From $6,208 USD

Single $6,729 USD
Twin share $6,208 USD
Prices valid until 30th December 2020

17 days
Duration

Middle East
Destination

Level 1 - Introductory to Moderate
Activity

Iran Culture and History Escorted Small Group Tour for seniors
Mar 29 2020 to Apr 14 2020

Iran Culture and History escorted small group tour

Discover the fascinating history and culture Iran has to offer on our Iran small group tour for seniors. This escorted educational tour is perfect for mature travellers with an active mind, seeking to learn about one of the world’s oldest civilisations. Travel to Iran with us on this seventeen-day trip, which focuses on the west of Iran, taking in ten key destinations.
Iran Travel Tour Highlights

Iran is located in southwestern Asia, once home to one of the world’s oldest civilisations, the centre of a great empire for centuries. At its height, its imperial territory stretched from the modern-day Balkan Peninsula in Europe, to the Indus River Valley in northwest India, and south to Egypt.

A country with a dramatic and colourful centuries-old history is bound to have incredible places to visit, ranging from natural to architectural wonders. Iran is definitely no exception.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Iran

Our journey begins and ends in Tehran, Iran, the modern capital of this ancient land. We then travel to nine destinations within the country, including two nights in Hamadan, three in Esfahan, two in Yazd and two in Shiraz. Along the way, we take in many of Iran’s world heritage sites. The lavish Golestan Palace, home of the Qajars and originally built in the Safavid era, exhibits the wealth and extravagance of the Persian monarchy. It is noted for its incorporation of Persian and Western design. Another monument that is considered an architectural masterpiece and a treasure of Islamic architecture is the 16th century Shah Mosque (also known as Imam Mosque or the Royal Mosque) located on the Naghsh-i Jahan Square (“Image of the World”, also known as Imam Square) in Isfahan. The Imam Square and the grand mosque are products of the massive urban planning undertaken in 1598, when Shah Abbas I moved the capital of Persia from Qazvin to Isfahan in an effort to avoid assaults by the Ottomans and to control the Persian Gulf.

Another UNESCO-listed site is Pasargadae, where Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, is entombed. We will also visit Persepolis, founded by Darius I in 518 BCE. Persepolis, the capital built by the Achaemenid kings, is located about 60 kilometres northeast of Shiraz. It was built on an immense half-artificial, half-natural terrace. The importance and quality of the monumental ruins make it a unique
archaeological site.

We will also visit Takht-e Soleiman, the Soltaniyeh Dome, Bisotun, the Fire Temple and the Towers of Silence.

The Persian Garden

In addition, we visit several examples of that great addition to world horticulture – the Persian Garden. Water plays a central role in the gardens of Iran, and it is reflected in the chahar bagh ("fourfold garden"), a model of garden philosophy and design used as a blueprint for landscaping throughout the Arab world and former Moorish territories in Asia and Europe.

The chahar bagh has its roots in the 6th Century palace gardens of the Achaemenid Empire. The gardens of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae share the same layout: they have a source of water in the centre (such as a fountain) that flows into four narrow canals, running at right angles and dividing the garden into four beds. The gardens are also marked with a walled enclosure, providing shade and a respite from the hot weather.

Iran City Tour, Ancient Civilisation, Rural Life

Led by our local guide and accompanied by an Odyssey program leader, our tour takes in the great cities of Iran: Tehran, Esfahan, and Shiraz. In Tehran, the program includes a trip to the National Museum, to see its archaeological treasures including glassware, ceramics, sculptures and mosaics. We walk across Esfahan’s beautiful bridges, and explore the Armenian quarter, as well as the major sights surrounding the main square.

However, we don’t just study the major cities. Travellers also have the opportunity to study the country’s ancient Persian civilisations, as well as its Islamic present. Our small group Iranian tour affords travellers the opportunity to experience rural life as well. We visit the ancient village of Masuleh, set on a steep slope of the Alborz Mountains, and Abyaneh, whose inhabitants still speak a dialect sprinkled with words from Middle Persian. There are also visits to historic sites, mosques,
gardens, bazaars, and tea houses. Together, we will experience life in a country that has an incredible history and is undergoing significant changes.

