

**Society for Asian Art**  
**Iran: Arts of Ancient Persia**  
**April 30 – May 15, 2016**

---

**July 20, 2015**

**April 30: Saturday.** Depart the US.

**May 1: Sunday. Tehran.** Arrive in Istanbul in the morning and connect with a flight to Tehran. Arrive in Tehran in the late afternoon and transfer to the *Espinaz Hotel*.

Dinner at the hotel's Persian restaurant.**D.**

**May 2: Monday. Tehran.** Morning visit to the Golestan Palace (Palace of Flowers) which is located on Khordad Square. When Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (1742-1797) became king, he chose Tehran as the new capital and it was then that Golestan Palace became the official residence of the royal family. Consisting of many buildings, terraces, and courtyards, the palace is set in a walled park veined with canals rushing down from the Tochal Mountains. It stands on the site of the historic Arg (citadel) of Tehran which was originally built in the time of Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty and remains an oasis of calm in the heart of the city. The interiors of many of the buildings are splendid and evoke a time when foreign dignitaries were invited to the Qajar court. Both the Eyvan-e Takht-e Marmar ("Terrace of the Marble Throne") and the Talar-e Aineh ("Hall of Mirrors") are famous for the spectacular mirror work that covers their walls.

Lunch at a wonderful local restaurant.

After lunch drive to the Iranian crown jewels. This spectacular collection of jewels, stored in the basement vault of the Bank Milli Iran, was closed for many years but is now open on certain days to the public. Admire the world's largest uncut diamond as well as the Peacock Throne with a wonderful guide.

End the day at the Aaran Contemporary Art gallery where we meet with owner, Nazila Noebashari. Founded in 2009 and based in Tehran, Aaran Gallery is committed to the promotion of contemporary Iranian artists and seeks to be a point of artistic exchange between South Asian and North African cultures.

Dinner at the Shandeez Mashad Restaurant. **B,L,D.**

**May 3: Tuesday. Tehran.** Morning visit to the Archaeological Museum with its fine collection including a stone capital of a winged lion from Susa and a 6<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. audience hall relief of Darius the Great from the Treasury at Persepolis.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

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

End the day at the Glass and Ceramics Museum of Iran, which is housed in a building dating to the beginning of this century. Remaining from the Ghajar period it was built as a private residence and currently offers an excellent collection of glassware and ceramics.

Dinner at the Gilaneh Restaurant. **B,L,D.**

**May 4: Wednesday. Mashhad.** Travel by plane on an early morning flight to Mashhad, the provincial capital of Khorassan, Iran's largest province. Mashhad is primarily a holy city and a place of pilgrimage for Shi'ite Muslims from all over the world.

Pilgrims come to Mashhad to visit the tomb of Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'ite Imam who died in 817 A.D. in the small village of Sanabad in Khorassan. It was felt, as a result of his sudden death, that he had been poisoned by his traveling companion, Caliph Mamun and his tomb came to be known as Mashhad, or the place of martyrdom. Today pilgrims pass through chambers of glittering mirror work and tiles to reach the tomb of Imam Reza. The chambers are always filled with hundreds of people praying and reciting the Koran. One of the Iranian kings who contributed to the building and decoration of the Imam Reza Shrine is Shah Abbas I who walked to Mashhad from Isfahan and arranged for the dome over the tomb chamber to be covered with sheets of gilded copper in 1607.

Our morning sightseeing will include as much as possible and we will try to enter the Imam Reza Shrine Complex which houses a rich library of manuscripts and hand written books. Also in the complex is the mosque of Gowhar Shad with an entrance portal to the old court built by Shah Abbas. Nearby is a small pavilion called the Naghareh Khaneh or Drum Tower where daily drums and trumpets salute the rising and setting sun. This mosque was built during the peaceful and prosperous reign of Timurid monarch, Shahrokh, by his pious wife, Gowhar Shad between 1405-1418 and is one of the finest in Iran.

Lunch today at a local restaurant.

