

Iran: The Ancient Land of Persia
May 2 – May 20, 2011

ITINERARY

Cheryl Walker
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Please note that we expect this program to change so that we can accommodate impromptu events, so be warned and be prepared! Mr. Jalil Charkhian will keep you updated en route.

May 2, 2011: Monday - Depart North America

8.00pm. Please plan on arriving at JFK International Airport at least 3 hours before departure. Please present your Turkish Airlines E-tickets at the check-in counter. ***Your E-ticket receipt was sent with your final documents. You may need to show your E-ticket receipt for all flights, so please always keep it in a safe place.*** The agent will then be able to check your luggage all the way through to Tehran. Please make sure that your luggage receipts read that your luggage has been checked in all the way through to Tehran (IKA). Please note you will not have access to your luggage while you are in Istanbul. Women should please make sure to have your Iranian clothing and a head scarf ready upon arrival in Tehran.

We have provided Turkish Airlines with your frequent flyer number if the number was provided to us. Upon check-in please make sure your frequent flyer number is in your reservation. We strongly recommend keeping all of your boarding passes until you have confirmed the miles have been credited to your account.

When you check-in, the Turkish agent will give you two boarding passes: one for the flight to Istanbul and one for the flight to Tehran. Please put the Istanbul to Tehran boarding pass in a secure spot.

Please be sure that you are familiar with the current regulations with regards to carrying liquids and gels. You are permitted to carry-on with you bottles of small containers of liquids or gels that are three ounces or less in your carry-on luggage as long as they all such containers fit in a one-liter clear plastic bag. All other liquids or gels must be placed in your checked luggage.

11.00pm. Depart JFK International Airport on Turkish Airlines flight # 12 for Istanbul. There are a total of 10 travelers from the group on this flight including you.

May 3: Tuesday – Istanbul, Turkey

3.40pm. Arrive at the Istanbul airport. Upon arrival at the airport please refer to the airport monitors to check the departure information for your onward flight to Tehran.

If you were not given a boarding pass in New York for your onward flight to Tehran you will need to go to a check-in desk to collect your boarding pass.

On the flight to Tehran you will usually be asked to fill out an immigration form and a customs form. Do not worry too much about detailing every single item on the customs form, as you are unlikely to be

searched, although it is certainly possible. You will find your Iran visa number written in the bottom half of your Iran visa.

9.30pm. Depart Istanbul on Turkish Airlines flight # 874 for Tehran. There are a total of 13 travelers from the group on this flight including you.

May 4: Wednesday – Tehran, Iran	B,L,D
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2.00am. Arrive in Tehran. **Please note that Iran requires that all non-Iranians entering the country be fingerprinted upon arrival in Tehran. This can be a lengthy process which requires passengers to relinquish their passports to Iranian officials and to wait for what is sometimes a long period of time while individual passport information is entered into a computer and four separate digital fingerprint photographs are taken for each passenger. Once this is completed your passport will be returned to you.**

Once this process is complete, please collect your luggage, clear customs and enter the arrivals area. Once in this area look for your Distant Horizons escort, Mr. Jalil Charkhian, who will be holding a sign with **“Archaeological Institute of America Tours and The Explorers Club Travelers”** on it for easy identification. Transfer immediately to the *Laleh Hotel*.

If you are unable to locate Mr. Charkhian please call his mobile phone at 0935-248-7432.

Upon arrival at the Laleh Hotel you will be given your room keys as quickly as possible and can then go immediately to your room. We will arrange for porters to bring your luggage up or if you like to get it quickly and its on wheels, you might consider taking it with you.

You are at leisure until you have breakfast which is served from 7.00am to 10.00am in the coffee shop on the lobby level. Please feel free to eat at any time before the introductory briefing.

11.00am. Meet for a trip orientation and introductory lecture that Dr. Margaret Root and Jalil Charkhian will conduct. Exact location to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian.

Today lunch is at the hotel coffee shop.

