

## **Unforgettable Iran**

**Trip notes: EAXU**

**Validity: 01/01/2009 to 29/12/2011**

Iran is a country of dramatic contrasts; its scenery ranges from snow capped mountains to vast, inhospitable deserts dotted by attractive oasis towns. Its cities and ancient sites reveal a deep and rich history. Some of the most exquisite examples of Middle Eastern design and architecture are to be found here, including the magnificent ruins of Persepolis, the dazzling Islamic centres at Esfahan and Shiraz. This adventure will also see you spending a night with the Nomads of Iran, experiencing a cooking class at a family's house in Kashan and reliving the ancient Silk Road at the Zein-o-din Caravanserai. For most travellers, the most rewarding aspect of the trip will be the welcome you receive from the Iranian people who greet foreigners with a warmth that is seldom found elsewhere.

### **Itinerary Disclaimer**

The information in this dossier has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change and does not form part of the contract between the client and Babel Travel. The itinerary featured is correct at time of printing. Occasionally our itineraries change as we make improvements that stem from past travellers, comments and our own research. Sometimes it can be a small change like adding an extra meal in the itinerary. Sometimes the change may result in us altering the trip for the coming year. Ultimately, our goal is to provide you with the most rewarding experience.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** Please ensure that you print a final copy of your dossier to review a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans. For the latest updated trip notes please visit our website: [www.babeltravel.com](http://www.babeltravel.com)

### **Cultural Engagement**

Robert Young Pelton and Babel Travel have teamed up to create the first organised entries into the World's Most Dangerous and forbidden places. Our Cultural Engagement trips have been created to challenge the intellectual, emotional, participatory and educational desires of a very select group of individuals. Our trips will maintain the highest level of personal and physical safety based on Robert Young Pelton's 30 years in conflict zones and Babel Travel's experience in the adventure travel business.

These trips are 'dangerous' because they are designed to make you think, our intention is not to scare you. Being inside a country is a completely different experience compared with watching it from the outside and it is bound to energise and engage you. You will be inspired to want to make a difference. Each group is screened, trained and tasked with creating an end product to share with the world. We do not intend to be passive observers. Stories, interviews, research, video and photographs will be combined to create a portal for the next group and the world. Communities in these regions don't have time to entertain outsiders. They are happy to engage, challenge and share with visitors but only if they take their message to the outside world.

Kevin Pollard, Founder and General Manager of Babel Travel, has long wanted to tap into

Pelton's expertise and access ever since he read his best selling guide *The World's Most Dangerous Places* which was first published in 1993 and is now in its fifth edition. Participants in this program will update the sixth edition and carry on Pelton's two-decade legacy of safely penetrating and making sense of the world's least understood regions.

Cultural Engagement trips for 2011 will include 11-22 day itineraries to Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, North Korea and Colombia with other destinations coming soon. Each journey will cost in the neighbourhood of EUR 5 - 12,000 per person, excluding airfare. Robert Young Pelton will not lead the trips personally, but will choose both the trip leaders (1 western and 1 local) and co-design each itinerary. Each western trip leader has a background in philanthropy, journalism, adventure travel and is considered an expert in the country they are leading trips to. There will be a second unadvertised list of trips for those return members who Pelton will accompany into selected locations.

Robert Young Pelton is the author of a number of books on survival and global conflict. He has journeyed through 36 conflicts and travelled to over 120 countries.  
[www.comebackalive.com](http://www.comebackalive.com)

### **Trip Structure**

The key elements of our Cultural Engagement trips (other than North Korea or other fixed agendas) are:

- 1) Meeting with VIPs and subject matter experts to welcome you to the country
- 2) Charitable social benefit hands on activity
- 3) Political discussions and interaction with at least two opposing entities
- 4) Exposure to authentic, non commercial and socially relevant environments
- 5) Interaction with locals, penetrating discussions and documentation of the countries situations
- 6) Formal interviews, information gathering, fact checking and publication of group's endeavours for public viewing and further discussion
- 7) Traditional interaction with social, political, NGO or other groups to understand how outsiders can engage, understand and better the situation
- 8) Cultural immersion into music, art, dancing, storytelling, history etc
- 9) Contemporary interpretation of culture, historical monuments, natural wonders, landscapes or events by experts
- 10) Trip members questions answered, flexibility in itinerary to take advantage of opportunities or invitations and constant support for unscripted discovery, interaction and follow on relationships

### **Formal Structure**

Each trip member will be sent a personal safety guide culled from *Come Back Alive* or *Dangerous Places* on survival in the specific area to which they are travelling. Members will be asked to pick 5 things that they hope to learn. There will be a formal videotape interview of your expectations or goals both at the start and after the trip. Your privacy is assured.

