

# The Land of Proud Civilization and Inspiring Art

Say the word Persia to Europeans or North Americans and the conversation is likely to move to fine art, ceramics, tiles, carpets or poets. Say the word Iran and the topic of terrorism or religious fundamentalism are most likely to arise. This is quite odd, as Persia and modern-day Iran are indeed the same land. Iranian tourist organisations intend to change this situation and promote local tourist attractions.

Present Iran was historically referred to as Persia until 1935 when Reza Shah Pahlavi formally asked the international community to call the country by its native name, Iran. But In 1959 due to controversial debates over the name, it was announced that both could be used.



## Persian Culture

With a long-standing and proud civilization, Persian culture is among the richest in the world. Two and a half millennia of inspiring literature, thousands of poets and writers, magnificent and impressive architecture, live customs dating back to Zoroastrians over 3000 years ago, and other unique characteristics of the nation are rivaled by only a few countries.

Throughout the history, this grand treasure of Persia was gradually transferred to eastern and western nations. Iran's significant contribution into the world civilization in many respects is indispensable. Among the ceremonies still being held are Norouz, Charshanbeh Suri, Sizdah Bedar, Yalda Night and Haft Sin.

Another eminent feature of Persian culture is art. In fact culture and art are two closely interwoven concepts forming the soul of human civilizations. Persian exquisite carpets, subtle soulful classic music, outstanding tile work of unique blue mosques, old influential architectural style and countless brilliant literary works are famous in the world. Undoubtedly, in this melting pot of civilization everybody will be overwhelmed by the beauties of the country and the depth of nation's colorful and lively culture.

## Cities

### Tehran

Iran is not blessed with one of the world's loveliest capitals. Pollution, chronic overcrowding and a lack of responsible planning have all helped to make Tehran a metropolis that even the most effusive travel agent would have difficulty praising. If you're expecting an exotic crossroads steeped in oriental splendor, you'll be sadly disappointed.

The distances are vast, the traffic is shockingly bad and the main sights are spread out. However, the hotels are good, the variety of restaurants is impressive, the facilities are far ahead of those anywhere in the provinces and the Tehranies are friendly. The major attraction for visitors is the city's excellent museums.



Tehran developed from a moderately prosperous trading village into an elegant, if dusty, city. European

visitors wrote of its many enchanting vineyards and gardens. In 1789, Agha Muhammed Khan declared Tehran his capital, and six years later he was crowned as Shah of all Persia.

From the early 1920s, the city was extensively modernized on a grid system, and this period marked the start of phenomenal population growth and uncontrolled urban development that continues to this day. Today Tehran is so vast that getting hopelessly lost at least once is a near certainty.

