

ASIA · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · CULTURE · DESERT · SACRED SITES · FOOD



Iran

Persepolis' ruins hint at the scale of an empire that once stretched from Egypt to the Indus, and Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Square ranks among the most beautiful public spaces anywhere. Between them lie Yazd's windcatchers, Shiraz's gardens and poets' tombs, and a tradition of hospitality that disarms visitors. Check the FCDO travel advice closely before planning anything.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Iran.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 13 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Tehran	 CURRENCY Iranian rial (IRR) £1 ≈ IRR 2,373,973	 LANGUAGE Persian, Azerbaijani Kurdish	 BEST TIME Mar–May, Sep–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£150 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h via Istanbul or Dubai ~£450–£850 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3:30 standard time

Iran's great sights line up across the central plateau, so most first trips follow the same two-week spine: Tehran, then Kashan's merchant houses and Persian garden, Isfahan's Safavid squares and bridges, desert Yazd, and Shiraz, with Persepolis nearby. Longer trips add Tabriz's vast covered bazaar in the north-west, the green Caspian provinces, the shrine city of Mashhad, the wind-carved kaluts of the Lut Desert, or the Persian Gulf islands of Qeshm and Hormuz. Distances are big, but domestic flights, comfortable coaches and night trains link everything.

Check the FCDO travel advice before considering a trip: it has long flagged particular risks for British nationals, and most travel insurance will not cover trips made against its advice. For those who go, Iran is hospitable to the point of embarrassment: strangers invite you home, and taarof, the ritual politeness of refusing payment, can turn paying into a negotiation. Sanctions mean foreign cards do not work, so everything runs on cash. Alcohol is banned, dress is conservative and summer heat is fierce, while Nowruz in late March fills every hotel. It suits history and architecture lovers prepared for some red tape.

Top 5 highlights

1

ARCHITECTURE

Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan

Laid out for Shah Abbas I around 1600, this vast UNESCO-listed square frames the blue-tiled Shah (Imam) Mosque, the exquisite Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ali Qapu Palace and the bazaar gate. Come at dusk, when families picnic on the lawns.

2

HISTORY

Persepolis

Ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings, begun by Darius I around 518 BC and burned by Alexander in 330 BC. Its stairways carved with tribute bearers from across the empire are astonishingly crisp, and nearby Naqsh-e Rostam holds four royal tombs.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Yazd old city

A UNESCO-listed maze of mud-brick lanes and badgir windcatchers on the edge of the desert, with a soaring-portalled Friday mosque, a Zoroastrian fire temple whose flame is said to have burned for 1,500 years, and Towers of Silence outside town.

4

SACRED SITE

Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, Shiraz

Shiraz's 'Pink Mosque' is famous for early-morning light pouring through its stained-glass windows onto Persian carpets. Combine it with the poet Hafez's tomb, the Eram Garden and the Vakil Bazaar in a city of gardens, poetry and orange blossom.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Kashan's historic houses

Nineteenth-century merchants built Kashan's courtyard mansions, such as the Tabatabaei and Borujerdi houses, with mirrorwork, stucco and windcatchers. Nearby Fin Garden is a UNESCO-listed Persian garden, and in May the Qamsar rose harvest scents the hills.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Tehran

≈ 9 million people

Sprawling and traffic-choked beneath the Alborz mountains, but worth two days for the Golestan Palace, the National Museum, the crown jewels and the Grand Bazaar, plus a cable-car ride up Tochal.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Mashhad

≈ 3.3 million people

Iran's holiest city surrounds the vast Imam Reza shrine, which draws more than 20 million pilgrims a year; non-Muslims can see parts of the complex accompanied by a shrine guide.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Isfahan

≈ 2.2 million people

Perhaps Iran's most beautiful city: Safavid mosques and palaces around Naqsh-e Jahan Square, the Armenian cathedral in New Julfa, and arched bridges across the Zayandeh River, which is often dry.

Figures are approximate city and urban-area estimates; counting satellite cities such as Karaj, Greater Tehran is considerably larger.

When to go to Iran

Best time: **Mar–May, Sep–Nov.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

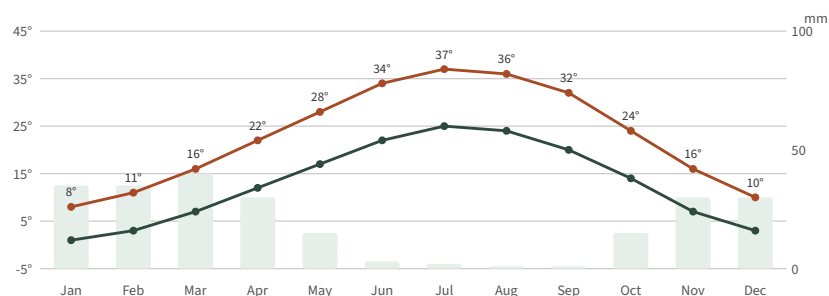
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Tehran

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar–Apr	Nowruz Persian New Year falls at the spring equinox, around 21 March, with haft-sin tables, family visits and two weeks of holidays; transport and hotels are packed and many businesses close.
May	Golabgiri rose harvest In May the villages around Kashan, especially Qamsar, pick Damask roses at dawn and distil rosewater in copper stills; visitors can watch the process and buy fresh golab.
Dec	Yalda Night On the winter solstice, around 21 December, families stay up through the longest night of the year eating pomegranates and watermelon and reading Hafez's poetry.

