

Tim's Itinerary in Iraq (April, 2014)

Friday, April 4 – arrival in Tehran Transfer to hotel in early morning. Visit National Museum of Iran, housing artifacts from many archaeological sites around the country, providing a wonderful historical backdrop to the entire trip. Day will also include visiting the Persian Glass and Ceramics Museum. It houses an extensive collection of earthenware, glassware, ceramics, chinaware and crystal objects. Also visit the Iran Carpet Museum, with displays that illustrate why Persian carpets have the status of an art form in Persian history. The carpets represent both urban and village weaving.

Saturday, April 5 – Tehran Visit Niyavaran Palace, the place where the late Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his family spent much of their last decade in Iran. Visit Tehran Bazar, a maze of alleyways that serves not only as the economic heart of the city, but with this economic importance, the merchants of the bazaar have become a major political force in modern Iran, so much so that the bazaris are an important constituency for anyone who intends to govern Iran. Visit to the National Jewels Museum, where the highlight is the Peacock Throne, as well as many jewels of Iran's rulers going back to the 18th century through the extensive collection amassed under the late Shah and his wife, Queen Farah. Late afternoon transfer to the airport for evening flight to Shiraz.

Sunday, April 6 – Shiraz Today is dedicated to the city of Shiraz, a city of parks and gardens. Hafez and Sadi, Iran's two most famous poets, come from Shiraz. Their tombs are pilgrimage sites. An afternoon visit to the Shiraz bazaar will show again, the important role of the bazaar to the city's commerce, a bazaar that is quite different than that of Tehran.

Monday, April 7 – Persepolis Many historians believe that Persepolis is the greatest embodiment of Persian culture. Established by Darius the Great (522 to 486 B.C.), Persepolis was the showplace under the Achaemenian dynasty (550-330 B.C.). The sheer expanse of Persepolis was awe inspiring to all its visitors, most of whom were subjects from the various part of the Empire who would come to Persepolis bearing gifts and to pay homage to the rulers. Also visit nearby Naqshi-i-Rustam, where one can see the tombs of prior kings built into the rock walls. Continue on with a brief stop in Pasargad and then on to Yazd.

Tuesday, April 8 – Yazd Yazd is a city of some half a million people in the midst of the desert. Much of Yazd's historical importance stems from its place as a home to Iran's largest Zoroastrian community. Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of the region prior to the Arab conquests in the 7th century. Visits in Yazd will include the Zoroastrian Fire Temple, as well as their Towers of Silence, located on the outskirts of Yazd. Also visit the Jameh Mosque and the Amir Chakhmaq mosque, both of which are impressive in their architecture, as well as Alexander's prison and the 11th century Tomb of the 12 Imams, where inscriptions are found in memory of the imams.

Wednesday, April 9 – Yazd/Nain/Isfahan Depart Yazd for a drive of several hours. En route, stop in Nain to visit the city's 10th century mosque, which still has areas where the stucco relief is in its original state. Continue on to Isfahan.

Thursday, April 10 – Isfahan □ By nearly unanimous opinion, Isfahan considered Iran's most beautiful city. Greenery abounds with tree line streets and beautiful architecture. One does not get the sense of a city with nearly 2 million inhabitants. With the Zayandeh River flowing through Isfahan, crossed by a series of impressive bridges, Isfahan is a visual delight. The Jameh Mosque, is truly a highlight of Islamic design, encompassing the influence of Seljuk dynasty during the 11th century. Looking up at the ceiling in the main dome, one can easily see how the carpet designers in the centuries since were influenced and how these designs are reflected in Persian carpets of subsequent centuries. Visit other buildings surrounding the beautifully designed Naghch-E-Jahan square, including the Imam mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque and the Ali Ghapu Palace. Also visit the Tchhel Sotoun Palace built as a pleasure pavilion and reception hall in the 17th century.

Friday, April 11 – Isfahan □ Touring of Isfahan continues, visiting the bridges of Isfahan; Khadju, Siose and Chahrestan. Visit the Manar Jomban, also known as the Shaking Minarets, as well as visiting the Armenian quarter to see the Armenian church and the community's museum.

Saturday, April 12 – Natanz/Kashan/Qom/Tehran □ Depart Isfahan and drive back to Tehran, with stops en route. First stop will be in Natanz, known today for the underground Iranian enrichment facilities outside the city. In Natanz, visit the Jameh Mosque, a well-preserved mosque from the 13th century. Stop in Kashan. Known for the city's famed carpets, Kashan rose to prominence during the Seljuk period from the 11th to 13th century, where it became legendary for rugs, ceramics and tilework. These crafts were elevated to an even higher art form under Shah Abbas I, during the 16th and 17th centuries. Following an earthquake in 1779, destroying much of the city, the subsequent Qajar dynasty spent abundantly to rebuild the city. Depart Kashan and continue to Qom. Known as the holiest city in Iran, Qom is the seat of the Islamic council that governs Iran today, the city is filled with Mullahs who come to Qom for their religious training. Visit the mausoleum of Hazrat Masume, the burial place of Imam Reza's sister Fatmah, who died in the 9th century. Continue on to Tehran, with a late afternoon arrival.

Sunday, April 13 – Tehran □ Transfer to the airport for departure flight.