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— TRANSFORMING DREAMS INTO MEMORIES —

23 Day Iran in Depth



ESCORTED ITINERARY – PRE-SET DATES – NON-FLEXIBLE INCLUSIONS

A Celebrity Escorted Tour

Detailed Itinerary: Included meals are shown with the letters B, L and D. 12985DBL

Monday April 15: Arrival

Arrive into Tehran where you will be met and transferred to our hotel. In the afternoon visit the fabulous State's Jewels Museum. It showcases some of the magnificent jewellery belonging to the last kings of Iran, including the Darya-i Nur (Sea of Light), the largest uncut diamond in the world, and the 'Globe of Jewels', a map of the world in emerald, sapphire, ruby, and diamonds. Overnight Tehran (D)

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Tuesday April 16: Tehran Museums

Today is devoted to visiting some of Tehran's Museums, demonstrating the rich cultural heritage of the country. The visits will include the archaeological section of Iran's National Museum, displaying an authenticated collection of pre-historic and ancient artefacts with pottery dating back to 6-7 millennium BC, and the Reza Abbasi Museum where the exhibits of fine Iranian art are arranged chronologically from the 2nd millenium BC to the end of the Qajar era in the early 20th century. Overnight Tehran (B, L, D)

Wednesday April 17: Golestan Palace

This morning we visit the Golestan Palace and Museum Complex, the former residence of the 19th and early 20th century Qajar Kings of Iran, incorporating several museums including the Marble Throne Room. After a break for lunch we visit the Carpet Museum to see the extensive collection of old and new Persian carpets and rugs sourced from the major carpet-weaving centres of Iran. Overnight Tehran (B, L, D)

Thursday April 18: The Caspian Sea

Departing Tehran we travel north through the picturesque Elburz Mountains and then along the shores of the Caspian Sea via the port of Anzali. We stop for lunch overlooking the Caspian Sea before continuing to Astara and our hotel on the lake backing onto the mountains. Overnight Astara (B, L, D)

Friday April 19: Ardebil to Tabriz

A pleasant morning's drive brings us to Ardebil to visit the magnificent Mausoleum of Sheikh Saffi-eddin Ardebili, a widely revered Sufi Philosopher of the 14th century, who made Ardebil his home. He was the forefather of the well-known Safavid Kings of Iran and his mausoleum has been the mecca of thousands of pilgrims and dervishes throughout the centuries. Ardebil sits on a high plateau and if the day is clear we should have good views of Mt Sabalan on our way to Tabriz. Overnight Tabriz (B, L, D)

Saturday April 20: St Stephanos

We travel outside of Tabriz for a full day excursion to visit the Armenian church of St Stephanos, set amongst spectacular mountain scenery in the Aros River Valley. The church features typical Armenian architecture with a bell tower and cylindrical tower with a conical roof. Overnight Tabriz (B, L, D)

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Sunday April 21: Exploring Tabriz

This morning we visit the Blue Mosque, known in the world as the Turquoise of Islam, the Azerbaijan Museum, displaying a fine collection of pre-historic and historic artefacts found in the area, and the extensive bazaar. After a break for lunch, we take a short excursion to the intriguing troglodyte village of Kandovan, up in the heights of Mt Sahand, a volcanic mountain. Here the people have carved their houses in the rocks and still live in them as in ancient times. Overnight Tabriz (B, L, D)

Monday April 22: To Zanzan

Today we travel to Zanzan and visit the magnificent Mausoleum of Uljaitu, constructed during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Khoda Bandeh (1304-1330). Its huge dome, which is about 51 metres high, ranks amongst the largest in the world; the stucco-work, tile-work, and the designs decorating this monument make it unique. Overnight Zanzan (B, L, D)

Tuesday April 23: Takht-e-Soleiman

We embark on a full day's journey into the Zagros Mountains where we visit the site of Takht-e-Soleiman located in a broad and remote mountain valley. What remains are the massive stone walls and remnants of the thirty-eight watch towers, palaces, the fire temple and the Anahita temple, built around the conical crater lake mainly by the Sassanians in the 6th century. Overnight Zanzan (B, L, D)

