjoyable here.



Accommodation: Arg Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Isfahan, tour of Pasargarde

We have a full day of driving today to reach our destination of Isfahan; it is a good idea to stock up on locally bought and easily found dates and pistachio nuts for the journey. On route we will stop at Pasargarde, UNESCO World Heritage Site, tomb of Cyrus the Great and former capital of the Achaemenid Empire. We will spend some time exploring the site and though not as striking as Persepolis, there is a great viewpoint where we can look over the site and the surrounding area. From here we will continue to Isfahan, driving through a desert lined with mountains, often snow-capped. Depending on the traffic our Explore leader may take us on a short walk to the Sio Se Pol Bridge, beautifully lit up at night and a fascinating place to see young Iranians socialising and hanging out.



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Full day walking around the wonders of Imam Square in Isfahan

Isfahan has long been regarded as the focal point of any visit to Iran, 'Isfahan is half the world' was the phrase used to describe the city in the 16th century when Shah Abbas moved the capital here. It is still possible to see the Shah's grand vision as we explore the city today. We will mainly be focussing on Imam square, one of the largest squares in the world which provides a breathtaking vista.

The best view is found from the Ali Qapu Palace, where we admire the fountains and beautiful mosques that make up the square. We will enter the two mosques, first of all Sheikh Lotfollah, also known as the Ladies Mosque as it was built for the Shah's harem, renowned for brightly coloured domed ceiling, where the light creates the image of a peacock. We will then head to the Shah Mosque on the corner of the square, probably the best known mosque in Iran as it is thought to be the masterpiece of Persian architecture. Tonight there is the option to experience zurkhaneh, a traditional strength and wrestling event. Though visitors are allowed to enter for a fee, this is a part of Iranian culture where locals work out and wrestle whilst a leader bangs the drums, sings and reads poetry.



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Morning trip to the Friday Mosque and pigeon tower, afternoon free to explore

This morning we will visit the UNESCO site of Masjed-e Jame - Friday Mosque. This 10th century mosque does not have the beauty of the buildings we visited yesterday but is fascinating due to its different areas, built over the last thousand years. Due to its age there is also an enormous amount of history that our guide will explain which really brings the mosque and the stories to life. We then visit a pigeon tower, a strange building looking like a chess piece which stands high over the city. The towers were used to store pigeons for the collection of guano, used as fertiliser for the local melon fields. This afternoon is free for us to wander the rest of Isfahan, there is the main bazaar which is approximately 4km long, a great place for shopaholics and those who enjoy bartering. The Iranians are much more relaxed than their Middle Eastern neighbours, so the markets are a peaceful experience, though there is always the chance to haggle for a bargain!



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Drive to Kashan, visit the Fin Gardens and extensive Bazaar complex

We leave the wonderful Isfahan behind and drive for a few hours north to Kashan, a town originally famous for its textiles and ceramic production, but now better known for the Fin gardens and extensive bazaar and hamams. The Fin gardens are our first stop, a relaxing and visually impressive Persian garden with water channels all passing through a central pavilion, there is also the chance to buy some rose water, a local speciality - outside of the site. From here we will visit the bazaar area, a widespread complex filled with hamams and mosques; one hamam has been converted to a traditional tea house where we will stop for those who need a break from shopping. Walking through the bazaar we get to the Mosque of Mir Emad, which we will visit along with the Masjed-e Jame. Tonight we stay in a traditional house that has been converted to a hotel with a restaurant serving traditional Iranian food - many like to try the aubergine stew, if you have already eaten too many chicken kebabs!



Accommodation: Ameri House (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Head to Tehran, Golestan Palace and Reza Abbasi Museum

Tehran is a sprawling metropolis with pockets of hidden beauty, the traffic is slow but you cannot help but be excited by the pace of life here, loads of vendors selling food on the streets which include great spots for pomegranate juice. We make our way over to the Golestan Palace, where we walk around the courtyard and admire the coloured panels and tiles decorated in the distinctive Qajar style of yellows, pinks and blues. We will also visit the gaudy marble throne room, filled with mirrors and glitzy items apparently looted from another palace. Our final stop of the day is to the Reza Abbasi Museum, filled with Persian art which dates back to the second millennium BC. This evening we have an included dinner in a traditional Iranian restaurant where we will say goodbye to our leader and driver.



