



WORLD DISCOVERY
— HISTORY CULTURE WILDLIFE —

Treasures of Iran



The abandoned desert citadel of Rayen (DAY 4).

DAY 1 - Depart UK.

DAY 2 - Arrival in Tehran.

On arrival in Tehran you will be met by a representative of World Discovery outside immigration and customs. You will then be taken by private car direct to your hotel. Your rooms are guaranteed to be available for immediate occupancy. The rest of the morning has been left free for you to catch up on your sleep. In the afternoon there is a visit to Iran's **National Museum**, which contains an authenticated collection of pre-historic, ancient and Islamic artifacts, with pottery dating back to the 7th millennium B.C.

Meals included: Lunch, dinner.

DAY 3 - Fly to Kerman.

In the morning fly to Kerman, a beautiful town located at 1,860 metres above sea level, and transfer to your hotel. Kerman was founded in the third century AD during Sassanid times as a strategic stage on the important caravan routes from Afghanistan, India and the south coast into the Persian heartlands. In the afternoon explore this fascinating destination with your guide, including the Ganj-Ali-Khan complex (a 17th century caravanserai and bazaar from the Safavid period). The complex also includes a mint and a *hammam* (bathhouse); the latter is now an ethnographic museum displaying all the accoutrements one needed to visit the bathhouse in Safavid times. Also visit the 14th century Friday Mosque. The prayer chamber contains some splendid tilework.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 4 - Rayen, Mahan.

A full day excursion into the surrounding countryside to see the remote desert citadel of Rayen, now abandoned but full of atmosphere. Rayen has recently been granted UNESCO World Heritage status. Our visit includes the Palace of the Governors, the military quarters, the mosque and bazaar area. Continue to Mahan to visit the blue-tiled Mausoleum of Shah Nematollah-e-Vali, the great 14th century Sufi leader, and the Shahzadeh Garden (late 19th century) before returning in the late afternoon to Kerman.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 5 - By road from Kerman to Yazd.

Further sightseeing in Kerman before leaving for the city of Yazd. En route you will visit the **Zeid-ed-Din caravanserai**, dating from the Safavid period. Arrive in Yazd in the late afternoon.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 6 - Yazd.

A full day of sightseeing in Yazd, the centre for Iran's small Zoroastrian community who, seeking refuge from the invading Arabs, found a safe haven within its fortified walls. On this day you will visit one of the two abandoned Zoroastrian **Towers of Silence** dating back to the 18th century, where until some 40-50 years ago the dead were carried and left to decompose and be devoured by birds; and the active **Zoroastrian Fire Temple**, the fire of which has been burning for about 1,500 years. Among Yazd's Islamic sites is the **Friday Mosque** (1324 A.D.), with the highest portal and minarets in Iran. Other notable Islamic monuments in Yazd are the Seljuk shrine dedicated to the Twelve Shi'ite Imams; and **Ziaieyeh Theological School**, known as Zendan-e-Eskander or Alexander's Prison. There are, also, many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat-Abad Garden, with an 18th century feudal hexagonal house.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 7 - By road via Pasargadae to Shiraz.

In the morning drive from Shiraz to Abarkuh, a charming desert town where you will take tea in the shade of a 4,000 year old cypress tree. Continue to **Pasargadae**, pre-dating Persepolis, the site of the simple but imposing tomb of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire. Located in the beautiful plain of Dasht-e-Morghab, the site is dominated by the tomb, raised on its stepped platforms, but there are further interesting remains, including two audience houses and a building known as 'Solomon's Prison' (Zenjan-i Soleyman). Arrive in Shiraz in the afternoon.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 8 - Persepolis, Naqsh-e-Rostam, Shiraz. Fly to Isfahan.

This morning you will enjoy an excursion to **Persepolis**, one of the most important sites of the Ancient World, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings with remains of the palaces of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes, and its famous bas-reliefs, depicting kings and courtiers and gift-bearing representatives of tributary nations of the Persian Empire; also visit **Naqsh-e-Rostam** to see the fire temple and the Royal Tombs; plus seven magnificent Sassanian rock-reliefs (including Shapur the First's famous victory over the Roman Emperor Valerian). Return to Shiraz, where sightseeing will include some of the famous gardens of this city of "roses and nightingales", including the **Eram Garden** with its tomb of Iran's greatest lyric poet, Hafez, the pink-tiled 19th century **Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque**, and the main bazaar. In the evening take the short flight to Isfahan and transfer to your hotel.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 9 - Isfahan.

Morning sightseeing in the beautiful city of Isfahan, the 17th century capital of the Safavids, visiting the famous bridges of **Shahrestan** and **Sio-se-pol**, and the Armenian Quarter whose many churches include the important **Cathedral of Vank**. In the afternoon explore one of the world's grandest squares, the **Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan**, including the **Ali-Qapu Palace** with its enchanting music rooms and balcony overlooking the Maidan, from where the Safavid Kings watched polo games. Also visit two of Islamic world's greatest mosques – the **Sheikh Lotfollah** and the **Shah**, finishing with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world-famous.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 10 - Isfahan.

Further sightseeing in Isfahan includes the magnificent **Friday Mosque** (with the famous Uljaitu Mihrab of the Il-Khanid period), **the Harun-e-Velayat Shrine** and the **Ali Minaret**; also visit **Chehel-Sotun (Forty Columns) Palace** and **Hasht-Beheشت (Eight Paradise) Palace**, both set in beautiful gardens.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 11 - By road from Isfahan to Tehran.

Today you will drive back to Tehran, stopping en route at the charming town of **Natanz** to visit a beautiful Friday Mosque and the Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani. Continue to **Kashan** to visit one of the most important and ancient archaeological sites in Iran known as Tepe Sialk. The site was excavated in 1930s and dates back to 4,000 B.C. Artifacts found at this site adorn many major museums in the world. You will also visit the historical garden of Fin which was first planted during the Safavid period and kept alive with water from the nearby Sulaimanieh Spring. Following a visit to a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Taba-Tabai House with its beautiful stucco dome and inlaid mirror work, continue to Tehran via the city of Qom.

Meals included: Full breakfast, lunch, dinner.

DAY 12 - Tehran/London.

Transfer to the airport for departure flight to London.

Meals included: Full breakfast.