After lunch at the hotel visit the Tomb of Nader Shah Afshar. Nader Shah was the founder of the Afshar dynasty and ruled from 1736 - 1747 A.D. He created an empire that stretched from northern India to the Caucasus Mountains but remains an enigmatic figure in Iranian history. Although he restored national independence and effectively protected Iran's territorial integrity during a dark moment of the country's history, his costly wars put great strain on the country's treasury and his obsessive suspicions and jealousies plunged Iran into political turmoil. His attempt to turn his subjects from the Shi'ite to the Sunni form of Islam cost him what little popularity he had left and he was assassinated in June 1747. After his assassination in 1747 the Afshar dynasty he established proved short-lived. A Sunni by upbringing, he was nevertheless a great benefactor of the Shrine of the Imam Reza in Mashhad, which he made his capital. His tomb and museum is located in a beautiful garden setting in the heart of Mashhad close to Imam Reza's shrine.

This evening dinner will be at a local restaurant. **Homa Hotel Mashhad. B,L,D.**

**May 5: Thursday. Kerman.** Morning visit to Tus, a powerful city and regional capital long before Mashhad. It was destroyed by the Mongols and never really regained its power. A ridge of clay running through the city is all that is left of its once enormous ramparts the size of which gives an indication of how large a city it was. Tus is perhaps best known now as the birth-place of Ferdowsi, one of Iran's most famous poets. He composed the epic Shahnameh (Epic of the Kings) in 30. He died in 1020, and is now buried under a mausoleum built in 1933. The mausoleum is surrounded by a beautiful garden. A small tea house in the gardens has been converted into a museum which, in addition to a manuscript of the Shahnameh weighing 73 kilograms, houses both ethnological and archaeological sections. The archaeological items were excavated from different regions of Khorassan, including Khaf and Torbat-e Jam.

After lunch at a local restaurant fly to Kerman.

Upon arrival transfer to the *Pars Hotel*.

Kerman's livelihood for many centuries depended on its position on the Asian trade routes. Located far from the most important industrial areas and the rich farmlands of the north and west, the province of Kerman is sparsely populated. It is believed to have been founded in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century by Ardashir I, founder of the Sassanian dynasty. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards it was ruled in turn by the Arabs, the Buyids, the Seljuks and the Mongols, and then until the Ghajar dynasty by a further succession of invaders and local dynasties. Somewhat surprisingly the town of Kerman is remarkably cosmopolitan dotted with ancient monuments attesting to its importance in early Iranian history.

Dinner at the hotel tonight. **B,L,D.**

**May 6: Friday. Kerman.** Morning drive to Rayen, a preserved medieval city molded from the red clay of the surrounding desert. As an oasis town in the Dasht-e Lut Desert, it is surrounded by date palms and citrus orchards. The dates here are amongst the tastiest in Iran. Deserted city streets, houses of rich merchants, communal baths and shops still stand clearly visible. The town was finally destroyed by the Afghans in 1722 but continued to be inhabited by local villagers until the beginning of this century, and it was their presence that ensured that the town did not fall into complete disrepair.

Enjoy lunch at the delightful Bagh-e Tarikhi Gardens, which were designed as traditional Persian gardens.

Drive to the beautiful town of Mahan well-known as the final home of the Sufi saint and poet, Shah Nematollah Vali. Shah Nematollah Vali, who died in 1431, was the founder of a Dervish order, centered in Mahan, which continues to be an active spiritual force in Iran today. The roots of the philosophy they practice dates back to the time of the Achaemenians. The poet spent many years wandering through Central Asia before finally settling at Mahan where he was taken with the surrounding violet-colored mountains. His tomb is an excellent example of the importance that traditional Persian architecture places on the harmony between nature and building. The central domed burial vault was completed in 1436 and was erected by Ahmad Shah Bahmani. It is flanked by two galleries on the east and west sides. In 1601 Shah Abbas I built the western gallery which leads into a tiled courtyard.

The building is set in a peaceful garden filled with fountains and the sound of running water.