Accommodation: Kowsar Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Lunch

DAY 9 - Trip ends in Tehran

Our trip ends this morning in Tehran after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 8
Lunch: 1



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader / Driver



Accommodation

8 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Iran

Climate

Much of Iran is arid desert and mountain. The harsh climate has great extremes of heat and cold between summer and winter. Average annual rainfall is below 25cm and usually confined to winter and spring. Summer (Apr- Oct) is very hot, whilst winter temperatures can reach -4. Spring and autumn are best.

Time difference to GMT

+3.5

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam

Language

Persian

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

In all towns on this trip there is free time to explore, however optional sightseeing excursions can also be organised and paid for locally.

Shiraz - Citadel, Saadi Tomb and Nagshe rejab - 30 USD

Isfahan - Vank Church, Pigeon tower and Shaking minerate - 30USD

Clothing

Dress code in Iran

Iran is a traditional Islamic country and a strict dress code is enforced throughout the tour.

Women:

Head - A headscarf must be worn by women at all times, preferably tied under the chin. Some hair can be shown (remember to pack a headscarf in your hand luggage for arrival).

Arms - must be covered by long sleeves

Feet - Any comfortable footwear is acceptable

In cold weather it is useful to have a cardigan which you can wear over your manteau and easily remove

Manteau - long coat or shirt

The Manteau should hide the shape of the body and must be mid-thigh to knee length. It is best to purchase a manteau or similar such as a 3/4 length cotton coat that hides your shape and covers your arms prior to your arrival in Iran. A long baggy men's shirt or loose dress can be used instead of an overcoat, but the above principles must apply.

We recommend one cotton or linen length manteau for the south and a warmer one for the north. However, if it is not possible to purchase, long shirts or coat will suffice.

Legs - should be covered by trousers or a long skirt below the manteau

Underneath the 'manteau' anything can be worn!

April to September can be hot (approx. 30 degrees plus) - A bra and light cotton trouserskirt is sufficient. Pack for hot conditions during this period of the year.

March, October, November can be cold (approx. 12 degrees) - warmer clothing is needed under the manteau and you will need a warm fleece or jacket for cold nights. Bring waterproofs between Oct-Apr.

The 'chador' - 'coverall' - is only worn at holy shrines and can be borrowed locally. Dress code is more relaxed in some towns and brighter garments are being worn by young locals.

Men:

Men must wear long trousers. Short sleeved shirts are acceptable but most Iranian men wear full length sleeves. April to September can be hot (approx. 30 degrees plus) - Pack for hot conditions during this period of the year. March, October, November can be cold (approx. 12 degrees) - warmer clothing is needed, you will need a warm fleece or jacket for cold nights. Bring waterproofs between Oct-Apr.

You may find when you arrive in Iran that some local Iranians do not dress as traditionally or strictly as we have suggested above. Explore feels that it is socially correct for our travellers to be responsible in the way they travel and respect all country traditions so we would advise that you try to stick to our advice as closely as possible and then once in Iran you can make your own decisions as to how much is appropriate to cover. Your tour leader can also advise you on this in each location.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes/boots are recommended.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack.

Equipment

Bring a waterbottle, torch and a universal plug for hotel basins. A small foldable shoulder bagatchel for museums, as most do not permit backpacks only handbags and bags of a similar size.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you may consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow £15.00 for tipping.

Country Information

Iran

Food and drink

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

Lunch price

£9

Dinner price

£12

Water price

£0.90 Please note that alcohol is not available within the country of Iran.

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Rials.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Major hard currencies are accepted in the main cities but we advise taking all of your spending money in Euros or US\$ cash (Travellers Cheques can be hard to change). Once you arrive in Iran there will be no way for you to get any extra money so please make sure you bring plenty with you so that you do not run out.

