

Iran

Beneath the Veil



This cultural tour of Iran journeys through some of the most spectacular sites in the country and offers countless examples of fascinating history as well as beautiful architecture and design. Often considered a restrictive society for women, this trip raises the veil on life as an Iranian woman. Throughout the trip we hold discussions with local women from all backgrounds on all aspects of their life, from a ladies-only gym to the revered shrine of Fatima Masumeh. It surely is a fascinating insight and will leave you and your students questioning your preconceptions of this beautiful country.



Recommended itinerary:

Culture shock rating: 

Physical rating: 

Day 1: Arrive in Tehran

Today we fly from the UK to Iran's bustling capital: Tehran. Upon our arrival at the airport, we will be met by our female Trip Leader before we transfer to our hotel to relax after our day travelling. This evening we will meet with a local business woman to hear her talk about the challenges she faces as a woman in her daily and working life in Iran.

Day 2: Explore Tehran, Cookery Centre and Fly to Shiraz

After our first Iranian breakfast, we will pay a visit to the Archaeological and Islamic Art Museum which follows Persia's history from the fifth millennium BC to 648AD and includes beautiful examples of Islamic works of art. We will then see the Golestan Palace, one of the oldest monuments in Tehran. It was once part of a group of royal buildings and is a masterpiece of architecture and design. Having enjoyed a much needed lunch, we will view what is quite possibly the World's finest collection of stones at the Jewellery Museum. Our last activity in Tehran will be a visit to a local cookery centre to meet with the women who work here to learn about their lives and the secrets of Iranian cookery. We will then transfer to the airport to fly to Shiraz.

Day 3: Sights of Shiraz and Women's Gym

Our first stop today will be the Naranjestan Gardens; the mirrored hall and rooms covered in intricate tiles with stained glass windows make it a sight to be seen. From here we will pay a visit to the Nasir al-Mulk mosque. Built in the Qajar era and still in use, it is famed for its intricate glasswork. In the afternoon, we will see the Hafez Mausoleum which was erected in memory of the celebrated Persian poet Hafez as well as the breath-taking mirrored interior of the Ali Ibn Hamzeh shrine; the only one of three such designs in Shiraz which will allow foreign visitors. This evening we will pay a visit to a local women-only gym, an important place for Iranian women where they are able to exercise without having to endure the restrictions on what they may wear in public. It will be an interesting opportunity to discuss with local women how they feel about the morality laws in Iran and how it affects their lives on a day to day basis.

Day 4: Persepolis, Pasargadae and Yazd

Today we say goodbye to Shiraz as we leave through the Quran Gate. Our first stop will be Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Here we will see the remains of the imposing palaces of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxaxes. We will then continue onwards to Pasargadae where Cyrus the Great built his capital in the Achaemenid Dynasty. The most important feature we will see here is Cyrus the Great's tomb and the site is also home to the earliest known example of the Persian *chahar bagh*, the traditional fourfold garden design. Our journey will finish in Yazd where we will spend the night.

Days 5: Yazd and Transfer to Isfahan

Marco Polo wrote about the beauty of Yazd and this ancient city is more of a living museum. First, we will visit the Amir Chakhmaq Mosque and Square which is noted for its symmetrical sunken alcoves and dates back to the 14th century. From here we will move on to the local bazaar to see the art of haggling first hand before paying a visit to the Atash Kadeh, also known as the Zoroastrian Fire Temple. This building was built in 1934 to enshrine the Atash Bahram, the 'Victorious Fire' which dates back to 470AD. It is one of nine Atash Bahrams with the other eight located in India.

Later we will see the Water Museum, highlighting the importance of water in the history of Yazd; a city which is in the midst of the desert but has still been settled for over 3000 years. Afterwards we visit the Alexander Prison, a misnomer as the building was actually a school, though the poet Hafez suggests that it was built by Alexander the Great and that the well in the courtyard was used as a dungeon. Our final stop in Yazd will be to a Zurkhaneh to watch the sport/rituals of zoorkhaneh which takes place here. The Zurkhaneh is a place for strengthening the body, boosting athletic morals, practising humility and avoiding arrogance and were traditionally used to train warriors in Iran. Over the centuries, religious hymns and chants were incorporated into the training and it is often touted as the reason for Iranian success in wrestling. After a long day in Yazd, we will transfer to Isfahan where we will spend the night.

Day 6: Isfahan and Women's Handicrafts

Isfahan was once one of the largest cities in the world. It flourished from 1050 to 1722, particularly under the Safavid Dynasty during the 16th century, when it became the capital of Persia for the second time. In the morning, we will visit the Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Constructed between 1598 and 1629, this is now a UNESCO World Heritage site and is surrounded by buildings from the Safavid era including the Sheikh Loft Allah Mosque (the ladies mosque), Shah Mosque and the Ali Qapu Palace. To the north of the square lies the extensive Isfahan bazaar, brimming with talented artisans and their products. In the afternoon we will head to Khajoo and Si-o-se Pol bridges, the latter of which is the longest bridge on the Zayandeh River, running 297.76m in length and formed of thirty three arches. Afterwards, we will visit a local women's handicraft workshop to learn about the crafts they make and the traditional roles of women in Iran.

Day 7: Kashan and Transfer to Tehran

Today we will return to Tehran stopping en route at Kashan, an oasis town where carpet, silk and textile weaving are the traditional crafts and where the Three Wise Men supposedly began their journey to Bethlehem. Kashan is famed for its traditional merchant's houses and we will pay a visit to the exquisite Fin Garden Complex. From here we will travel to the shrine of Fatema Mae'sume in Qom. Every year thousands of Muslims travel to Qom to honour Fatima Masumeh who is revered as a saint and we will learn about the tradition of making women saints in Islamic culture. Finally, we will reach Tehran for our last night in Iran.

Day 8: Depart Tehran and Return to UK

This morning we wave goodbye to our Trip Leader as we board our return flight to the UK and rehearse the tales of our adventure for our friends and family at home!

Important Information:

It is important to realise that the itinerary needs to be flexible. While every effort will be made to follow the above schedule, in the event of political problems, airline schedule changes, we will do our best to make your trip as enjoyable and hassle-free as possible, but it is important to EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED and be prepared to accept some slight changes. Relax and have faith in your guides.



DAYS FOR GIRLS This trip can include a session working alongside Days for Girls, a grass roots organisation aimed at giving every woman and girl access to proper feminine hygiene products and health advice. For more information look on our website: www.thestc.co.uk/travel/days-for-girls



The School
Travel Consultancy

For more information and a detailed quote, please contact us:

telephone: 01392 660056

email: schools@thestc.co.uk

website: www.thestc.co.uk