You will be asked to use a skill you have to contribute to a diary, wrap up, interview and query. Each person will be issued with a workbook with suggested questions, discussion points, and a do-it-yourself travel guide creation kit modelled on *The World's Most Dangerous Places*. The goal is to give structure to exploration and curiosity.

During the trip you will be brought into the narrative and will be filmed interacting,

interviewing, photographing or helping. At the end of the trip the material will be assembled into a web based blog. Should you choose not to be photographed, you will not be included on the public site. Those who wish to have their trip kept private will be respected.

## **Itinerary**

### **Day 1 Tehran**

Arrive and check into your hotel. Your trip leader will leave a notice in the hotel reception with information for our all important welcome meeting, scheduled for 12pm on Day 1. You will need to bring your passport, all vouchers and a copy of your insurance policy to this meeting so that your leader can obtain important details that are essential to the running of the trip. This meeting will give you an overview of all the exciting things you will be seeing during your stay and includes a lot of practical information on how to get the most out of your time in Iran.

Important Note: it is a condition of joining our trips that you are in possession of a comprehensive travel insurance policy before leaving your country of origin.

If your flight arrives too late we recommend that you consider booking a night's accommodation prior to the trip so you can ensure you are able to attend this meeting. We recommend that you have lunch beforehand, as we will be heading to explore the city straight after the group meeting.

After the welcome meeting we'll take a walking tour into the heart of Tehran.

Tehran, Iran's capital, can be described as exciting, noisy and chaotic! With a population of 18 million, Tehran is a sprawling, modern city. One fifth of Iran's entire population live here and it's an ideal place to get accustomed to the Iranian way of life, with the best restaurants, shops and museums in the country.

On our walking tour of Tehran, we will visit the majestic Golestan Palace to see how the former Qajar rulers lived. We will take a wander through the expansive Tehran bazaar to the Imam Khomeini Mosque. We will view the many political murals that surround the former US Embassy to discover more about Iran's recent history. We'll finish the walking tour by relaxing as locals do – smoking a Qalyan (flavoured water pipe), drinking chai and eating dates at a local cafe. Tonight, we'll enjoy some fine Iranian cuisine and some traditional music at a local restaurant.

### **Day 2 Qom**

Leaving the hustle and bustle of the Tehran behind, we travel by mini-van to the outskirts of the city. Here we visit the enormous holy shrine of Iman Khomeini, the father of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. When completed it will be one of the most important buildings in the Islamic World. Revered as the leader of the 1979 revolution, Iman Khomeini was laid to rest here in 1989. People from all over Iran travel here to pay their respects. Afterwards we'll do as the locals do and enjoy a picnic lunch on the lawn that surrounds the shrine. This is a great way to interact with locals and you will soon discover the warmth and friendliness they exude.

While here, we visit the nearby Behesht-e Zahra, a vast cemetery dedicated to the many Iranians who lost their lives during the Iran-Iraq war. Over 200 000 people are buried here and it serves as a moving reminder of the senselessness of war.

Travelling south along the desert road we reach Qom (2 hours), one of the holiest cities in Iran. Founded in the 9th century, Qom is a sacred city and place of annual pilgrimage for the Shiite branch of Islam thanks to the 17th century golden Hazrat-e Masumeh mosque built as a shrine over the tomb of Fatima, the sister of Imam. Qom is also one of the most conservative and religious places in the country and spending some time here is a great way to gain an insight into how important Islam is to the Iranian people. Shiite scholars and students come from across the world to study in the Madrassas (Koranic schools) of Qom. During our visit here we will learn a little about the teachings of the Koran at these Madrassas.