**Departures for Iran Tours**

Odyssey’s affordable and educational Iran tour packages have been running for almost 10 years. Odyssey Traveller has a minimum of two departures of the Iran Culture and History Escorted small group tours (formerly known as Persian Heritage) each year. The tours to Iran are **limited to 15 people**. Additionally, Odyssey program leaders are trained to assist you with local etiquette and customs to ensure that you enjoy your vacation experience whilst on one of our Iranian tours. This information will form part of your pre-travel departure pack. Our program, a combination of day tour and overnight trips, is suitable for mature travellers, either couples or singles.

Here is the testimony of one Odyssey traveller from our 2019 tour:

> Of our many travels, our trip to Iran was among the most memorable. The people, the country, the scenery were all wonderful, we felt very safe at all times. The people welcomed us to their country and wanted to engage in discussion every day. They were very friendly. Our guide and driver were excellent, so much history to absorb. Well worth the experience. – Kate and Kevin J. April 2019

For more details, click the ‘Top 5’ or ‘Itinerary’ buttons above! If you’re keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email, or, to book, simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

**Read more about travelling in Iran:**

Odyssey has a list of books to read to discover more about Iran, click
You may also read our previous articles about this destination:

- Questions About Iran
- Tehran Through Time
- Safavids in Persia
- History of Persian Carpets
- Beauty and Artistry in Iran: Persian Gardens and Mosaic Tiles
- Persepolis in Iran, a famous place on any escorted small group tour
- Travelling in Iran – the history and monuments of ancient Persia
- Thirty must see places when visiting Iran

**Tour Notes**

- Group size limited to 15.
- Itineraries may change if flight schedules, site availability, and other inclusions have to be amended prior to departure.

**Top 5**

1. Explore the UNESCO World Heritage listed sites of Persepolis, Pasargadae, Takht-e Soleiman, the Soltaniyeh Dome, Bisotun, the Golestan Palace, and the Fire Temple and the Towers of Silence in Yazd.
2. Discover Iran's splendid ancient and modern mosques, minarets, mausoleums, and markets.
3. Fall in love with Esfahan, home to Naqsh-e Jahan Square, surrounded by covered bazaars and home to the architectural jewels of the Safavid Empire.
4. Visit Yazd, an historic Silk Road oasis town, home to the oldest Zoroastrian fire temple and the haunting Towers of Silence.
5. Be inspired by Shiraz, known as the city of poets, literature, wine, and flowers, visiting two famous Persian Gardens, the Bagh-e Eram and the Narenjestan-e Ghavam.

**Itinerary**
Day 1

Locations: Tehran

Overview: Transfers to the hotel are included for those travelling on Odyssey's designated flight following arrival at Tehran's international airport (see details below). For those arriving on a different flight, transfers are not included. If time permits, we will have a short visit to the Sa'ad Abad Museum complex, otherwise it will be included on the following day or at the end of the tour.

31 March 2019 EK0971 10:25am
6 Oct 2019 EK0971 9:25am
29 March 2020 EK0971 10:25am

Accommodation: 2 nights at the Grand II 4 Star Hotel or similar accommodation.

Day 2

Locations: Tehran

Overview: Today we explore the sights of Tehran including the National Museum, the Carpet Museum, and the Carpet & Glassware Museum.

Accommodation: Overnight at the Grand II 4 Star Hotel or similar accommodation.

Day 3

Locations: Anzali

Overview: Today we will drive north via Rasht to Bandar-e Anzali (Anzali Port), on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Owing to its position and climate, the surrounding districts are characterised by green fields and forests. En route we visit the village of Masuleh, built into the steep slope of the Alborz Mountains. Here, the roof of one house is the yard of the house above and also the pavement in the village!

Accommodation: 1 night at the Sefid Kenar Hotel, or similar accommodation.
Day 4

Locations: Zanjan

Overview: Today we will enjoy a short walk along Anzali's waterfront, then drive to the province of Zanjan. Zanjan is located northwest of Iran, and its geographical conditions, abundant water sources, and fertile soil have made the province suitable for farming and animal husbandry. Most villages of the province are of ancient origin. Here we visit the UNESCO listed Soltaniyeh Dome, which lies on a plain between two mountains. The capital in Persia during the time of the Ilkhanid Mongols from 1302, the mausoleum of Soltaniyeh has the world's third largest brick dome. It was described by historian Michael Axworthy (2007) as "one of the grandest monuments of Iranian Islamic architecture."