Return to Kerman stopping just outside of Kerman is Gombad-E Jabaliye, meaning "Mountain of Stone" which is one of the most majestic monuments of southern Iran and also one of the most puzzling. Neither its date nor its use can be determined. This small double-domed unusual structure was constructed in an octagonal shape using stone, rather than the more usual brick. Some historians have determined that it predates the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and may have been a Zoroastrian building. Evidence supporting this theory is the presence of several fire temples located further along the road.

Return to Kerman for overnight. **B,L,D.**

**May 7: Saturday. Yazd.** This morning leave the hotel with our luggage and drive to Kerman's historical core. Walk through an attractive ensemble of three buildings inside the Kerman Bazaar, including a lovely madrassa built around a garden courtyard and a historical bath-house, now a museum. The staggered entrance gives access to a first chamber surrounded by six spacious apses. Narrow passages lead to a row of dome-covered halls, each of which served a different purpose.

The bazaar itself is noteworthy and is constructed of beautiful and well-preserved brick. The vaulted gallery offers a handsome example of the craftsmanship of Iranian bricklayers. The way the cupolas rest on their pilasters reflects a real mastery of architecture.

Enjoy a glass of tea at a local tea-house before driving to the Akhvan Hotel for a delicious Persian lunch.

After lunch drive to Yazd passing through many acres of pistachios, and the town of Rafsanjani, home of the former President of Iran, whose family owns a pistachio estate here.

Stop for a break after about 3 ½ hours at the Zein-o-Din Caravanserai. This 400-year old caravanserai was built on the orders of Shah Abbas I and is located two days' camel ride south of Yazd. It was part of 999 caravanserais built to promote trade throughout the country. It has recently been converted into a hotel.

Close by is an Onager Sanctuary where a local environmental agency has successfully been breeding these extremely rare and critically endangered animals. A Persian Onager is a wild, often aggressive equid (horse) that has successfully resisted domestication attempts since ancient civilization. Historically found in the Steppes and deserts of the Middle East through China and Mongolia, the current range has been drastically reduced to two protected areas in Iran. There are currently estimated to be less than 500 Onagers left in Iran.

Continue on to Yazd, a drive of about 1 ½ hours arriving in Yazd in the early evening.

Upon arrival transfer to the *Moshir Garden Hotel*.

Dinner this evening will be at the hotel. **B,L,D.**

**May 8: Sunday. Yazd.** 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 devastation of the Mongols.

This morning drive to the home of the former Governor of the city – known as the Dowlat-Abad House – to see how these wind towers work and to learn more about residential Persian architecture in the desert. Enormous domes starting at ground level would act as protective roofs for deep water-tanks which would be built 20 feet below street level. People would access these tanks by steep staircases.

Continue on to the Water Museum, located in a restored mansion, which offers an excellent introduction to "qanats" the underground water channels that which Persians have used for over 2,000 years to irrigate crops and supply drinking water.

Stop in at the Haj Khalifeh Ali Rahbar pastry shop. Opened in 1916 the shop is considered the best pastry shop in Yazd. Marvel at the beautiful displays and be sure to sample a few of their sweet treats!

Close by is the Amir Chakhmaq Complex whose stunning three-story façade is home to rows of perfectly proportioned sunken alcoves and tiles laid out in intricate patterns.

Leaving this commercial area drive into Yazd's historical core and enjoy lunch.

After lunch, visit the Friday Mosque where the tiled portal is crowned by twin minarets, the tallest in the country, and like many early mosques was constructed on the site of a Sassanid fire temple. Yazd's Friday Mosque was built over a forty year period from 1324 to 1365 and is probably the best preserved 14<sup>th</sup> century mosque in Iran. The portal's facade is decorated from top to bottom with dazzling tile work, predominately blue in color.

From here enjoy a short walking tour through Yazd's covered streets. Pass by the Bogheh-ye Sayyed Roknaddin to see the stunning portal and continue on to the roof-top of the Fazeli Carpet store to admire the sight of the city's many wind-towers piercing the skyline. Walk by the old water tower surrounded by four wind towers before stopping at Khan-e Laari one of the best preserved Qajar-era houses in Yazd.