After lunch visit the Archaeological Museum, with a fine collection that includes a many famous sculptures of the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian empires. A highlight is the colossal statue of Darius the Great, made for the temple of Heliopolis in Egypt and transported to Susa to adorn a monumental gateway there.

7.30pm. Welcome dinner at the hotel’s Persian restaurant – the Namakdoon Restaurant.

May 5: Thursday - Tehran	B,L,D
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7.00am–10.00am. **Breakfast is served in the coffee shop on the lobby level. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).**

Enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Tehran, concentrating on its excellent museums. Compared to Iran’s other urban centers, Tehran is not considered an old city. Tehran remained relatively unimportant until it was made the national capital by Agha Mohammad Khan, founder of the Qajar Dynasty, who was

crowned in Tehran in 1795. It was expanded by his successor Fath-Ali Shah, who built the Golestan Palace. Today it is a bustling modern metropolis.

In the morning, visit the Carpet Museum where some of the finest examples of Persian carpets are on display. The Carpet Museum is a short distance from the hotel (1/4 mile) and it is probably faster to walk than drive but the bus will be available for anyone who prefers to be driven.

Continue on to visit the Reza Abbasi Museum, which is home to a superior collection of Persian miniatures.

Enjoy lunch at the Ferdowsi Hotel Restaurant.

Afternoon visit to the Golestan Palace (Palace of Flowers), located on Khordad Square. When Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (1742-1797) became king, he chose Tehran as the new capital and the Golestan Palace became the official residence of the royal family. Both the *eyvan-i takht-i marmar* ("Terrace of the Marble Throne") and the *Talar-i a'ina* ("Hall of Mirrors") are famous for the spectacular mirror work that covers their walls.

End the day at the Glass and Ceramics Museum, which is housed in a building dating to the Ghajar period that was built as a private residence.

Return to the hotel driving past the former U.S. Embassy.

Dinner at the hotel's European Restaurant, the Rotisserie, located on the top floor of the hotel.

May 6: Friday - Takab	B,L,D
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7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast is served in the coffee shop on the lobby level. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing.

8.00am. Depart Tehran to drive about three hours north to Soltaniye, known for its mausoleum of the Mongol Sultan Oljeitu Khodabande with one of the largest domes in the world. The mausoleum was originally built as the final resting place of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, but this never came to pass. The Mongol sultan was left with a vast mausoleum and no one to occupy it. The building was converted into the sultan's own tomb, and he was buried here in about 1317. The decorations and patterns carved on the plastered walls of this monument have inspired geometric and floral patterns on Persian textiles.

Lunch today is at the Grand Zanjan Hotel.

Continue on 1.5 hours to Takht-e Soleiman (Solomon's Throne) to enjoy the well-preserved remains of a large fortified settlement built around a small lake on a hilltop. The original 38 fortified towers along the wall have worn down to the same height as the wall, but the wall itself is still largely intact and the south gateway remains in remarkably good condition. Takht-e Soleiman was a great Sassanian religious center, and the oldest remaining structures here are the ruins of a palace and a substantial fire-altar. This is the place where the Warriors' Fire, one of the three most sacred fires of Zoroastrianism, was kept. It is also one of the many places that claim to be the birthplace of Zoroaster.

Drive 30 minutes to check-in at the **Takab Ranji Hotel** for dinner and overnight.

May 7: Saturday - Hamadan

B,L,D

Please note that today is a religious mourning holiday. It is the martyrdom of Hazrat-e Fatemeh, the Prophet's daughter. Almost all shops, banks and offices will be closed today. We have confirmed that all of the sites scheduled for today will be open.

7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast is served in the hotel's restaurant. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing.

8.00am. Morning drive to Hamadan (about three hours), which in antiquity linked Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau. It was here that the Median capital, Ecbatana (Hegmataneh), was founded. At the height of its glory as the Achaemenid summer capital, it was described as one of the most opulent of cities with splendid palaces, buildings plated with precious metals, and seven layers of town walls (the inner two coated in gold and silver).