Accommodation: 1 night at the Zanjan Bozorg Hotel or similar accommodation.

Day 5

Locations: Takab

Overview: Today we will visit the great Sassanian religious site of Takht-e Soleiman (the 'Throne of Solomon”) en route to Takab. The UNESCO listed religious site of Takht-e Soleiman dates back to 800 BCE. The water filled crater and fire temple located here were of great symbolic significance to Zoroastrianism and are associated with the volcanic history of the area. We the night in Takab, a hilly market town.

Accommodation: 1 night at the Ranji Hotel or similar accommodation.

Day 6

Locations: Hamadan

Overview: Today we travel to Hamadan via the Alisadr Cave, the largest cave in the world containing water. We explore the caves by paddle boat, and have lunch at the site. We then continue to Hamadan, known to classicists as Ecbatana, and the capital of Persia under the Achaemenids. It is situated on the Royal Road built by Darius the Great between the Mesopotamia and the Iranian Platea

Accommodation: 2 nights at the Baba Taher Hotel, or similar
Day 7

Locations: Hamadan

Overview: Today we travel southwest to Kermanshah. En route we visit the Temple of Anahita in Kangavar, and the Sassanian bas-reliefs at Taq-e Bostan. After lunch we visit the UNESCO listed site of Bisotun to see its bas-reliefs and cuneiform inscriptions.

Accommodation: Overnight at the Baba Taher Hotel, Hamadan, or similar accommodation.

Day 8

Locations: Kashan

Overview: Today we drive southeast to Kashan, the first of the large oasis towns along the Qom-Kerman road which runs along the edge of the Dasht-e Kevir desert. Here we enjoy the restful shade of cupola-covered houses and the coolness of pleasant gardens with water fountains. We visit Fin Garden, designed for Shah Abbas I, as well as Khan-e Tabatabi and Khan-e Borujerdi, merchant houses built in the late 1800s. The greenery and lively atmosphere of this well-tended oasis stands out against the the parched immensities of the surrounding desert. Tonight we stay at a beautiful Kashani traditional house.

Accommodation: 1 night at the Negin Traditional House, or similar accommodation.

Day 9

Locations: Esfahan

Overview: Today we will continue to travel south, visiting Abyaneh village on the way to Esfahan. A common saying during the Safavid (1502-1722) period was that "Esfahan was half the world." Today the city is still Iran's most beautiful city. The wonderful buildings may be attributed to Shah Abbas who made the town his capital in 1598. These have added to the considerable wealth of history already preserved in buildings from earlier periods. On arrival we visit the Vank Cathedral, in
the old Armenian quarter of the city. In the evening we visit the Khaju Bridge, built under Shah Abbas II. The bridge doubles as a dam, and has always been as much a meeting place as a bearer of traffic. The bridge features two levels of terraced arcades, the lower containing locks to regulate the water flow. One can still see original paintings, tiles, and the remains of stone seats built for Shah Abbas II to sit on and admire the views. A pavilion was built in the centre exclusively for his pleasure. We also visit Sio She Pol (33 arches) Bridge before checking in to our hotel.

**Accommodation:** 2 nights at the Piroozy Hotel, or similar accommodation.

**Day 10**

**Locations:** Esfahan

**Overview:** We have a full day exploring Esfahan, beginning with visits to Naqsh-e Jahan Square, home to the Ali Qapu, Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques as well as the Gheisarieh Bazaar. After lunch, we will visit Chehel Sotoun (Forty Pillars reception hall and pleasure pavilion) and have some free time before dinner to explore the bazaar.