### **Day 3 Kashan**

Taking a local train we travel from Qom and reach the charming town of Kashan (2 hours). Kashan is famous for its exquisite carpets, silks, ceramics, copperware and rosewater. Our walking tour will see us discover some of the finest traditional houses in Iran on visits to the Khans of Khan-e Borujerdi and Khan-e Tabatabaei. These 19th century khans were funded by wealthy merchants and feature elegant courtyards, lush gardens and intricate stonework.

Moving on, we'll wander through of one of the most impressive bazaars in the country, stop off to visit the Agha Bozorg Mosque and Madrasa, ramble through an old caravanserai and perhaps pop into the old mill where the miller will gladly show you the traditional method for grinding flour! After wards, we will relax in the lovely Fin gardens complete with fountains and pools fed by natural springs.

Tonight, we'll be the guests in a local family house where we will have an opportunity to learn how to make delicious Iranian food. Kashan is famous for having the country's tastiest khoresh (a thick meaty stew of vegetables and nuts) and fesenjan (a sauce of pomegranate juice, walnuts, aubergine and cardamom - usually served over chicken or even camel!). These dishes are some of the many delicious specialities that you will help prepare and, of course, eat! Spending time with this family will give you a fantastic insight into the lives of everyday Iranians, and will be especially eye-opening for the women in the group.

### **Day 4 Abyaneh**

Travelling on from Kashan in our private van we reach Abyaneh (2 hours). Abyaneh is a rustic, red clay village at the foot of Karkus Mountains, 2500 m above sea level. Here traditions have endured the test of time.

The village is compact with narrow, sloping lanes. Here, the roofs of some houses are used to serve as the courtyard for other houses higher up on the slope. Intricate patterns and traditional poems are carved into the wooden doors. These poems are a window into history, giving us an insight into old Iranian culture.

Another interesting aspect of Abyaneh is the women's traditional costume. These outfits consist of a very colourful floral scarf and meticulously designed pleated pants.

On our walking tour through the village, you will see local craftspeople at work, and have plenty of opportunities to meet with the villagers. If we're lucky, we may even be able to stop into a local house for a chat, some tea and some dates.

### **Days 5-6 Esfahan**

Leaving early in our private van, we reach Iran's most enchanting city, Esfahan (3 hours). It lies on the banks of the Zayandeh Rud River and is often described by the words: "Esfahan nesf-e Jahan" (Esfahan is half the world). This fascinating city has long attracted travellers from all over the world, and it is here where one can really appreciate the true grace and beauty of Persian heritage.

We start our walking tour in the enormous Imam Square. Built in 1612 as a royal polo ground, Imam Square is one of the largest and finest public spaces in the world. Its entertainers, storytellers, preachers and silk route caravans have entranced travellers for centuries. Our local guide will give us an insight into life under Persia's greatest ruler, Shah Abbas, and guide us through the Iman Mosque, Sheikh Lotfallah Mosque, and the Ali Qapu Palace.

We finish the tour in Esfahan's lively bazaar, which seems to capture the very essence of ancient Persia. Here the aroma of exotic spices fills the air. The hustle and bustle of activity all around you is mesmerising: merchants selling gold, carpets and handicrafts, locals haggling for a bargain and craftsman busy at work. It's easy to spend many hours strolling through here, and after relaxing in a local eatery, you will be able to do just that. The bazaar is a shopper's paradise, and is an excellent place to purchase souvenirs.

Day 6 is free for you to explore this wonderful city. Take time to wander along the city's many tree-lined boulevards. Make sure you take a walk by the Zayandeh River, stopping for a well deserved chai at one of the impressive bridges. A visit to the Jameh Mosque (Friday mosque), the Chehel Sotun Palace or perhaps the odd Manar Jomban (shaking minarets) is also highly recommended. Your leader can assist with these visits.

The abundance of fine Islamic buildings, most of which are covered in the blue mosaic tiles for which Iran is famous, the enormous bazaar, elegant gardens and impressive palaces will surely make Esfahan a highlight of your time in Iran.

### **Days 7-8 Yazd**

We depart Esfahan and embark on a local bus ride to Yazd (5 hours).

Arriving in the ancient desert city of Yazd, you will be intrigued by its unique architecture. Badgirs (wind towers) are a feature of most of the buildings in the old city - they trap draughts and direct them into the houses below for cooling. Yazd retains a timeless feel. It was a major stop on the caravan routes to Central Asia and India during the Silk Road period and Marco Polo visited Yazd on his way to China.