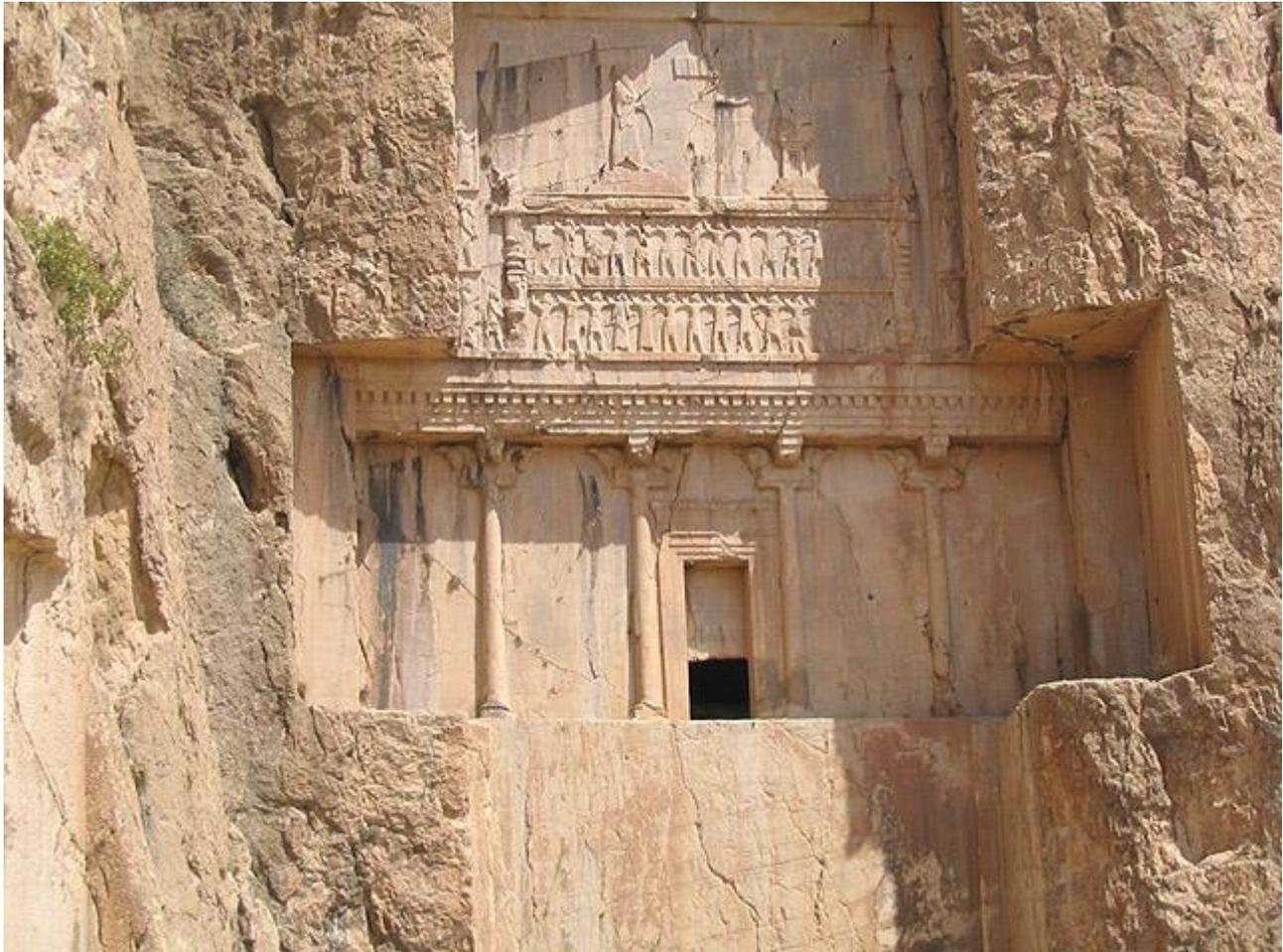
## Shiraz

Shiraz was one of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world and was the Iranian capital during the Zand dynasty (1747–79), when many of its most beautiful buildings were built or restored. Through its many artists and scholars, Shiraz has been synonymous with learning, nightingales, poetry, roses and also wine!

Today Shiraz is a relaxed, cultivated city, with wide tree-lined avenues and abundant monuments, gardens and mosques to keep most visitors happy for several days. The university here is one of Iran's finest, and you'll come across lots of students eager to speak English.

## Yazd

One of the oldest cities of Iran, with desert architecture, an important Zoroastrian center since Sassanian time that has kept Fire Temple and Dakhmehs (Towers of Silence), a prosperous city standing at the crossroads of the most important caravan routes from central Asia and India to the south and West has the name of Yazd. Marco Polo, who came here on his way to China in 1212, called it "The Good and Noble City of Yazd".



## Kerman

Kerman is situated at the edge of Lut Desert and was built in the third century A.D. by Ardashir I. Great Friday Mosque, Bazaar, Ganj – Ali Khan Bath and Museum, Jabalieh and Green Domes, traditional refrigerators, in addition the Tomb of the great Sufi leader Shah Nematollah Vali are the most important tourism attractions in Kerman, a city which is also renowned for carpet, copper, pistachio and marble.

## Persepolis

Takht – e Jamshid or as the Greeks called it, Persepolis, is a ruined capital of the ancient Iran, about 60km north–east of Shiraz. It is one of the greatest artistic legacies of the ancient world, founded by Darius I (550 – 486 B.C. ), an Achaemenid king, in 518 B.C. He intended to build a capital in his homeland unique throughout history. He decided to found the capital on the slope of a mountain now called Rahmat, located in the Marvdasht plain, regarded as a holy place by him. Takht – e–Jamshid was completed by Xerxes and Artaxerxes I who ruled Iran from 486 to 465 B.C. and from 465 to 425 respectively. The palaces were used by the Achaemenid kings up until they were destroyed by Alexander in 330 B.C.

**Religious tourism and visits to friends drive demand**

Traditionally, only wealthier Iranians travel abroad. The main purposes of travel are visiting friends and family and religious tourism. However, with increasing purchasing power as a result of oil revenues, and following Iran's signing of cooperation agreements with some Islamic countries in Asia, departures to destinations such as Thailand and Malaysia may start to increase further. Although customized packages to these destinations could add value to travel agents' offerings, religious tourism packages and flight only will remain the fastest growing and most lucrative types of travel. Euromonitor.com

### **Pros and Cons**

Iran currently ranks 68th in tourism revenues worldwide. Iran with attractive natural and historical sites is rated among the 10 most touristic countries in the world. Close to 1.8% of national employment is generated in the tourism sector which is slated to increase to 10% in the next five years. Weak advertising, unstable regional conditions, a poor public image in some parts of the world, and absence of efficient planning schemes in the tourism sector have all hindered the growth of tourism. Wikipedia.org

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