

## **WONDERS OF IRAN**

### **Day 1: Arrival Tehran (D)**

Our group tour commences this evening in the bustling city of Tehran. After our welcome meeting there is the opportunity to sample Iran's famous fare. A great start to a fantastic tour of Iran!

### **Day 2: Tehran (B) (L)**

We start our day at the National Museum of Iran where we get a crash course in Iran's rich history – this will lay the groundwork for the rest of our trip! We'll also visit the newly refurbished Museum of the Islamic Period where we'll see arts and antiquities from the Islamic period, including calligraphy and textiles. After lunch, get ready to witness one of Tehran's biggest draw cards – the National Jewellery Museum. Located in the vault of the National Bank this collection of crowns, tiaras and precious gems was amassed by the Iranian Royal family from the 16th century onwards and is, quite simply jaw dropping.

### **Day 3: Tehran (B) (D)**

Our focus this morning is on the sprawling Golestan Palace compound located in the heart and historic centre of Tehran. This is one of the oldest compounds in Tehran and was originally built during the Safavid Dynasty. Not far from the palace is the Grand Bazaar of Tehran. Described as a city within a city the bazaar here is known to have been an area of trade for more than a thousand years (although the oldest walls and buildings still here are only around 400 years of age). All this walking means we'll need to refuel, so we'll follow the Tehranis to a popular local spot for some lunch. Iran is known for its carpets, so no visit to Tehran would be complete without a visit to the Carpet Museum to see some of the country's finest examples. This evening we'll stroll the Tabiat Bridge and find dinner overlooking two of the city's finest parks.

### **Day 4: Tehran - Hamadan (B) (L)**

Leaving Tehran behind this morning, we make our way to the ancient city of Ecbatana (modern day Hamadan) where we'll have lunch. After lunch we'll

visit the rock inscription of Ganjnameh. Carved by Darius the Great and his son Xerxes I, the inscriptions appear in three languages – Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian.

### **Day 5: Hamadan - Kermanshah - Hamadan (B) (D)**

We start our day with a visit to the UNESCO Heritage site of Taq-e Bostan. These bas-relief carvings are some of the best surviving from the Sassanid era and feature royal hunting scenes, backed by elephants. Later we'll visit the site of Bisotun, featuring more bas-relief carvings, these ones dating from 521BC.

### **Day 6: Hamadan – Kashan via Qom (B) (L)**

As we leave Hamadan today and make our way to Kashan we'll stop at the second most sacred city in Iran after Mashhad, Qom. This afternoon we'll arrive in Kashan, an historic oasis city that was once a centre for tile and pottery production.

### **Day 7 – Kashan (B) (D)**

Wondering the atmospheric streets, we'll visit the beautiful Tabatabaei and Boroujerdi Houses as well as the hammam of Sultan Amir Ahmad, a 500 year old bathhouse with roof top views of the city over the tops of the bath house domes. This afternoon, we'll relax in the stunning Bagh-e Fin, or Fin Gardens – the perfect way to while away an afternoon.

### **Day 8 – Kashan – Esfahan (B) (D)**

Esfahan! This is, without a doubt, the most visually stunning city in Iran.

### **Day 9 – Isfahan (B) (L)**

There's was a 16th century rhyme that went "Esfahan nesf-e jahan", which means Esfahan is half the world. While perhaps not so geographically accurate, it is certainly true that the former capital of the Persian Empire is certainly one of the most beautiful cities in the world. We'll begin our exploration with the Masjed-e Jahmeh, a perfect example of 800 years different Islamic architectural styles. Next we'll visit the only surviving palace of the royal precinct, Chehel

Sotun, before making our way to Naqshe-e Jahan Square, the second largest square in the world and one that has change little since its construction in 1602. After lunch we'll take a peek inside the Bazaar-e Bozorg (Grand Bazaar), exploring it's labyrinthine alleyways shopping for handicrafts. Later this evening, once the sun has set, we'll make like the local Esfahanis and stroll across the bridge of 33 arches, Pol Si-e-She.