It truly is a fascinating place to wander around. There are 12 different bazaars dotted around the city which make for some interesting exploring. Yazd is also Iran's centre of Zoroastrians - one of the world's oldest religions, and the state religion in Persia until the advent of Islam. Upon arrival, we will visit the Artashkadeh, the fire temple of the Zoroastrian community. Here we will see a flame that the Zoroastrians claim has been burning for more than 1 500 years! We will also visit the Towers of Silence, an old Zoroastrian burial ground where dead bodies were left to be devoured by vultures, before burying the remaining bones.

In the evening we will enjoy a meal in a traditional bathhouse that has been converted into a delightful restaurant.

On Day 8 we will tour the mazelike streets of the ancient mud brick old town to learn a little about the badgirs (wind towers) that keep Yazd's houses so cool in the baking summer months. We will also visit the impressive Amir Chakhmaq Complex, the Jameh Mosque and the Water Musuem.

The afternoon is free for you to explore more of the city. One great option is to hire a bicycle and ride through the large mud brick old town. Otherwise, you can simply relax in the courtyard of our hotel, a 19th century traditional mansion, smoke a qalyan or try a Yazd speciality - camel fesenjun!

### **Day 9 Zein-o-din Caravanserai**

The morning is free for you to explore more of Yazd, before we depart for the magnificent Zein-o-din Caravanserai, situated in the desolate Dasht-e Lut desert. This is a classic caravanserai built during the 16th century under the orders of Shah Abbas, who is believed to have constructed 999 such caravanserais to promote commerce. A caravanserai is an inn where Silk Road traders could rest and recover from the day's journey.

Most typically, it was a building with a square or rectangular walled exterior with a single portal wide enough to allow heavily laden animals (such as camels and donkeys) to enter. The courtyard was open to the sky, and the inside walls of the enclosure were outfitted with a number of small bays to accommodate merchants and their servants, animals, and merchandise.

A night's stay here is a wonderful chance to relive the age when merchants travelled the remarkable Silk Road. Most of the rooms remain unchanged from days gone by, with carpets covering raised brick floors. Heavy curtains (rather than doors) separate rooms from the courtyard. Later in the evening we'll be entertained by Baluchistan dancers, who originate from Iran's border with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### **Day 10 Abarqu**

After a hearty breakfast at the Caravanserai, there is time to relax on the rooftop with panoramic views of the surrounding desert. Leaving Zein-o-din Caravanserai we travel across mountain ranges and reach the historical town of Abarqu (5 hours). This typical central Iranian town is located in one of the most famous deserts in Iran, and with the stunning Zagros Mountains as a backdrop Abarqu is a perfect place to see another side of Iran.

Upon arrival we will visit the famous ice house, the Jameh Mosque, the 4000 year old cypress tree, the 11th century Gonbad Ali Dome and the Khan-e Aghazadeh Qajar-era mansion. This town gives you a true taste of life for every day Iranians.

### **Day 11 Nomad Stay**

Leaving Abarqu early, we travel in our private van through the Fars province, in search of our nomad friends (5-6 hours). Iran has over 500 different nomadic tribes and the largest and most important tribe is the Qashqai tribe. The Qashqai are Turkic speaking pastoral nomads who migrate between winter pastures near the Persian Gulf and summer pastures on the central Iranian Plateau. More than half the area north of Shiraz is home to several different tribes who have gathered in this region over centuries of nomadic existence. These nomadic tribes earn an income from herding cattle and making carpets.

Due to their nomadic existence, we actually have to go in search for the nomad family as there is no set location for them to stay. Arriving in the mid afternoon we are greeted by the head of the tribe who will settle us into his tribe's nomad tent. This tent, or 'house of hair' is made predominately from goat and sheep wool and is our home for the night.

A stay here is a wonderful opportunity to observe the lifestyle of nomads as they herd their animals, tend to the fields and weave traditional carpets. After sharing a meal with our new friends, we are entertained with traditional nomad song and dance.

Please take note that due to the authenticity of this activity it is impossible to guarantee any set program. No two trips are identical, as each group will stay with a different family. But like any Babel Travel adventure, expect the unexpected. Really, anything can happen from a simple night in with local families to an invitation to a nomad wedding!