How much does Iran cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ IRR 71,219,178 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ IRR 166,178,082 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £150 per person / day ≈ IRR 356,095,890 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Fesenjan Chicken or duck simmered in a dark, sweet-sour sauce of ground walnuts and pomegranate molasses, served with saffron-tinted rice; a dish for celebrations and winter evenings.	Chelow kabab Often called the national dish: skewers of minced-lamb kabab koobideh with buttery saffron rice, grilled tomatoes, raw onion and a sprinkle of sumac.	Ghormeh sabzi A slow-cooked stew of fried herbs, kidney beans, lamb and dried limes with a sour, deeply savoury flavour; served at home and in every traditional restaurant.
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Getting around

Iran Air, Mahan Air and smaller carriers fly cheaply between major cities, and VIP coaches with wide reclining seats link almost every town for a few pounds. RAI trains, including overnight sleepers on long routes such as Tehran to Mashhad, are comfortable but slower. Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Mashhad have metros, and the local ride-hailing apps Snapp and Tapsi work well but need an Iranian SIM card.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 220V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 115 Fire: 125 Police: 110 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
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DIALLING CODE

+98

TIME ZONE

UTC+3:30 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not traditionally expected, but tip guides and drivers, round up taxi fares, and leave about 10% in smarter restaurants if service is not already included.

ETIQUETTE

Women should cover their hair in public and everyone should keep legs and upper arms covered. Expect taarof: if a shopkeeper or driver refuses payment, insist politely two or three times.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA), Tehran; Shiraz International Airport (SYZ), Shiraz; Isfahan International Airport (IFN), Isfahan

Visas & entry for Iran

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Iran unless you hold an Iranian passport.

Check the expiry date of your visa before travelling. If you overstay your visa, you may have to stay in Iran until this is resolved and you may be detained.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Cholera

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria from March to November in the rural south eastern provinces of Iran and in the north, along the Azerbaijan border in Ardabil and near the Turkmenistan border in North Khorasan: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Iran

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 13 Nov 2026	Martyrdom of Fatima
Wed 23 Dec 2026	Birthday of Imam Ali
Wed 6 Jan 2027	Isra' and Mi'raj (date may shift)
Sun 24 Jan 2027	Birthday of Mahdi (date may shift)
Thu 11 Feb 2027	Islamic Revolution Day
Mon 1 Mar 2027	Martyrdom of Imam Ali (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Sat 20 Mar 2027	Iranian Oil Industry Nationalization Day
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Nowruz
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Nowruz Holiday
Tue 23 Mar 2027	Nowruz Holiday
Wed 24 Mar 2027	Nowruz Holiday
Thu 1 Apr 2027	Islamic Republic Day
Fri 2 Apr 2027	Nature's Day
Sat 3 Apr 2027	Martyrdom of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 25 May 2027	Eid al-Ghadir (date may shift)
Fri 4 Jun 2027	Death of Imam Khomeini
Sat 5 Jun 2027	15 Khordad Uprising
Tue 15 Jun 2027	Tasua (date may shift)
Wed 16 Jun 2027	Ashura (date may shift)
Sun 25 Jul 2027	Arbaeen (date may shift)
Mon 2 Aug 2027	Death of Prophet Muhammad and Martyrdom of Hasan ibn Ali (date may shift)
Tue 3 Aug 2027	Martyrdom of Ali al-Rida (date may shift)
Wed 11 Aug 2027	Martyrdom of Hasan al-Askari (date may shift)
Fri 20 Aug 2027	Birthday of Muhammad and Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Persian

ENGLISH	PERSIAN	SAY IT
Hello	سلام	sah-LAHM
Thank you	ممنون	mam-NOON

ENGLISH	PERSIAN	SAY IT
Please	لطفاً	<i>LOT-fan</i>
Excuse me	ببخشید	<i>beh-bakh-SHEED</i>
How much is this?	این چنده؟	<i>een CHAN-deh</i>

Know before you go

Foreign bank cards do not work in Iran because of sanctions, so bring all the money you will need in cash, ideally euros or US dollars in clean, recent notes.

Prices are usually quoted in toman (10 rials) rather than the rials printed on banknotes, sometimes with the last three zeros dropped; confirm the unit before you pay.

Check the FCDO travel advice and entry requirements well ahead: rules for British passport holders differ from those for most other Europeans, and most insurers will not cover travel against FCDO advice.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.