



CICERONI
T R A V E L

ANCIENT FRONTIERS FROM PERSIA TO IRAN

THURSDAY 3 – THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2019 (15 DAYS)

LECTURER: JOHN OSBORNE

£4695

- **Comprehensive introduction to ancient Persia and modern Iran**
- **Begin in Shiraz from where we explore Persepolis and other sites of the Achaemenid Empire**
- **5 nights in magnificent Isfahan with its spectacular mosques, shrines & bazaars**
- **See some of the best ‘Persian’ gardens**
- **Atmospheric south-east Iranian towns of Kerman, Mahan and Rayan, ignored by many tours, included**
- **All meals included & we stay in comfortable 4 & 5* hotels**



Details of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran

OVERVIEW

The transformation of ancient Persia into modern Iran is one of the most fascinating stories connected with the Middle East. As all locals will tell you, Iran is NOT an Arab country, and how right they are! Though the vast majority of Iranians are Shi’ite Muslim by faith, one of the few ‘Arabic’ features of this country is their use of Arabic script to express the languages and dialects used by its varied peoples. Indeed, despite what we are told, Iran is generally more tolerant, both of its own minorities and of outsiders, than many of its more purely Arabic (Sunni) neighbours.

Our two-week exploration of Iran will cover not only a lot of ground (remember it is twice the size of France!) but also a complex set of histories. From its early settlers to the rise of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, it was at the centre of the ancient world, confronting, for example, the Greeks and Romans over many centuries. These momentous chapters, encompassing other dynasties such as the Seleucids, the Parthians and the Sassanids, will be explored when we visit the remarkable sites at Persepolis and elsewhere.

Today’s visual record is dominated by Islam and its monuments. It is astonishing to recall that after the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 636, Islam conquered huge areas, including Persia which was absorbed by 651. We shall see some of the finest mosques and shrines associated with this third ‘religion of the book’, above all in Shiraz and Isfahan.

We are normally not aware that no less than eight separate dynasties ruled Persia between 1038 and the fall of the last Shah in 1979. Since then, the Islamic Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini has placed Iran at the forefront of East/West relations, though in its present guise it is slowly opening the doors again. This is a complex heritage full of meaning and potential for today’s Iran and one we shall explore.

From the large cites to the small towns and villages we shall visit, one of the abiding memories you will garner will be the enormous range of trees, flowering shrubs and plants found in abundance. Similarly, the historic gardens included will present the basic formula of these ‘paradisiacal’ retreats: enclosing walls, formal planted beds and everywhere water – here still, there cascading – creating a cool oasis amidst the hurly-burly of the outside world.

We arrive in Shiraz, flying via Istanbul with Turkish Airlines, where we spend three nights; we continue to Kerman for two and Yazd for three nights; we end with five nights in Isfahan from where we fly to London via Istanbul. All meals are included on this tour, with tea, coffee and water. Finally, again and again you will be surprised and refreshed, indeed overcome not only by the country’s beauty but above all by the genuine warmth of the welcome – so different from that which we are ‘fed’ by the media. Do come...

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Thursday 3 October – We fly from Heathrow to Shiraz, via Istanbul on Turkish Airlines, Iran is three and a half hours ahead of the UK. Dinner is served during the flight.

Days 2 & 3: Friday & Saturday 4 & 5 October – Our flight arrives in the early morning and we transfer immediately into **Shiraz** and check into our 5* hotel, the **Zandiye** or similar, where our rooms will be ready for immediate occupation. After a morning to rest, over this afternoon and all of the following day, we explore this most enchanting of cities. We include the **Bazaar**, the **Citadel** and the **Vakil Baths**. The **Nasir-al-Molk Mosque** is remarkable and we shall also visit the **Bagh-e Eram**, the **Tomb of Hafez**, Persia's most revered poet and the **Tomb of Saadi**. We also visit three of the lovely **gardens** for which Shiraz is famous.

Day 4: Sunday 6 October – A day to remember as we drive out to visit **Persepolis**, the spectacular centre of the Archaemenid Empire, a site of huge impact. We also visit the nearby Royal Tombs at **Naqsh-e Rostam** and **Naqsh-e Rostam**. We return to Shiraz mid afternoon and there will be some free time for independent exploration of the old city.