### **Days 12-13 Shiraz**

Leaving our new friends, we travel through harsh landscape reaching the city of Shiraz (4-5 hours). This city evokes images of ancient Persia - exotic gardens, lavish mansions, rich red wine, silky woollen rugs, philosophy and poetry. Shiraz has also always been a renowned centre of learning, boasting many of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. Known as Iran's poetic capital, it was also home to two of Persia's most famous poets of the 13th and 14th centuries, Saadi and Hafez, whose mausoleums are here.

Our walking tour sees us visit both the Saadi and Hafez mausoleums where you can listen to locals being reciting poetry. Moving on we'll visit the Zand complex of the Karim Khani fortress, Vakil mosque and the Pars museum. We will finish the day by stopping off in one of Bazar-e Vakil's traditional teahouses.

On Day 13 we start out early with our local guide and drive to the cliff face royal tombs of Naqsh-e Rostam where Darius 1 and his successors are buried before continuing on to Persepolis, Iran's premier attraction. The legendary capital of Darius the Great was founded in 512 BC. At this time the Persian empire stretched from the Indus Valley to the Aegean and included Thrace, Armenia, Turkey, Assyria and even Lower Egypt.

Persepolis was as a magnificent setting for celebrations – especially Norouz (the New Year procession) the most important occasion in the Mazdean religion. In 330 BC Alexander the Great burnt the city to the ground, but many reminders of the city still remain.

On our return to Shiraz there is free time to explore more of the city. Why not wander the labyrinth of narrow streets in the old city visiting the traditional handicraft workshops and local markets? For enthusiastic sightseers the splendid mansion of Ghavam Orangery, the sumptuous Garden of Paradise, Nasiralmolk mosque and Khan Madrassa are all worthy of a visit.

### **Days 14-15 Tehran**

Leaving early, we take the short 1 hour flight back to Tehran. No activities are included today but some of you may wish to explore some more of Tehran upon our return. Other major places of interest include the National Jewelry Museum, Carpet Museum, National Museum of Iran, the Glass and Ceramics Museum and the Islamic Museum.

On the evening of Day 14, a final feast awaits. We raise our glass to a country whose hospitality is as warm as the sun that washes over it.

Day 15 is departure day and we say farewell to Iran with memories that will last a lifetime. There are no activities planned for today and you are able to depart the hotel at any time. Check out time from the hotel is 11am. If you are departing later, you can arrange luggage storage at the hotel reception. There may be a small service fee.

### **Arrival and Departure Transfers**

Both arrival and departure transfers are included in the price of this trip. This is regardless of when you arrive or depart Iran. If you have booked your flights separately from your trip please ensure that you inform Babel Travel of your flight details at least one month before departure.

### **Arrival Complications**

If you have not made contact with our representative (please look for the Babel Travel logo and your name) within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, please contact our Iranian representative. Give this person your exact location in the airport (find a landmark) and you will be attended to promptly.

In the very unlikely event that this process fails, you can find taxis at the front of the airport. If arranging the taxi yourself we recommend you negotiate the fare before getting in the taxi. The Iman Khomeini Airport is located about 20 km from the hotel and should cost around USD 15.

Please inform your group leader at the initial group meeting if this occurs and you will be refunded. No refund is available on missed transfers, or portions of your trip owing to a different flight arrival or delayed flight arrival. Any additional cost incurred in order to meet up with your group is at your own expense.

### **Starting Point Hotel**

TBA  
Tehran  
Iran

### **Finishing Point Hotel**

TBA  
Tehran  
Iran

### **Trip Style: Cultural Engagement**

This is the only way professionals, intellectuals, and modern day explorers can visit the world's most inaccessible places with comfort, security and insight. Robert Young Pelton and Babel Travel have designed experiences that are both life changing and inspiring. Those who want more from their travels will understand that whilst these trips are intense, they are also engaging and rewarding by opening a window into the rapidly changing world. Accordingly these trips are never the same, never dull and will encourage further

exploration. Comfort, safety and value are the cornerstones of planning and the ability to engage and interact with our hosts is critical. This is a trip for those who “do” not watch.