End the afternoon focusing 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. Visit the Ateshkade, where the sacred flame has been burning since about 470 A.D. It was transferred from its original site to this site in 1940. It continues to attract Zoroastrians from around the world – the majority of who now live in Iran, India or Pakistan.

The final stop for the day at sunset will be at two of these 'Towers of Silence' which were used until thirty years ago by Zoroastrians as a place for leaving their dead to be devoured by vultures, their souls freed. Enjoy a climb up along a steep, dirt path to the top of one of the towers. Around these two very impressive towers are the remains of ceremonial buildings that Zoroastrians would use before and after the dead were left at the tops of the towers.

Enjoy dinner this evening at the Alma Café, a new restaurant located in the hotel complex, where many of Yazd's young professionals come to eat and socialize. **B,L,D.**

**May 9: Monday. Shiraz.** Depart the hotel to drive about 40 minutes to the 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.

Continue on about 2 ½ hours to the road-side Surmaz Bahram Palace restaurant for a simple, fast, but well-prepared lunch.

After lunch drive about 2 hours to the site of Pasargad which was excavated by Dr. David Stronach, Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Cyrus the Great defeated Astyages the Mede near Pasargad in 550 BC and, according to tradition, decided to build the first Achaemenian capital on the site of his victory. The white limestone tomb of Cyrus stands apart from the scattered remains of gardens, palaces and temples at Pasargad. Its foundation takes the form of a high plinth of six receding steps upon which rests a

gabled tomb chamber. Classical writers describe the tomb as being inside a walled garden shaped by many different kinds of trees none of which, unfortunately, exist today.

Continue on to Shiraz, about two hours away, and upon arrival transfer to the *Homa Shiraz Hotel. B,L,D.*

**May 10: Tuesday. Shiraz.** Morning visit to the Eram Gardens. Eram is the Persian version of the Arabic word Iram which means heaven. Built during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a quadripartite Persian Paradise Garden structure, the garden and Qavam House, which is decorated with tiles featuring poems from Hafez, are set within the Shiraz Botanical Garden.

From here drive to the Fars Museum. This octagonal pavilion was originally built by Karim Khan and was used for official receptions. It now houses a collection relating to the life of Karim Khan and other historic artifacts relating to the province.

A short distance away by foot is the citadel or Arg-e Karim Khan. The citadel was built in 1766 when Karim Khan invited the best architects and artists of the time to work on the design. High-quality materials were brought in from around Iran and from overseas and the citadel was quickly constructed. In shape it resembles a medieval fortress. During the Zand dynasty it was used by Karim Khan as his living quarters and later, during the Qajar period, it was used as the governor's seat. Today the citadel has been restored and is a museum.

Continue by foot through the bazaar of Shiraz considered by many to be the finest in Iran and, here, discover the heart of the city.

Stop at the Pink Mosque or Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque which is the oldest mosque in Shiraz and one of the most elegant mosques in southern Iran. Its foundations can be traced to the 9<sup>th</sup> century although what is seen today largely dates from a Safavid rebuilding.

End the morning at the Narenjastan which dates back to the Qajar dynasty. Due to abundance of sour orange trees the garden was given its name Narenjastan which means oranges. Construction began in 1257 and at the entrance is a marble stone tablet containing Quranic verses along with poems by Asudeh Shirazi. The northern wing with its inlaid doors and windows along with mirror work and paintings is among the architectural feats of the Qajar dynasty.

Enjoy lunch at the Qavam Café which serves superb Persian cuisine.

After lunch visit the tomb of Saadi, born in 1213, he became one of the major Persian poets of the time, known not only in Persian speaking countries, but also in the west. He encompassed a quality and depth of social and moral thoughts in his writings and is widely recognized as one of the greatest poets of the classical literary tradition. His works have been quoted as recently as 2009 by President Barack Obama.

End the day at the tomb of the celebrated poet Hafez which is 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.

Return to the hotel late afternoon.