Wednesday April 24: To Shiraz

This morning we return to Tehran by coach before boarding our domestic flight to Shiraz. Overnight Shiraz (B, L, D)

Thursday April 25: Firuzabad

We travel south to the city known today as Firuzabad to visit the enormous palace of Ardashir, of unique architectural design with its huge arch and three domes. On the ancient road to Firuzabad we pass by two bas-reliefs, depicting Ardashir defeating the Parthian king Artabanus and receiving the crown of kingship from Ahuramazda, as well as the Qaleh-i Dokhtar, built by Ardashir as a fortress guarding the entrance to the valley. Overnight Shiraz (B, L, D)

Friday April 26: Bishapur

Today we travel to Bishapur to visit the site of the Sassanian city built by Shapur 1st (241-273 A.D.), the second Sassanian king. We investigate the building complex which includes six

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Sassanian rock-reliefs at Tang-e-Chogan, commemorating Shapur's victories over the Romans and other adversaries. Overnight Shiraz (B, L, D)

Saturday April 27: Exploring Shiraz

In the morning we visit the tomb of the great 14th century poet Hafez. Set in a peaceful garden, the marble tombstone is engraved with a verse from the poet and many Iranians treat the tomb as a site of pilgrimage. We visit the wonderful Bagh-i-Eram garden with a grand residence overlooking the fountains and botanic gardens; and Nasr el-Molk mosque with its unusually deep blue tiling, finely carved pillars and exquisite stained glass. The afternoon is free for further shopping in the bazaar or visiting more of the many monuments of Shiraz. Overnight Shiraz (B, L, D)

Sunday April 28: Persepolis

We depart for Persepolis, one of the most important sites of the Ancient World, is our destination today. It is 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. At Naghsh-e-Rostam we see the Achaemenid fire temple Ka'be-Zardosht and Royal Tombs plus seven magnificent Sassanian rock-reliefs (including Shapur the First's famous victory over the Roman Emperor Valerian). Our hotel is conveniently located next to the site at Persepolis. Overnight Persepolis (B, L, D)

Monday April 29: Pasargadae

On the way to Yazd we visit Pasargadae, the site of the tomb and remains of palaces of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, all located in the magnificent Dasht-e-Morghab. Driving through the typical desert town of Abarkuh we stop and have tea under the shade of a 4,000-year old Cypress tree before arriving into Yazd and checking into our hotel. Overnight Yazd (B, L, D)

Tuesday April 30: Zoroastrian Yazd

The Zoroastrian religion was the main religion of Iran from at least Sassanian times and perhaps even earlier. It emphasises the manifestation of divinity in nature, and its centres of worship are nature itself or the fire temples in each city or town. Today in Yazd, the centre for Iran's small remaining Zoroastrian community, we visit one of the two Zoroastrian abandoned Towers of Silence (Dakhma), and the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, the fire of which has been burning for about 1500 years. Among Yazd's Islamic sites is the Friday Mosque, with the

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highest portal and minarets in Iran. There are also many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat Abad Garden, which we see this afternoon. Overnight Yazd (B, L, D)

Wednesday May 1: At Leisure

Today is at leisure to explore Yazd independently. You may like to explore the old city where most of the buildings are constructed from sun-dried mud bricks. Take note of the brown *Bagdirs* or wind catchers on every rooftop that ventilate the houses and provide a natural form of air-conditioning. Overnight Yazd (B, D)

Thursday May 2: To Isfahan

Leaving Yazd we drive to Isfahan, with a stop en-route at the village of Meybod where we visit the fine Zilou museum and ceramic shops. We continue to Na'in, another charming desert town and visit the 10th century Friday Mosque, and the 17th century Pirnia House and Ethnographic Museum, with a walk through the old part of town. After a break for lunch we head to Isfahan and check into our hotel. Overnight Isfahan (B, L, D)