### **Included Activities**

Walking tour and Golestan Palace entry in Tehran, Entry into the Hazrat-e Masumeh shrine in Qom, entry into the traditional houses, family visit and cooking demonstration in Kashan, guided tour and entry into Iman Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and the Ali Qapu Palace in Esfahan, entry into all sights in our walking tour in Yazd, Baluchistan Dancing performance at the Zein-o-din Caravanserai, entry into all sights in our walking tour in Abarqu, Guide and transport at the Nomad Stay, entry into all sights in our walking tour list in Shiraz, entry and guided tour in Persopolis and Naqst-e Rostam, visits to 5 different charities/aid organisations.

All other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded.

### **Optional Activities**

Although we do not arrange any specific optional excursions in Iran, there is plenty of free time for you to undertake activities not covered specifically in the itinerary. You should allow approx. EUR 15-20 per week for extra activities.

This is a list of the more popular excursions that past travellers have taken:

- National Jewels Museum in Tehran (10,000 IRR)
- Glass and Ceramics Museum in Tehran (10,000 IRR)
- National Museum of Iran in Tehran (10,000 IRR)
- Jameh Mosque in Esfahan (5,000 IRR)
- Chehel Sotun Palace in Esfahan (5,000 IRR)
- Manar Jomban Shaking Minarets in Esfahan (5,000 IRR)
- Bike riding in Yazd (30,000 IRR)

### **Group Size**

Maximum of 12 travellers per group.

### **Accommodation**

Guesthouses/hotels (12 nights), nomad tent (1 night), caravanserai (1 night)

Our main criteria for choosing hotels are neatness and cleanliness. On our Cultural Engagement trips, most of the hotels are 3 to 4 stars - comfortable and sometimes luxurious! Bathroom facilities may be shared and rooms may be multi-share rather than twin. Please bear in mind that hotels can occasionally be challenged with minor problems and technical difficulties. At each hotel your leader will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements.

If you are travelling alone you will be allocated a room with another group member of the same sex. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds.

If you have purchased pre or post trip accommodation (if available), you may be required to change rooms for the additional nights.

### **Early Check-in Throughout the Trip**

Throughout the trip we request that our hotels prepare rooms in time for our arrival, however this may not always be possible. Instead we can store our luggage and explore our new destination.

### **Included Meals**

14 Breakfasts, 14 lunches, 14 dinners. Allow \$100 for snacks.

There are some simple breakfasts included on this trip which comprises simply of bread, butter, jam, coffee/tea and juice. This is typical of breakfasts in hotels in Iran. Local breakfasts are available for the more adventurous at nearby markets.

### **Getting Around**

Private van, taxi, local bus, local train, metro, flight, walking.

Babel Travel adventures use every form of local transport available. We feel that this is the best way to get a feel for the country by travelling the way the locals do. Travelling the local way will not only give you a true taste of the country but will leave you with great experiences to last a lifetime.

### **Visas**

It is your responsibility to arrange a visa before you travel. Babel Travel cannot accept responsibility for anyone who is refused entry because they lack the correct documentation.

Visas for Iran are required by all nationalities. Obtaining a visa for Iran is two-step process:

Step 1: An authorisation code for your visa must be issued by The Iranian Ministry of Foreign affairs.

Step 2: A visa stamp for your passport must be obtained at an Iranian Embassy once the authorization code has been issued.

**How to apply for your Authorisation Code:** Please immediately fill in the visa application form sent to you by our sales team at the time of booking. You need to fill in your entire program for your stay in Iran. If you are arriving early or staying on afterwards this needs to be written on your application form. As you are technically the responsibility of the Babel Travel operator for your entire stay, only Babel Travel booked activities/accommodation are able to be nominated as part of this visa application. We have filled in the trip itinerary for you.

Return it together with a scanned copy of the first page of your passport via email to [info.en@babeltravel.com](mailto:info.en@babeltravel.com) as soon as possible

Please ensure all details are correct before sending. Any errors may result in your visa being denied or delayed. Please read important visa notes below.

Our agent in Iran will process the applications for the group with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It takes between 3-5 weeks, depending on your nationality for your authorisation code to be issued. All applications are submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 75 & 60 days prior to the first travel date. Applications are only submitted once minimum numbers for the trip to run (4) have been reached.

We recommend your flight to Iran should be as close to the starting date as possible. We also recommend your flights dates should be changeable in case of delays at the embassy issuing the visa.