Dinner this evening at the wonderful Haft Khan Restaurant where you can sit Persian style or where there are a limited number of western table and chairs. **B,L,D.**

**May 11: Wednesday. Shiraz.** Full day excursion to Persepolis, Naghsh-e-Rostam and Naghsh-e-Rajab.

**7:00am.** Today drive about one hour outside of Shiraz to enjoy a full day excursion to Persepolis the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenian 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 drive to Naqsh-e Rajab is the site of four limestone rock-face inscriptions and bas-reliefs that date to the early Sassanid era. One of the carvings is the investiture inscription of Ardashir I (*r.* 226 - 241), the founder of the dynasty. The second investiture inscription is Ardashir's successor, Shapur I (*r.* 241 - 272). A third bas-relief, known as 'Shapur's Parade' celebrates the king's military victory in 244 over the Roman emperor Valerian and Philip the Arab. A fourth bas-relief and inscription is attributed to Kartir, high priest under Shapur I and his sons Hormizd I (*r.* 272 - 273) and Bahram I (*r.* 273 – 276)

Nearby Naqsh-e Rostam which contains the carved tombs of four Achaemenian rulers. The tombs are widely accepted to be those of Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes and Darius II. The detail of the tomb carvings is absolutely beautiful. Do make a point of standing on top of the nearby small hill, in order to get an excellent vantage point to view these incredible tombs and also to take photographs.

After a truly wonderful day return to Shiraz.

Dinner tonight at the Sufi Restaurant. **B,L,D.**

**May 12: Thursday. Isfahan.** Drive about 6 hours to Isfahan stopping en route for lunch.

Check into the hotel and after a cup of tea in the beautiful courtyard drive to the Hasht Behesht which is located in the center of the Garden of Nightingales (the Bagh-e Bulbul), and is 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 stories 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. 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Chehel Sotun, the Hasht Behesht was restored by ISMEO – Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente for NOCHMI – National Organization for Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran. The project, completed in 1977, received an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1980.

This evening enjoy a Persian buffet dinner served in the hotel courtyard. **B,L,D.**

**May 13: Friday. Isfahan.** After breakfast begin exploring Isfahan, perhaps the most beautiful of all Iranian cities. Begin with a visit to the Palace of Forty Columns, a charming pavilion used to receive dignitaries and ambassadors. 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 geometrical 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.

As we drive today admire some of the five bridges crossing the Zayendehrud River which is sadly now dry due to drought and the construction of a dam. Perhaps the most beautiful bridge is the two-story Khaju Bridge which was 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. The oldest bridge is the Shahrestan where, over massive stone piers dating from the Sassanid period, the Seljuks built pointed arches designed to allow for the rush of spring waters.

After seeing the Bridge of 33 Arches, drive to the Armenian quarter of Isfahan. This dates from the time of Shah Abbas I who set up this colony of Christians from the town of Jolfa and named it New Jolfa. There are fourteen churches here and we have planned a walking tour beginning at the Bethlehem Church.

Stop for lunch at the Hermes Café.

After lunch continue by foot to the Vank Cathedral which was one of the first Armenian churches to be established in the Jolfa district after the Ottoman War of 1603-1605. Construction took over 50 years and consists of a domed sanctuary similar to a Persian mosque but with the addition of a semi-octagonal apse and raised chancel usually seen in western churches. The interior is covered with gilded carvings and intricate paintings of Biblical stories. A museum located near the cathedral houses a detailed display of artefacts from the history of the Armenian community in Isfahan including a historic printing press and the first book printed in Iran, bibles, Safavid costumes, tapestries and artefacts of the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Enjoy dinner at a lovely local restaurant – Shahrazd – within walking distance of the hotel.

**B,L,D.**

**May 14: Saturday. Isfahan.** In the morning visit the Friday Mosque, which is like a museum with its tiled ivans, vaulted ceilings and lofty domes. The complex and magnificent Friday Mosque in Isfahan displays more than 800 years of Persian religious architecture, from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries, and is truly one of the world's greatest mosques. It is built using a traditional plan with four ivans, or vaulted halls, placed on the axes of a central courtyard. The northwestern ivan was originally constructed during the Seljuk period in about 1121 although its vibrant surface decoration dates from the reign of Shah Soltan Hosayn. Also in the mosque you can see the Mongol influence on Persian architecture (Chingghis Khan's son, Olgedi, lived here as a Shah) and also the Timurid style.