Friday May 3: Exploring Isfahan

Our full day tour of the beautiful city of Isfahan commences with a survey of the city's three famous bridges – Shahrestan, Khajou and Sio-se-pol – each with its own design and architectural features. We also visit the Armenian Quarter and several of its churches, including the important Cathedral of Vank, decorated in a mixture of Islamic tile designs, Christian imagery and wonderful frescoes. In the afternoon, we visit one of the world's grandest squares, the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan, including the Ali Qapu Palace with its balcony overlooking the Maidan. We also visit two of the Islamic world's greatest mosques – the Sheikh Lotfollah and the Shah – both with magnificent architecture and tile work. Our touring today concludes with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar. Overnight Isfahan (B, L, D)

Saturday May 4: Isfahan

Our sightseeing in Isfahan continues with a visit to the magnificent Friday Mosque, with the famous Uljaitu Mihrab (Prayer Niche) of the Il-Khanid period. The Friday Mosque is considered a museum of a thousand years of Persian religious architecture. Our exploration continues to the Chehel Sotun Palace, where its wooden columns reflected in the surface of the pool give its name 'The Palace of Forty Columns'. In the afternoon we have free time to return to the main Maidan for a further visit to the shops and bazaar. Overnight Isfahan (B, L, D)

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Sunday May 5: At Leisure

Today is at leisure to further your explorations of Isfahan. Overnight Isfahan (B, D)

Monday May 6: Return to Tehran

Today we return to Tehran by road, firstly stopping at the town of Natanz to visit a beautiful Islamic mosque and dervish complex. Next we travel to Kashan, to visit one of the most important and ancient archaeological sites in Iran, the ziggurat known as Tepe Sialk. We 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. A museum on the site displays artefacts from nearby Tepe Sialk. Before departing Kashan we visit a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Borujerdi House with its beautiful stucco and painted decoration. Arriving in Tehran this afternoon, we check into our hotel with time to freshen up before we gather for our farewell meal. Overnight Tehran (B, L, D)

Tuesday May 7: Departure

Emirates Airlines has several flights departing Tehran to Dubai throughout the day. Your tour consultant can assist with arranging the best possible connections and booking a late check out at an extra cost if required. (B)



Celebrity Host: Dr John Tidmarsh

The former president of the University of Sydney's Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation, and a former lecturer in the Department of Archaeology.

Dr John Tidmarsh is an archaeologist who has conducted excavations in Syria, Jordan, Greece, and Cyprus. He is currently Co-Director of the University of Sydney excavations at Pella in Jordan and also Co-Director of the Australian Mission to Jebel Khalid, Syria. He is an Honorary Associate, Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Sydney and was previously Senior Investigator

of the University of Sydney excavations in Torone, Greece and Associate Director of the University of Sydney excavations at Paphos, Cyprus.

He has travelled widely in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East and since the 1980s has led numerous tours to Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Oman, and Greece.

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His main interests are in the art, archaeology and history of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic period in the east, and in the Islamic World. He has written many articles and conference papers on these areas and has co-authored several books on the excavations at Jebel Khalid in Syria. He is soon to complete his book on the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods at Pella in Jordan.

John has a BA (Hons), MA (Hons) and PhD from the University of Sydney where he was previously tutor, then part-time lecturer in Classical Archaeology. He is a former President of the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation at that university.

He is also a Clinical Endocrinologist (MBBS, FRACP) who worked previously in private practice and at Bankstown Hospital in Sydney, and is now at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. We asked John, what motivates your passion for travel?

“Since I first joined the excavation team in 1978 at Pella in Jordan I have become addicted to travelling and working in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

Along with my fascination for the detective work and discovery which archaeological excavation entails, one of my greatest joys is introducing my tour groups to worlds very different from those they have encountered while travelling in the USA and Europe. It is a source of real pleasure for me to see those first-timers to the Middle East, who often approach the region with slight trepidation though they may have travelled widely elsewhere, become quickly entranced by the marvellous mountain and desert landscapes and monuments that these countries possess and, more importantly, by the unsurpassed friendliness and hospitality of both Arabs and Persians alike.”

End of Services.

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