Upon arrival in Hamadan visit Ganj Nameh ("Treasury Story"), a rocky peak (now accessible for visitors of all ages!) looking down over the summer pass through the Mount Elvand. This passage has been traversed from time immemorial by pastoral nomads with their flocks. One of the inscriptions is attributed to Darius the Great, while its mate is in the name of Xerxes (486-465 BC). The inscriptions were written in cuneiform script in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian. Probably originally encrusted with gold, the inscriptions praise the god of light and wisdom, Ahura Mazda, patron deity of the Achaemenid kings and god of the Zoroastrian faith.

Today lunch is at N'al-Eshkan, a local restaurant in Hamadan.

After lunch, drive about one hour south of Hamadan to visit one of the most important Median sites, Tepe Nush-e Jan with its extraordinary fire temple dating from the 8th century BC.

Return to Hamadan and check-in at the *Bu-Ali Hotel*.

Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

May 8: Sunday - Kermanshah

B,L,D

6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel's coffee shop or designated breakfast area located on the lobby level of the hotel. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing.

8.30am. Spend the day exploring the area around Hamadan, including the important Median archaeological site of Tepe Ecbatana, which was the capital of Media and the summer residence of the Achaemenid kings and one of the residences of the Parthian kings. According to ancient Greek writers, the city was founded in about 678 B.C. by Deioces, who was the first king of the Medes. Ecbatana was captured from the Median ruler Astyages by the Cyrus the Great in 550 B.C., and it was taken from the last Achaemenid ruler by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. The site of the ancient city lies partly within the modern city of Hamadan and has never been excavated.

Also visit Gonbad-e Alavyyan, built during the 12th century when Hamadan was a major Seljuk capital. The tombs of two members of the powerful Alavian family, who continued to rule Hamadan long after the Seljuk period, are housed inside. The interior ornamentation from the Ilkhanid era enraptured Robert Byron in *Road to Oxiana*.

Return to the hotel for lunch before departing for Kermanshah.

Drive 90 minutes to visit Kangavar, where excavations have revealed the remains of a temple dedicated to Anahita, the goddess of water and abundance, that dates back to Seleucid or Parthian times.

Continue on a little over an hour to the rock-carved monument of Darius the Great at Bisitun, which provided the key to the decipherment of cuneiform and is a designated UNESCO World Heritage site that features remains from prehistoric times to the Median, Achaemenid, Sassanian and Ilkhanid periods. Please note that the site occasionally has scaffolding around it for preservation work. Although there currently is no scaffolding at the site this could change prior to your arrival.

Afterwards, drive 30 minutes to Kermanshah and check-in at the *Jamshid Hotel*.

Tonight, dinner is at the hotel.

May 9: Monday - Yazd	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

After breakfast, begin sightseeing with the Sassanian rock carvings of Taq-e Bostan, where a series of bas-reliefs and grottoes have been carved into the cliff face. The grottoes are unique in Sassanian art and although it seems likely that three were planned, only two were actually completed. The larger and more complex of the two is generally dated to the reign of Pirooz (457-484) or Khosrow II (590-628).

10.30am. Transfer to the airport for your flight to Tehran. Mr. Jalil Charkhian will have the tickets for this flight and will assist you with check-in. Please note that security is tight and women and men will go through security separately.

We have arranged for box lunches from the hotel today.

12.35pm. Depart Kermanshah on Iran Air flight # 284 for Tehran. A snack will be served on the flight.

1.45pm. Arrive in Tehran.

Upon arrival in Tehran drive to the Bank Melli to view the Iranian crown jewels in the bank’s vault. The crown jewels are said to be one of the largest, most dazzling, and valuable jewel collections in the world. The collection consists of some forty cases with most of the items in the collection dating back to the Safavid Dynasty that ruled Iran from A.D. 1502-1736. The Peacock Throne (among many other jeweled pieces) is unbelievable in its stunning beauty and craftsmanship. Please note that this museum can get crowded.