**Accommodation:** Overnight at the Piroozy Hotel, or similar accommodation.

**Day 11**

**Locations:** Yazd

**Overview:** Today we continue travelling south to Yazd, one of the Iranian strongholds of Zoroastrianism, famous for its fire temples. En route we stop at Meybod to visit the Narein Castle. If time permits, we'll visit to the Towers of Silence on the outskirts of Yazd, before checking into our hotel (if not, we will visit them the following day). The towers were used by the Zoroastrians to dispose of the dead to avoid contaminating the soil with a body.

**Accommodation:** Two nights at the Safaieeh 4 Star Hotel, or similar accommodation.
Day 12

Locations: Yazd

Overview: Today we explore the old city of Yazd. Its adobe buildings, the street plans, wind towers, and the qanat water supply system are a wonderful reflection of Persian architecture and ingenuity as a response to the local hot desert environment. We also visit the Bagh-e Dolat Garden and Yazd's Ateshkadeh (Zoroastrian Fire Temple).

Accommodation: Overnight at the Safaiieeh 4 Star Hotel, or similar accommodation.

Day 13

Locations: Shiraz

Overview: Today we continue on through desert scenery to Shiraz. En route we visit the ancient Abarqu Cypress tree, and the UNESCO listed site of Pasargadae, where Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty is entombed. We arrive in Shiraz, city of poets, late in the afternoon. Shiraz has a rich and turbulent history. It was spared destruction by Genghis Khan's forces as well as the forces of Timur who followed 160 years later. Several earthquakes and Afghan raids destroyed the area, however it was resurrected as the Iranian capital in the mid 18th century during the Zand dynasty.

Accommodation: 3 nights at the Chamran New 5 Start Hotel, or similar accommodation.

Day 14

Locations: Shiraz

Overview: Today we visit Persepolis, founded by Darius I in 518 BCE. Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire, is located about 60 kilometres northeast of Shiraz. It was built on an immense half-artificial, half-natural terrace. The importance and quality of the monumental ruins make it a unique archaeological site. We also visit the Royal Necropolis (Naghsh-e-Rostam), before driving back to Shiraz to visit the Eram Garden (Paradise Garden), followed by Nasir-o-Molk (Pink Mosque) and the Narenjestan-e Ghavam (Narenjestan Palace. We also visit the Zand citadel, the Arg-e Karim Khan, as well as the tombs of
Hafez, a 14th century poet, and Sa'di, a 13th century poet.

**Accommodation:** Overnight at the Chamran New 5 Start Hotel, or similar accommodation.

### Day 15

**Locations:** Shiraz

**Overview:** Today we take a scenic drive west to visit the ancient city of Bishapur (Shapur's City), the capital under the Sassanian king Shapur I. Shapur's armies defeated the Romans three times, and his city is full of strong Hellenistic-Roman and Persian influences in the architecture of its temple, audience hall, and defence structures. It was here that the Roman General Valerian spent his final days in captivity.

**Accommodation:** Overnight at the Chamran New 5 Start Hotel, or similar accommodation.

### Day 16

**Locations:** Tehran

**Overview:** This morning we will complete our visits in Shiraz and fly to Tehran.

**Accommodation:** 1 night at the Grand II 4 Star Hotel, or similar accommodation.

### Day 17

**Locations:** Tehran

**Overview:** This morning we visit the National Jewel Museum. Our tour will end with a transfer to the airport for those booked on the evening flight (as advised by Odyssey). For those departing on a different flight, transfers are not included.

16 April 2019 EK0980 19:10
22 Oct 2019 EK0980 18:10
14 April 2020 EK0980 19:20

**Accommodation:**

### Inclusions / Exclusions

**What's included in our Iranian Tour**
• 16 breakfasts, 16 lunches, and 16 dinners.
• 16 nights of hotel accommodation.
• 1 internal flight in economy class and taxes.
• Transport in comfortable and modern coaches.
• All lectures, excursions, entrance fees, and local guides.
• Gratuities and necessary tips.
• Services of tour leader for the duration of tour.
• Visa Reference Number and supporting documents, required to apply for the Visa.

What's not included in our Iranian Tour
• Items of a personal nature such as telephone calls and laundry.
• Comprehensive travel insurance.
• International airfares and departure taxes.
• Airport transfers if not on selected flights (as advised).
• Visa service (Odyssey offer Visa Service at additional $150 per person)
• Visa fee

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.