Where To Exchange

Currency exchange is available in most major towns and cities

ATM Availability

do NOT work with foreign cards

Credit Card Acceptance

Accepted in some of tourist shops in Isfahan but please do not rely on this as it is not always possible

Travellers Cheques

Very hard to change.

Transport Information

Bus

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Due to the high numbers of visitors to Iran and the limited tourism infrastructure we are finding that on occasion hotels may cancel our reservations at short notice. While we do all possible to avoid this, there is a chance you will be subject to some accommodation changes during your trip. Any changes made will be to an accommodation of equal or a higher standard. We are confident that any changes to your accommodation will not detract from your enjoyment of this incredible country.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

As of 19 Sept 2018 - FCO advises British-Iranian dual nationals against all but essential travel to Iran. Due to this we are now unable to accept bookings from clients who meet this criterion.

An Iran visa is required by all nationalities, and must be arranged prior to travel. Please consult with your nearest Iran Consulate for further, up to date information regarding the visa process, costs and any relevant supporting documentation that you will need to supply.

Part of the Iran Visa process is to obtain an authorisation code/invitational letter from the local Iranian authorities. All nationalities will require this. Explore will request this on your behalf at the earliest 3 months prior to departure, the local Iran authorities will not process any requests sent through outside of their 2 month process time. All visa authorisation code/invitational letters arranged by Explore are on a group visa basis which does not permit any independent travel within the country and requires for all traveller to be on an arranged tour with a tour leader at all times. Please note the various process times depending on your nationality: British, American and Canadian: Minimum of 30-35 working days
All other nationalities: Minimum of 10 working days

In order for Explore to obtain the necessary authorisation code/invitation letter on your behalf, we will require a clear colour copy of your passport photo page and all pages with visas and/or country stamps to reach us 12 weeks before you travel. In addition to the colour copy of your passport pages, you'll also need to supply us with further personal information including a head and shoulders digital photograph of the applicant in front of a white area, a C.V./resume (max. 2 pages), username information for all social media websites you are a member of, and email and telephone contact details (please provide the same information you will provide on your visa application form). Explore will be in contact with you regarding this information no later than 12 weeks before you travel. If you have made your booking between 10-12 weeks before you travel we require your personal details immediately.

You can submit your application for your visa, once Explore has obtained your authorisation code/invitational letter and sent it through to you. Please note, if you intend using the London or Dublin Consulate, then we strongly recommend to contact them first to confirm that they have your authorisation code/invitational letter or alternatively to wait a minimum of 3 working days after you

have received your authorisation code before attending the Consulate. Please do this before you attend the consulate, as they will not accept your application if they have not received your authorisation code/invitation letter from the local Iranian authorities. For non-UK residents, please contact your nearest consulate for the most up to date information on visa costs and required documentation as this can vary depending on your nationality and country of residence. Most Consulates provide a 5-7 working day visa processing service.

Please note the authorisation code is only valid for 30 days from issuance.

For UK residents, applications are only accepted in person at the London or Dublin Consulate. Please note that you'll need to submit 2 passport photos (women need to wear a head scarf for these photos), along with your passport and visa application form to The Iranian Consulate in London or Dublin. Currently the London Consulate is charging approximately £170.00 per person for the visa. Please note, any women attending the London or Dublin Consulate in person will need to wear a head scarf. Please ensure that your passport has a minimum of 6 months validity from the date of return to your home country. Please note that any passport that contains an endorsement or a visa for Israel or stamps from other countries' border crossing points with Israel, regardless of whether it has expired, will not be accepted.

Iran has a strict visa process with some extensive background checks on all applicants, and may reject an application for numerous reasons including but not limited to sensitive occupations linked to politics; the media; military. If your visa request is rejected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iran then Explore will provide a voucher for all recoverable costs.

Please be aware that entry may also be refused to some countries if your passport bears stamps or visas (valid or expired) from certain countries. Please bear this in mind when booking/traveling to certain destinations as it can negatively affect your future travel plans.

All visa information is subject to regular change, so please check with your local consulate for the most up to date advice for the countries you intend to visit.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full

amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom. Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Iran

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