When approved, your authorisation code will be faxed to the embassy that you nominated in your application. Our Iranian operator will then notify Babel Travel of your authorisation code via email. We will then inform you. It is vital that you provide us with an email contact at time of booking. On occasions the local operator may contact you directly regarding the information provided for visa processing.

**How to obtain your visa stamp:** Once you have received your authorisation code from our agent (it will come to you as an email at your nominated email address) immediately take or courier your passport along with your visa fee and photos to your nominated Iranian Embassy to obtain the visa.

The cost of the actual visa needs to be covered by you. Please check your relevant embassy for visa costs.

If you wish to send your passport via mail we recommend that you do this through express post or courier service.

The turnaround time for your visa to be stamped in your passport and returned to your home address may be 3-4 days. Please note that Iranian embassies and consulates worldwide may only open for 2 or 3 days a week due to the large amount of public holidays in Iran. Please check with your nominated Iranian Embassy for their opening times and processing times for visas.

Once your code has been authorised, it is essential that you provide a photo of yourself with your passport to the embassy. For women we recommend you provide a photo with your hair covered by a headscarf (not a hat). If you wish to personally collect your visa at the designated embassy you must also arrive wearing a headscarf.

If you have any questions regarding this process, please feel free to email [info.en@babeltravel.com](mailto:info.en@babeltravel.com)

### **Important Visa Notes:**

1. Visa costs fluctuate and vary, but are usually between EUR 40-70 depending on your nationality. Once your day tourist visa is issued you must enter Iran within 90 days.

2. Entry visas are required by all nationalities before arrival into Iran. They CANNOT be obtained at either the Tehran airport or at any of Iran's border crossings. There has been talk of some nationalities getting a 7 day visa on arrival at the Tehran airport but this is

entirely up to the immigration official on the day and we don't recommend you do this. Extending your visa is all but impossible to achieve.

3. Please check that the embassy issues you with a tourist visa and not a business visa (the stamp in your passport must state that the visa is a tourist one). If you are issued with a business visa hotels will charge you the business travellers rates which are often far higher than the tourist rates.

4. A visa will be flatly refused if your passport contains evidence of travel to Israel. Note: this is not confined to just an Israeli stamp in your passport. You will be refused an Iranian Visa if there is an Egyptian entry or exit stamp from the Egyptian/Israeli border (at Taba or Rafah) or a Jordanian entry or exit stamp from the Jordanian/Israeli border (at Wadi Araba near Aqaba, Sheikh Hussein bridge or King Hussein bridge otherwise known as the Allenby bridge) in your passport. Even without actually having an Israeli stamp in your passport, these exit or entry stamps prove that you have visited Israel and entry into Iran will be disallowed.

5. Upon arrival in Iran women not wearing an Islamic headscarf, long sleeves, covered shoes and a loose fitting skirt or pants, a coat that comes down to above your knees may be refused entry into the country (to avoid this problem bring with you a thin full length raincoat if you choose to buy a manteau after you arrive). A manteau is a loose fitting trench coat that comes down to just above your knees and is required by law to be worn by all women in Iran. Men must also be conservatively dressed wearing long trousers upon arrival, or they too may be refused entry. Please check important notes in these trip notes for more information on local dress

6. When you fill out your application form don't just write 'retired' or 'student', please clarify your job.

For your nearest Iranian Embassy please check the Iranian Ministry of Foreign affairs of Iran website [www.mfa.gov.ir](http://www.mfa.gov.ir)

## **Insurance**

Our trip price do not include insurance. However, it is a condition of joining our trips that travellers are fully insured for any medical expenses they might incur while travelling. At the start of the trip your leader will ask to see your insurance documents and will note down the policy number and emergency contact number.

We recommend that you take out a comprehensive travel insurance policy that covers repatriation and evacuation in case of a medical emergency, kidnapping, serious injury or worse, trip cancellation or trip curtailment as well as covering lose of baggage and valuables. You may also need specific cover for expensive camera equipment.

Many credit card companies offer complementary travel insurance. However the majority of such policies offer virtually no cover and cannot be accepted as adequate travel insurance. If you are planning on using credit card insurance you must bring along proof that the policy covers medical emergencies. Failure to be able to provide such proof to the leader will result in you being compelled to purchase a new approved policy before you can join the trip. If your travel insurance was not purchased from Babel Travel or our agents, you will be required to sign a waiver absolving the company and its agents should your policy not be adequate.