Return to the airport for your flight to Yazd. Mr. Jalil Charkhian will have the tickets for this flight and will assist you with check-in. Please note that security is tight and women and men will go through security separately.

6.35pm. Depart Tehran on Iran Air flight # 298 for Yazd.

7.45pm. Arrive in Yazd.

Upon arrival, transfer to the very traditional *Moshir Garden Hotel* for dinner and overnight. This hotel is the first Iranian “garden hotel.” It was built utilizing traditional and native architecture along with an old garden collection related to the Ghajar period. The hotel has an old building, mansion, hall, threshold, vestibule, corridor, orangery, little garden, crypt, underground water reservoir, wind-tower and pavilion. **Please note that rooms vary in size and views.** Admire its beautiful garden with a 13,000-square-meter area that has old trees such as mulberry, fig, pine, and pomegranate, along with a flowing stream.

May 10: Tuesday - Yazd	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Marco Polo visited Yazd on his way to China and called it the “good and noble city of Yazd.” Located in the heart of Iran, between the Kavir and Lut deserts, Yazd was a major stop on the international caravan routes to Central Asia and India. The architecture of Yazd is perhaps the most traditionally Persian to be found, preserved by the dry climate and spared the devastations of the Mongols. Views from all over the city reveal sun-baked roofs and numerous wind towers. These wind towers are seen all over Iran, but are most highly developed in Yazd. Slatted towers capture the slightest desert breeze, pooling it down to the lower level where it is cooled by passing over water and circulated through the house.

Begin the morning at the Dowlat-abad Gardens, once home to the former governor of the city. Comprising a large garden and buildings, this well-known complex is built in a traditional Persian style. Admire the beautiful gardens as well as the main building which offers a chance to see how the “*badgirs*” (wind-catchers) work and to learn more about residential Persian architecture in the desert.

Continue on to visit the Friday Mosque, whose the tiled portal is crowned by the tallest twin minarets in the country. Like many early mosques, this one was constructed on the site of a Sassanid fire temple. Yazd’s Friday Mosque was built over a 40-year period from 1324 to 1365 and is probably the best preserved 14th-century mosque in Iran. The portal’s façade is decorated from top to bottom with dazzling tile work, predominantly blue in color.

Enjoy a walking tour through the bazaar and covered streets of the old quarter of Yazd. The weavers of Yazd were famous for their silk brocades that can still be found, although weavers are finding it difficult to compete with modern factory techniques.

This afternoon, lunch is at the very traditional Hammam-e-Khan Restaurant.

After lunch, spend the afternoon concentrating on the Zoroastrian religion, which at one time was the state creed but faded away after the Arab conquest. There are about 400,000 Zoroastrians left in the world, of which about 60,000 live in and around Yazd. Zoroastrians are followers of Zoroaster, who was probably born about 550 B.C. in what is now Afghanistan. It was one of the first religions to postulate an omnipotent, invisible god. Zoroastrians worship fire as a symbol of God, and keep eternal flames burning at their temples. Begin by driving just outside of Yazd to a small village called Taft, where a large number of Zoroastrians still live. Walk through this medieval town along narrow streets to their main fire temple – a simple building where a flame is always lit.

From here return to Yazd and visit the Ateshkade. It is said that the sacred flame here has been burning since about A.D. 470 and was transferred from its original site to this site in 1940. It attracts Zoroastrians from around the world – the majority of whom now live elsewhere in Iran, India or Pakistan. Zoroastrians believe in the purity of the elements and will not bury or cremate their dead as they believe these practices pollute the Earth and atmosphere, respectively. Until recently, the dead have been exposed on ‘towers of silence’ where vultures soon dispose of the remains.

The final stop for the day, at sunset, will be at two of these ‘towers of silence’ which were used until very recently. Around these two impressive towers are the remains of ceremonial buildings that Zoroastrians used before and after the dead were left at the tops of the towers.

Dinner this evening at the hotel.