From here drive to the immense Maydan-e Shah, or Imam Square. The square is the central focus of this fascinating city and never failed to inspire and awe European merchants and ambassadors to the Safavid court. The square is actually a huge rectangle measuring 1,674 feet by 540 feet and is enclosed by double-storied arcades. Four jewels of 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture adorn each side of the square, symbolizing the political, economic and religious spheres of Safavid Persia. Visit the Lotfollah Mosque, constructed between 1603 and 1617 which served as a private chapel for the



Imperial family. The domed ceiling has the finest faience tile work of 17<sup>th</sup> century Persia. On the west side of the square is the Ali Qapu Palace and on the southern side, the towering portal of the Shah Mosque, a monument to the grand vision of Shah Abbas the Great who died shortly before its completion.

Enjoy lunch at the Bastani Restaurant, located in the heart of the bazaar.

After lunch enjoy free time in the bazaar.

Return to the hotel mid-afternoon.

Farewell dinner at the Jarchi Bashi Restaurant. **B,L,D.**

**May 15: Sunday.** Direct flight from Isfahan to Istanbul, or to Tehran to continue with the Trip Extension.

**Trip Price based on 20 paying travelers: \$6,100**

**Single supplement: \$1,460**

**Includes:**

1. Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels as listed
2. Three meals daily with water and soft-drinks included
3. Water on the bus at all times
4. The following flights
  - Tehran/Mashhad
  - Mashhad/Kerman
5. All sightseeing and excursions in a private air-conditioned bus
6. All entrance fees listed
7. Arrival and departure transfers for those arriving and departing on the designated group flights.
8. Services of an English speaking Iranian national guide who will travel with the group throughout – we will confirm Mojgan
9. Porterage
10. All tips to drivers, guides and national guide
11. A \$400 per person contribution to the Society for Asian Art
12. Dr. Keelan Overton will accompany the trip.
13. Services of local guides in Shiraz and Isfahan

**Not included:**

1. International airfare to and from Iran
2. Visa fee for Iran which is currently \$90 a person
3. Airport departure taxes (no taxes currently)
4. Passport fees
5. Drinks – other than bottled water and soft drinks – with meals.
6. Excess luggage charges
7. Travel Insurance
8. Items of a purely personal nature
9. Any item not listed

## **Extension**

**May 15 – May 22, 2016**

---

**May 11, 2015**

**May 15: Sunday. Tehran.** Arrive in Tehran (from Istanbul via Turkish Air), arrival mid-afternoon.

Or drive from Isfahan to Tehran – these travelers continuing on the extension will be driven back to Tehran and have lunch en route.

Dinner and overnight at the *Espinas Hotel*. **D.**

**May 16: Monday. Tehran.** After breakfast travel about one hour to northern Tehran to the Niavaran Palace and Museum, the last home of Mohammad-Reza Shah and his family located in the north-east part of the city. The complex boasts two palaces, a pavilion, Persian gardens, a museum and a smaller gallery. The main palace, the Niavaran Palace, has two floors and offers carpets and artifacts on display, including a carpet from Kerman illustrated with Iranian kings from the Achaemenian to the Qajar dynasties. Another delight is the Sahebqaraniyeh Palace which was built as the summer harem for Nasser-ed-Din Shah. Today, a refurbished structure houses the Jahan-nama Museum. This includes a beautiful little *hoz khooneh* (pool room), some Qajar paintings, and a tea house depicting art and architecture from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Continue on to the seldom visited Sa'd-Abad Palace. The group will 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 the Nayeb Restaurant.