Day 5: Monday 7 October – A full day's drive to **Kerman**, a remarkable town on the Persian Silk road, not always included in itineraries and well worth visiting. We stop at the Sassanian palace at **Sarvestan** and the ancient Friday Mosque in **Neiriz** en route. In Kerman we stay at the 4* **Hotel Pars** or similar.

Day 6: Tuesday 8 October – This morning we drive through spectacular desert and mountain scenery to **Rayen** to visit a well preserved mud-built **Citadel** of great beauty. Returning towards Kerman, we also visit the beautiful **Bagh-e Shahzade Garden** and the nearby **Sufi Mosque** at **Mahan** before returning to Kerman.

Day 7: Wednesday 9 October – We visit the **Kerman Friday Mosque** and walk through the atmospheric Safavid **Ganj Ali Khan** complex before leaving for Yazd, stopping en route at the restored Zeir-o-Din caravanserai where we have lunch. We continue to **Yazd**, long associated with Zoroastrianism for a three night stay at the 4* **Dad Hotel** (or similar).

Day 8: Thursday 10 October – We explore the old merchant quarter of the **Historic City of Yazd**, newly inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. We visit the **Friday Mosque**, the **Zoroastrian Fire Temple** and 'Towers of Silence', plus the **Bagh-e Dolat Abad Garden**. Evenings in Yazd are always jolly and there will be time to explore the various speciality shops.

Day 9: Friday 11 October – We drive a short distance out to the small town of **Meybod**, where we visit a **Pottery Factory**, the **Old Citadel** and a traditional **Pigeon Tower**.

Day 10: Saturday 12 October – We leave for **Isfahan** driving via **Nain**, where we visit the early **Friday Mosque** and the traditional **Pirnia House** en route. In Isfahan we stay at the 4* Safir Hotel or similar for a five-night stay.

Days 11, 12 & 13: Sunday 13, Monday 14 & Tuesday 15 October – **Isfahan** is the most magical city in Iran, full of excitement with wonderful buildings to discover. Over three days we shall visit Shah Jahan's magical parade ground, the **Maydan-e Iman** with its two fabulous **Mosques**, the **Masjed-e Jame (Friday Mosque)** and the **Armenian Vank Cathedral & Museum**, and many more, too numerous to mention here. There will be ample time for independent exploration during our stay.

Day 14: Wednesday 16 October – We have a lovely drive north through mountain scenery with stops in **Natanz** to see the unusual **Mosque** and nearby **Abyaneh**, a traditional, picturesque, mountain village, where we have a picnic lunch.

Day 15: Thursday 17 October – We fly in the early morning from Isfahan to London via Istanbul with Turkish Airlines.

VISITING IRAN - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We hope the following will help you decide whether or not you would like to join us on one of our visits to Iran. They are based on the experiences of Tom Duncan, who was in Iran April/May 2018, but particularly John Osborne, who has led tours of Iran for many years.

Will I be welcome? You will be surprised by the friendliness of the locals - everywhere. Foreign visitors are a source of endless fascination and you should expect locals to engage you in conversation.

Will I be safe? This is a question often asked. Inbound travel to Iran has increased significantly over the past few years. Ultimately of course, any decision to travel is a personal one for you to make. You may wish to read the current advice on the FCO travel website before making your decision. We would not operate the tour against FCO advice. The biggest danger is probably from the unpredictable habits of the Iranian car and motor-cycle drivers!

What will the weather be like? Much of the time we travel at an altitude of between 1,000 – 1,750 m and the atmosphere is remarkably dry. The weather will be warm during the day (mid 20s to low 30s) but cool at night and rain is a possibility. Have loose/light clothing for days, plus a jumper or fleece for mornings and evenings.

What should I wear? As a Muslim country, Iran has specific dress codes, though these are not as draconian as often imagined. Women are expected to keep their heads covered at all times in public (this includes restaurants), loosely draping the head and shoulders with a scarf. Bare arms and legs are unacceptable so wear sleeved blouses, plus trousers or a full length dress. Men are expected to wear long-sleeved shirts, though in some cities the local young now ignore this tradition. Similarly, for both sexes legs and ankles should always be covered and wearing either shorts, or sandals without socks, are an absolute 'no-no'.

How much travelling is involved? Our internal travel will be by air-conditioned coach. Some of the journeys will be long, given the size of Iran, though through some wonderful scenery, broken with frequent stops. Be aware that toilets in most roadside restaurants will not be to European standards and some will be of the 'squat' type. Free bottled water will be available on the coach.