### **Day 10 - Esfahan (B)**

We'll start our day with a visit to Jolfa, the Armenian Quarter of the city and its' magnificent Vank Cathedral. Later we'll make our way back to Imam Square where we can relax in a traditional teahouse, before visiting what can be considered the pinnacle of Persian Islamic architecture – the Masjed-e Sheike Lotfollah and the Masjed-e Shah. These two mosques cannot help but make a lasting impression.

### **Day 11 - Esfahan - Yazd via Meybod (B) (D)**

This morning we'll say good bye to one of our favourite cities as we head to the city of Wind Catchers, Yazd. On the way we'll visit the village of Meybod, home to an ice house and a pigeon house.

### **Day 12 - Yazd (B) (L)**

Long considered an important stop on the trade routes, Yazd is a charmingly fascinating desert city. According to UNESCO, the old town of Yazd is one of the oldest in the world and today you'll feel like you've stepped back in time as you wander the maze of historic lanes. Yazd is also the home to Ateshkadeh, a Zoroastrian Fire Temple where the flame has reportedly been burning since 470AD. After this introduction to Zoroastrianism, we'll visit the Towers of Silence, a once-sacred site where the bodies of deceased Zoroastrians were offered to the earth. Here in the desert it can be difficult to believe that there is any water to be found, but this afternoon we'll visit the Yazd Water Museum to find out how qanats (water channels) were dug to supply water for drinking and irrigation. This evening we'll join the locals in a stroll around the evocative Amir Chakhmaq Complex.

### **Day 13 Yazd – Shiraz (B) (L)**

Today we make our way from Yazd to another one-time-capital of the Persian Empire, Shiraz. The capital during the Zand Dynasty (1747 – 79), Shiraz was one of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world and is still considered to be the centre of Persian culture. It's said that Iranian homes have two books, the Quran and a collection of poems by the poet Hafez. A city of poets, Shiraz is known as a city of learning and poetry and of course it is perhaps most famous for the wine it is no longer able to produce.

### **Day 14 – Shiraz (B) (D)**

One of Shiraz's most well known sites (and definitely its most photographed!), is the Masjed-e Nasir al-Molk, more commonly known as the Pink Mosque. We'll visit in the morning as the sun streams through the stained glass windows, filling the space with a kaleidoscope of rainbow light. Later we'll visit Bagh-e Naranjestan and its beautiful pavilion built for the powerful Mohamed Ali Khan and then we'll venture into our favourite bazaar in Iran – the Vakil Bazaar – and its associated mosque and hammam (bathhouse).

### **Day 15 – Shiraz (B)**

Although it needs little introduction, we must say that Persepolis is one of the most jaw-dropping sites we've encountered on our travels. This city embodies the pinnacle of Darius the Great's Achaemenid Empire, but it also represents its' ultimate demise at the hands of Alexander the Great. The extensive ruins here are marvelously well preserved and you're unlikely to encounter such extensive and well-preserved bas-relief carvings anywhere else in the region.

### **Day 16 – Shiraz (B) (D)**

Today we'll visit tombs of the poets Hafez and Sa'di and you'll see the poetic sway they hold on Iranian's hearts with the many people who make a pilgrimage to their graves. This evening we have a special treat – we're having dinner with some good friends in Iran who will prepare for you the best home-cooked Iranian cuisine you'll taste all trip! This is a wonderful opportunity to understand a little more about Persian culture from our hosts.

### **Day 17 – Shiraz – Tehran (B) (D)**

A leisurely breakfast this morning before we say goodbye to the City of Poets and head to the airport for our flight back to Tehran. Soon free time this afternoon to do some last minute sightseeing or shopping before we meet for our final dinner in this amazing country.

### **Day 18 – Departure (B)**

This morning we will bid farewell to new friends as our cultural tour of Iran concludes after breakfast.