After lunch visit the Museum of Contemporary Art which was designed by Kamran Diba using elements from traditional Persian architecture. Considered to be one of the most valuable collections outside of Europe and the United States and includes works by Monet, Van Gogh, Picasso, Diego Rivera, Andy Warhol, Munch and Lichtenstein among other.

Return to the hotel.

Dinner tonight at the Shandiz Mashad Restaurant. **B,L,D.**

**May 17: Tuesday. Zanjan.** Depart the hotel this morning to begin driving to Zanjan. After 2.5 hours stop in Qazvin known for its carpets and seedless grapes and visit its museum with its collection of 3000-year-old bronzes and ceramics from the Alamut Valley.

Continue on to the Qajar-era Nabi (Shah) Mosque with its Mogul-style topknots and an expansive courtyard. The mosque bears inscriptions indicating that Fath Ali Shah of the Qajar dynasty was the founder of the mosque but other sources indicate the mosque has been in existence since the Safavid period.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch drive further west to visit Soltaniye, a UNESCO World Heritage site, 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.

Afterwards continue driving about 30 minutes to Zanjan which has a fantastic brick-vaulted bazaar and the surrounding alleys are home to several historic mosques.

Dinner and overnight at the *Grand Zanjan Hotel*.

**May 18: Wednesday. Zanjan.** After breakfast travel 2.5 hours further west via Dandy to spend a full day at the UNESCO World Heritage site, 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. Enter the site through a large arched gateway hollowed out of the very thick circular stone wall surrounding the settlement. The original 38 fortified towers along the wall have worn away to the same height as the wall, but the wall itself is still largely intact and the south gateway is still in remarkably good condition. Takht-e Soleiman was a great Sassanian religious center and, in fact, the oldest remaining structures here are the ruins of a Sassanian palace and a substantial fire-altar which once formed part of a much larger temple complex. 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 claims to be the birthplace of Zoroaster.

Enjoy a picnic lunch at the site.

After a lovely day return to Zanjan via a scenic road. **B,L,D.**

**May 19: Thursday. Ardabil.** Depart this morning for Ardabil. Visit the town of Kivi en route. Kivi located on the west side of the Baghru (Talesh) Mountains has lush green mountain scenery and dates back to pre-Islam. Enjoy a tea break here in the beautiful surroundings.

Continue on to Ardabil for lunch at a local restaurant.

Spend the balance of the day exploring Ardabil including a visit to the impressive UNESCO World Heritage site mausoleum complex of Shaykh Safi al-Din (1252-1334), the revered 14<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi leader/philosopher and ancestor of Shah Ismail (d. 1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty. The complex includes the tombs of Sheikh Safi and Shah Isma'il, the *chini-khana* (House of china), a magnificent room for a renowned collection of Chinese porcelain, now in the Archeological Museum, Tehran. The complex includes several other buildings, such as the *jannat-sara*, an assembly and prayer hall, the *dar al-hadith*, reserved for orthodox Shi'ite learning. The celebrated "Ardabil carpet," now in the V&A, and its pair in the Los Angeles County Museum, were commissioned by the Safavid Shah Tahmasb (reigned 1524-76) for display in this shrine.

Also visit the Sheik Jebra'il Shrine (tomb of Safi-od-Din's father) and time permitting the Il-khanid Jameh Mosque.

Transfer to the *Sabalan Grand Hotel*.

Dinner tonight at the hotel. **B,L,D.**

**May 20: Friday. Tabriz.** After breakfast begin driving just over 3 hours to Tabriz. Until recently Tabriz was the second largest city in Iran. Originally it was founded in Sassanian times and by the 10<sup>th</sup> century it was a major center. Indeed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was promoted to the rank of capital by the then Mongol leader Genghis Khan and the town retained this status. Unfortunately Tabriz has suffered the ravages of wars and earthquakes over the years though several interesting monuments still survive.

Upon arrival in Tabriz enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch spend the day at the fabulous bazaar of Tabriz, a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is a large, labyrinthine bazaar selling a huge variety of goods including carpets made in Tabriz. Tabriz is also known for its silverwork and jewelry.