May 11: Wednesday - Shiraz	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Morning drive to Shiraz (about six hours), stopping en route at Pasargadae, a site that pre-dates Persepolis. The white limestone tomb of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, stands apart from the scattered remains of gardens, palaces, and temples at the site.

Lunch at Apadana Restaurant, a very simple restaurant, near Pasargadae today.

After lunch, begin exploring the sprawling site of Pasargadae, focusing on the remains of the palace.

Continue driving two hours to Shiraz. Upon arrival, check-in to the *Homa Hotel Shiraz*.

This evening, dinner will be at the hotel.

May 12: Thursday - Shiraz	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Early this morning, drive about one hour outside of Shiraz to Persepolis, ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire and perhaps one of the most beautiful and spectacular archaeological sites surviving today. It is truly the symbol of ancient Persia (if not modern-day Iran) and is an unbelievable site to behold!

This afternoon, lunch will be at the lovely Laneh Tavous Restaurant.

After lunch, return to Shiraz to explore the city. Visit the Fars Museum. This octagonal pavilion was originally built by Karim Khan for official receptions, and it now houses a collection relating to the life of Karim Khan and other historic artifacts relating to the province. Perhaps more interesting than the museum is the beautiful building itself, with its charming tiled panels and painted roof.

Spend the balance of the day at the wonderful bazaar, considered by many to be the finest in Iran and a wonderful way to explore the heart and spirit of Shiraz.

Dinner this evening at the delightful Shatterabbas Restaurant, which serves superb Persian cuisine.

After dinner, pass by the famous tomb of Shah Cheragh, brother of Imam Reza, which is beautifully lit at night. The tomb of this 9th-century martyr draws thousands of pilgrims annually and is the principal pilgrimage center in the province of Fars. Tashi Khatin, queen of Fars in the 14th century, was the first to build a shrine over the remains of Shah Cheragh, although the present structure with its distinctive bulbous dome dates from the 19th century with recent restorations.

May 13: Friday - Shiraz	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Morning visit to Naqsh-e Rostam, located near Persepolis, which contains the carved tombs of four Achaemenid rulers: Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. There are also eight reliefs of the later Sassanian dynasty, most of them cut into the stone below the façades of the tombs. These magnificent reliefs depict various scenes of imperial conquest and ritual piety. An enigmatic ritual tower structure from Achaemenid times completes the religious environment here. It bears a lengthy inscription of the Sassanian king Shapur I (A.D. 240-271), who thereby attaches himself to the proud legacy of the Achaemenids. The text, written in Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek, details Shapur’s diplomatic and military maneuvers against the Romans.

Time permitting, we are also planning a stop at Istakhr, an ancient Sassanian royal residence.

After lunch today at the Apadana Hotel’s restaurant, return to Persepolis for a second visit to this magnificent site.

Return to Shiraz to spend the balance of the day at one of the best preserved of the Shiraz houses, which is the ancestral home of the Qaqam family (known locally as “Narenjestan”). The Qaqams were originally merchants who came to Shiraz from Qazvin, but soon became active in government serving under the Zand, Ghajar, and Pahlavi Dynasties. Narenjestan preserves the elegance and refinement enjoyed by upper-class Persian families in the 19th century.

Dinner is at the local Soofi Restaurant this evening.

May 14: Saturday - Isfahan	B,L,D
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6.30am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the hotel’s coffee shop or designated breakfast area. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day’s sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

We have an early start this morning to learn more about Shiraz, known for its nightingales, poetry, and (in times past) its wine. Begin at the tomb of the celebrated poet Hafez, located in a small garden. The marble tombstone engraved with a long verse from the poet’s works was placed here inside a small shrine by Karim Khan in 1773. The poet lived in Shiraz his entire life (1300-1389) and is well known to Iranians.

An early lunch today will be at the hotel.

After lunch, begin driving five to six hours to Isfahan.