How fit do I need to be? You should have a reasonable level of fitness, such that you can walk around cities and archaeological sites without difficulty. You will not need specific vaccinations for this visit.

Are the hotels comfortable? We use a mixture of 4 & 5* hotels and they are clean and rooms are reasonably well equipped – a list of things you should have with you will be supplied nearer the date of travel. Bottled water is supplied free in your hotel bedrooms. Bathrooms are usually spotlessly clean though most will have a shower and not a bath.

In common with all tour operators, while we have requested particular hotels in each city, it is impossible to guarantee these hotels. This is because hotels are allocated to groups a few weeks before departure, via a government agency in Tehran. Thus, we may not get our first choice in all locations. In such cases a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Is there Wi-Fi? Most hotels have very reasonable Wi-Fi connections so you should be able to send and receive emails, download your UK daily paper and access some non-Iranian sites, apart from news sites from the US or UK such as the BBC, CNN, Fox News etc.

What is there to eat and drink? All meals are included in these visits; tea/coffee and water are included with breakfasts and water with all lunches and dinners. Iranian cuisine includes a lot of rice with kebabs, and stews are an ever-present staple. The main meal offering is usually chicken or lamb, with beef on occasion; fish is a rarity and expensive. Seasonal fruit will be available and desserts are delicious (if you like rose-water, pistachios etc.). Water, soft drinks plus non-alcoholic beers, tea and coffee are available with lunches and dinners. There is no alcohol available in Iran and you MUST NOT attempt to take some with you in your luggage – your luggage will be subject to X-ray on arrival.

Will I need to take much money? As almost all expenses are included in the visit costs you should not need much cash. US Dollars and Euro are preferred at exchange bureaux, though not all will accept Sterling. Your Debit or Credit Card cannot be used, either to withdraw cash or to make purchases, apart from in the odd Carpet and Jewellery Store when the payment will be routed via Dubai or a similar place.

Will I need a VISA? A Visa will be required. Full details will be sent upon confirmation of your booking but in principle the process works as follows for British Passport holders:

- On confirmation of your booking you will have to send either by post or email:
 - Short resume/CV (This is a new requirement and needs to be a normal CV which outlines all the past jobs you have held)
 - Photocopy of your passport – page with photo only
 - Passport Photo
- We then use these documents to obtain a Visa Authorisation Number from the authorities in Iran and send you the code.
- To obtain the Visa in your passport you will need to:
 - Complete a Visa application form
 - Arrange to attend the Iranian Consulate in London with original passport to provide finger prints
 - We can provide details of a firm who can assist you to avoid queuing!
- Non-UK passport holders or non-UK residents should contact the relevant Iranian embassy in the country in which you reside for individual requirements.
- It should also be noted that anyone with a passport showing evidence of having visited Israel within a year of travel to Iran (including having entered or left Jordan/Egypt from posts which are known to border Israel) are likely to be denied a visa for Iran.
- As of January 2016 US policy (subject to change) has stated that anyone wishing to travel to or via the USA is required to apply for a US visa (rather than an ESTA) if they have travelled to Iran since March 2011. The process is fairly straightforward – this is just something you will need to be aware of if you have future plans to travel to or via the US.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £4695

Deposit £600

Single Supplement £695 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Tour Participants Each tour will be limited to 21 participants

Hotels 13 nights with breakfast in a mixture of 4 & 5* hotels as per the outline programme

Flights Turkish Airlines

Outward: **TK1980** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **1130**, arrive Istanbul **1720**

TK884 Depart Istanbul **2050**, arrive Shiraz **0115** following day

Return: **TK893** Depart Isfahan **0300**, arrive Istanbul **0605**

TK1979 Depart Istanbul **0745**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **0950**

Flight Upgrades Should you wish to fly Business Class, please enquire for upgrade costs

Price includes All dinners & lunches with water & tea/coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, the services of John Osborne & our local Tour Manager

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, soft &/or non-alcoholic drinks. Visa from £165 (7 Day Service) or from £250 (Next Day Service) plus visa agent fee from £65 (if used for assistance)



CICERONI TRAVEL
2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone **+44 (0) 1869 811167** Fax **+44 (0) 1869 811188**
Email **info@ciceroni.co.uk** Website **www.ciceroni.co.uk**