Dinner and overnight at the *Tabriz International Hotel. B,L,D.*

**May 21: Saturday. Tabriz.** Continue exploring Tabriz this morning. Our first stop will be at the Qajar Museum inside Amir Nezam Garrousi's house located in the Sheshghelan district in Tabriz near Maqbaratoshoara. It was built in the period of Qajarid crown prince Abbas Mirza(1781-1925) when Tabriz was considered the second capital. After renovating the building in 2006 it has been used as the Qajar Museum. The extensive basement contains exhibits on stones, weapons and architecture and first floor contains exhibits on coins, mosaics, porcelains, glassware and music.

Continue on to the Blue Mosque of Tabriz which is considered by many, a masterpiece of Iranian decorative tile work. It was built towards the end of the reign of Timurid ruler Jahan Shah and the mosque plan is a variant on the usual four ivan courtyard style. The decoration of the mosque is justly renowned for the exceptional quality of the tile work, the finesse of the designs and harmony of the overall composition. The range of colors is more varied than elsewhere in Iran with the addition of an olive green, ochre and a brown to the more usual blues and whites.

Close by is the Azerbaijan Museum which features items excavated from the 4000 year old citadel of the Iron Age town of Hasanlu, symbols of wealth from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC and a recreation of the famous "Ardebil" carpet believed to be one of the best carpets ever created. The original carpet is displayed in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

After lunch at a local restaurant visit the Jameh Mosque at the western end of the bazaar. Since its foundation, the Jameh Mosque has been surrounded by the bazaar and the most ancient part of this mosque is its vast roofed area. It has an arch and domes, based on octagonal brick pillars, covered with delicate and artistic plasterwork of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This mosque was repaired during the rule of Mongol Ilkhanid Dynasty, which built additional sections to this mosque. Its high-altitude altar and plasterwork are reminders of that era. During the rule of Aq Qoyonlooyan in the former undivided Azerbaijan province, a tall, tiled dome was built in the northern corner of this mosque – the remains of which can be currently observed.

Continue on to the ruins of Arg-e-Tabriz, a remnant of a fortress built in the Ilkhanate period. Historians believe that it was used as a military castle but clerics claim that the structure was initially used as a mosque in its early days, but during the Qajar era was used as a military post, and storage facility for weapons (in Persian Ark means castle). Supporting this phenomenon the clerics have been damaged large parts of the Ark to make a new mosque. It also played an important role in the Constitutionalist war of Iran in the early 1900s against Mohammad Ali Shah of the Qajar dynasty. After the revolution large parts of the building were destroyed by the clerics

to prepare a new place for Friday prayers in Tabriz. The structure today stands 28 meters high, and is still used as part of a space for holding Friday prayers in Tabriz.

Return to the hotel.

Farewell dinner this evening is in a restaurant close to the lake and the Shah Goli Gardens.

**May 22: Sunday. Depart.** Morning flight from Tabriz to connect with international flights.

**Trip Price based on 9-10 paying travelers: \$2,740 for those also on the main trip**

**Trip Price based on 9-10 paying travelers: 2,890**

**Single supplement: \$610**

**Includes:**

1. Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels as listed
2. Three meals daily with water and soft-drinks included
3. Water on the bus at all times
4. All sightseeing and excursions in a private air-conditioned bus
5. All entrance fees listed
6. Arrival and departure transfers for those arriving and departing on the designated group flights.
7. Services of an English speaking Iranian national guide who will travel with the group throughout – we will confirm Mojgan
8. Porterage
9. All tips to drivers, guides and national guide
10. A supplemental \$150 per person contribution will be charged as a donation to the Society for Asian Art to travelers participating only in the trip extension.
11. Dr. Keelan Overton will accompany the trip.

**Not included:**

12. International airfare to and from Iran
13. Visa fee for Iran which is currently \$90 a person
14. Airport departure taxes (no taxes currently)
15. Passport fees
16. Drinks – other than bottled water and soft drinks – with meals.
17. Excess luggage charges
18. Travel Insurance
19. Items of a purely personal nature
20. Any item not listed