Upon arrival, transfer to the *Abbasi Hotel*, a converted caravanserai. The large double-storied caravanserai was originally constructed for the students and professors of the college, but was later transformed into a wonderful hotel where guests can drink tea inside a garden courtyard with the full view of the Madrassa Chahar Bagh's magnificent dome.

This evening enjoy a buffet dinner at the hotel.

May 15: Sunday - Isfahan	B,L,D
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7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the Chehel-Sotun Restaurant. *The restaurant has two floors and only the second floor is used for breakfast. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).*

With its long history, Isfahan is the most celebrated of all Iranian cities and a marvel of urban planning. In the 11th century the Saljuqs made the city their capital. They transformed the Friday mosque into an impressive congregational mosque, centered on an open courtyard, which became the standard type for all Iranian mosques. Even after Isfahan ceased to be the capital with the arrival of the Mongols in the mid-13th century, rulers, governors, and wealthy patrons continued to expand, renovate, and refine the mosque, which stands today as a veritable “museum” of structure and design.

Spend the day in the area around the city's Royal Square. In the late 16th century, the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I (reigned 1587-1629) consolidated his control and initiated one of the world's grandest experiments in city planning by moving the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan in 1598. He personally supervised the construction of mosques, palaces, bazaars, and gardens over the next thirty years and strongly encouraged members of the ruling elite to partake in the massive project. The central focus of the new capital is the immense Maydan-i Shah, or Royal Square, now referred to as Maydan-i Imam. The square is actually a huge rectangle enclosed by double-storeyed arcades.

Four jewels of 17th-century architecture adorn the sides of the square, symbolizing the political, economic, and religious spheres of Safavid Iran. On the north side is the entrance to the royal Qaysariyya Bazaar, which links the Saljuq congregational mosque to the Maydan-i Shah. The Lutfallah Mosque, constructed between 1603 and 1617, is located on the eastern side of the square and may have served as a private chapel for the imperial family. The interior of its domed ceiling has the finest faience tile work of 17th-century Iran. The inscriptions were executed by Ali Riza Abbasi, the greatest calligrapher of the Safavid period. On the west is the Ali Qapu Palace, one of several royal pavilions that comprised the Safavid palace precinct, and on the southern side stands the towering portal of the Shah Mosque, a monument to the grand vision of Shah Abbas the Great, who died shortly before its completion.

Lunch at the Bastani Restaurant.

The afternoon is spent exploring the bazaar of Isfahan and learning more about traditional crafts in Iran. See carpets, meet a well-known painter of miniatures, and wander through aisles of old copper and brassware, gold jewelry, lacquered boxes, and many other wonderful items!

Enjoy dinner this evening at the Aseman Hotel's Revolving Restaurant, located on the banks of the river and overlooking the entire city.

May 16: Monday - Isfahan**B,L,D**

7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the Chehel-Sotun Restaurant. *The restaurant has two floors and only the second floor is used for breakfast.* Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Planned stops today include the Hasht Behesht, located in the center of the Garden of Nightingales (the Bagh-e Bulbul), one of Isfahan's two surviving Safavid pavilions. 'Hasht Behesht' translates as 'Eight Paradises' and refers to a Timurid palace building type consisting of two storeys of four corner rooms around a central domed space. In Isfahan, the corner rooms are octagonal, forming massive pillars that define four large openings leading to large porches in the south, east and west, and an iwan in the north. The vault of the central space is detailed with polychrome muqarnas and is capped with a lantern. Nineteenth century engravings reveal that the interior was once covered in tiles and wall paintings that have since been removed. Some of the original mirror mosaic remains on the vault.

Along with the Ali Qapu and Chihil Sutun, the Hasht Behesht was restored by IsMEO – Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente for NOCHMI – the National Organization for Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran. The project, completed in 1977, received an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1980.

Drive to the Armenian quarter of Isfahan, known as New Julfa. This dates from the time of Shah Abbas, who set up this colony of Christians from the town of Julfa and named it New Julfa. Explore the area on foot, including a visit to the Vank Cathedral.

Lunch this afternoon will be at the Khan-Gostar Restaurant in the Armenian/Julfa quarter.

En route to Isfahan's Armenian quarter, admire some of the five bridges crossing the Zayanda-rud River at Isfahan. Perhaps the most beautiful is the two-storey Khaju Bridge, constructed by Shah Abbas II in about 1650. It is essentially a bridge superimposed upon a dam, 436 feet long, and supported by twenty-four stone arches.

In the afternoon, drive to the 17th-century Chihil-Sutun (Forty Columns) Palace, one of several royal pavilions reserved for royal receptions and audiences. Here the walls and ceilings are covered with frescoes and paintings, and the superb wooden roof of the porch is painted with a series of geometric decorations interspersed with flowers. The roof was waterproofed by covering it with a fresh layer of beaten egg every year, the weight of which has caused many others to collapse.

Dinner this evening will be at the Shahrazad Restaurant, a 10-minute walk from the hotel.

May 17: Tuesday - Isfahan**B,L,D**

7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the Chehel-Sotun Restaurant. *The restaurant has two floors and only the second floor is used for breakfast.* Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).

Begin the day at the Friday Mosque, a museum of brick and tiled ivans (vaulted halls), vaulted ceilings, and lofty domes. The complex displays more than 800 years of Persian religious architecture, from the 11th to the 18th centuries, and is truly one of the world's greatest mosques. It was built using a traditional plan with four ivans placed on the axes of a central courtyard. The northwestern ivan was originally

constructed ca. 1121 during the Saljuq period, although its tiled surface decoration dates from the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn in the late 17th century. The mosque also includes what is considered the finest brick domed chamber anywhere, which was built in 1088. It also houses the most remarkable stucco mihrab (niche used to indicate the direction of Mecca for worshippers), commissioned by Sultan Uljaitu, the patron of the mausoleum in Sultaniya.

We will also visit the Ali Mosque and Minaret, which was built during the rule of Saljuq Sultan Sanjar (1118-1157) in the mid-12th century. The minaret retains its Saljuq decorative brickwork, while the mosque was largely rebuilt and redecorated during the rule of Safavid Shah Ismail I (1501-1524).

Continue on to the shrine of Harun-e-Vellayat, an important pilgrimage site containing some high-quality frescoes and, in the courtyard, mosaics of Khomeini and Khamenei.

After lunch at the local Partikan Restaurant, return to the bazaar to continue exploring and learning about traditional Iranian crafts.

Dinner this evening will be at the Chehel-Sotun Restaurant of the Abbasi Hotel.

May 18: Wednesday - Tehran

B,L,D

7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast will be served in the Chehel-Sotun Restaurant. *The restaurant has two floors and only the second floor is used for breakfast. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing (time to be confirmed by Jalil Charkhian).*

After breakfast, begin the return trip to Tehran, a total drive of approximately eight hours. Stop at Abyaneh, an ancient and picturesque village, designated an Iranian Cultural Heritage site, a drive which takes a little more than an hour over a mountainous road. Watching women riding donkeys in colorful dress, one truly feels as if one has stepped back in time!

Drive about 1.25 hours to the oasis town of Kashan, stopping en route at some extraordinary private homes that have been left empty but are currently being restored. Admire the beautiful stucco domes, the fine wall paintings, and the inlaid mirror work.

Upon arrival in Kashan, enjoy lunch at the Amir Kabir Hotel.

After lunch, visit the historical Garden of Fin, which was first planted during the Safavid period and kept alive with water from the nearby Sulaimanieh Spring. This beautiful garden was expanded by the Zand and Qajar monarchs, with many open pavilions added. A museum on-site displays artifacts from nearby Teppe Sialk. Also, visit a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Taba-Tabai House. Admire its beautiful stucco dome and inlaid mirror work, with some of the best examples of existing “*badgirs*” (wind-catchers).

Continue on to the site of Sialk. The two large mounds here were excavated by the French Archaeological Service in the 1930's and the site has revealed numerous varieties of pottery and domestic implements of clay, stone, and bone from as early as the 4th century B.C. It appears to have been sacked and deserted in the 8th century B.C. You can still see the outlines of various mud-brick buildings and a large number of potsherds embedded throughout the two mounds.

Continue driving about 3.5 hours to Tehran, stopping at the Tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini (time permitting). Upon arrival, check-in to the **Laleh Hotel**.

Tonight dinner is at the hotel.

May 19: Thursday - Tehran

B,L,D

7.00am–10.00am. Breakfast is served in the coffee shop on the lobby level. Please feel free to eat at any time before departing for the day's sightseeing.

This morning drive to the seldom-visited Sa'ad Abad Palace and enjoy the Green Palace, which houses some of the most beautiful carpets from various provinces of Iran. Many of these were commissioned by Reza Shah himself.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant today in the Darband area of Tehran.

Return to the hotel for some time at leisure. Rooms have been reserved until departure early tomorrow morning for the Imam Khomeini Airport.

Special farewell dinner this evening.

Return to the hotel to rest before departure from the hotel for a Turkish Airlines flight bound for Istanbul.

May 20: Friday – Istanbul

3.30am. Depart the hotel for the airport for your flight to Istanbul.

Upon arrival at the Tehran airport say goodbye to Mr. Jalil Charkhian. Please proceed inside the terminal and present your Turkish Airlines E-tickets at the check-in counter. ***Your E-ticket receipt was sent with your final documents. You may need to show your E-ticket receipt for all flights, so please always keep it in a safe place.***

We have provided Turkish Airlines with your United Airlines Mileage Plus number if it was provided to us. Upon check-in please make sure your United Airlines Mileage Plus number is in your reservation. We strongly recommend keeping all of your boarding passes until you have confirmed the miles have been credited to your account.

Please be sure that you are familiar with the current regulations with regards to carrying liquids and gels. You are permitted to carry-on with you bottles of small containers of liquids or gels that are three ounces or less in your carry-on luggage as long as they all such containers fit in a one-liter clear plastic bag. All other liquids or gels must be placed in your checked luggage.

7.00am. Depart Tehran on Turkish Airlines flight # 879 for Istanbul. There are a total of 12 travelers from the group on this flight including you.

8.55am. Arrive in Istanbul. Upon arrival you will need to clear immigration, collect your luggage and clear customs. You are under your own arrangements while in Istanbul.

May 21: Saturday – Istanbul

You are under your own arrangements while in Istanbul.

May 22: Sunday – Istanbul

You are under your own arrangements while in Istanbul.

May 23: Monday – Return North America

2.15pm. Please plan on arriving at the Istanbul International Airport at least 3 hours before departure. Please present your Turkish Airlines E-tickets at the check-in counter. ***Your E-ticket receipt was sent with your final documents. You may need to show your E-ticket receipt for all flights, so please always keep it in a safe place.***

We have provided Turkish Airlines with your frequent flyer number if the number was provided to us. Upon check-in please make sure your frequent flyer number is in your reservation. We strongly recommend keeping all of your boarding passes until you have confirmed the miles have been credited to your account.

Please be sure that you are familiar with the current regulations with regards to carrying liquids and gels. You are permitted to carry-on with you bottles of small containers of liquids or gels that are three ounces or less in your carry-on luggage as long as they all such containers fit in a one-liter clear plastic bag. All other liquids or gels must be placed in your checked luggage.

5.15pm. Depart Istanbul on Turkish Airlines flight # 011 for New York/Kennedy.

9.00pm. Arrive in New York/Kennedy. Upon arrival you will need to clear immigration, collect your luggage and clear customs. Welcome Home!

**Please note that this itinerary is subject to change. The pleasant quality of seclusion in parts of Iran lends itself to more limited traveler amenities, so be prepared for schedule changes, unique facilities, simple accommodations, and sometimes inefficient but pleasant service.
We do not anticipate major changes, but flexibility is an important asset!**