Any clients unable to provide proof of adequate travel insurance cover will be required to purchase a policy or will not be allowed to join the trip.

Most insurers require a local police report to support claims for loss of or damage to personal property. Our office can only issue a letter verifying that personal items have been lost or damaged on the trip of EUR 50 in value and the leader was informed of the loss or damage at the time that it occurred. We recommend Ingle Insurance for this particular trip; <https://www.ingletravel.com/en/travel/specialRisk.asp>

Please also make sure you have access to an additional EUR 500, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control necessitate a change to our planned route.

Babel Travel's Cultural Engagement trips are insured through Ingle Insurance. These trips cover clients in cases of traffic accidents, medical emergencies (including medical evacuation and repatriation), accidental death and disablement coverage, incidents related to war, terrorism and kidnappings but it does NOT include ransom or extortion insurance. We also do not cover for political evacuation (i.e. preemptively removing participants from a volatile situation before there is a medical emergency claim).

### **Your Safety**

By choosing to travel with Babel Travel you can be sure that your safety and well-being is our prime concern. Over the years we have built up a network of local offices, and a team of Destination Managers, local and non-local staff enables us to maintain constant contact with events on the ground in each of our destinations, and to ensure that every aspect of your tour runs as smoothly as possible. If you find yourself worrying far too much about all the terrible things that might happen to you while travelling overseas, remember that generally overseas travel is very safe and group travel even more so.

Your group leader will be with you on all included activities, however you will have some free time to pursue your own activities and interests, chill out or explore in your own time. Please be aware that the optional activities you undertake are not part of your Babel Travel itinerary, and Babel Travel makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. We simply recommend them and not endorse them. Saying that, we will warn you if we feel that an activity is dangerous or an operator isn't reputable.

### **Your Health**

All travellers joining our tours are assumed to be in good health and to have a sufficient level of fitness to complete their chosen itinerary. If you have an existing medical condition or disability you must make this known at the time of booking. If accepted on the tour, you must also make your condition known to the trip leader.

When selecting your trip please carefully read the Babel Travel brochure and itinerary and assess your ability to cope with our style of travel. Please contact us at [info.en@babeltravel.com](mailto:info.en@babeltravel.com) should you require any clarification on what is involved on your itinerary. For travellers over 70 years a completed Babel Medical certificate is required. Babel Travel reserves the right to turn away, without recompense, any person who is found, at any time during their trip, to have concealed an existing medical condition. We also reserve the right to turn away any person who we consider incapable of completing the trip.

If you are taking any form of medication, please make sure that you bring with you an adequate supply to last the duration of your stay and inform your leader at the start of the tour. You might not be able to obtain suitable medication in the countries you are visiting. If you suffer from asthma even occasionally, we recommend you bring your medication as it cannot be administered by your leader and may not be readily available while you are travelling.

Although, there are no particular health requirements for this trip, we recommend you consult a doctor or health clinic on what vaccinations may be required. It is your responsibility to bring a small supply of items such as insect repellent, aspirin or plasters for small cuts and abrasions. Some travellers like to bring along their own emergency medical kit which may be used by local medical staff in the case of accidents or illness. Your group leader is fully trained in basic first aid and will carry, at all times a very well stocked First Aid Kit which can be used in emergencies.

### **Drinking Water**

Please DO NOT drink tap water, even in hotels or restaurants as it usually contains higher levels of minerals than the water you are used to drinking in your own country. It is fine for a local to drink water from a tap as their bodies are conditioned to it, but we highly recommend you drink bottled water at all times. Bottled water is found everywhere and is quite cheap. Upset stomachs generally occur quite quickly if you drink local water, and although it is not really serious - it can hamper your overall enjoyment of a country. Also, please aim to brush your teeth by using bottled water.

### **Extreme Temperatures**

IRAN: As Iran is a desert county it can have extreme weather! Temperatures can reach approximately 45-50C in summer, which means that it can be quite uncomfortable for those not used to this kind of weather. At the other extreme, the winter months can be exceptionally cold. The best time to visit Iran is between April-May and September-October.

### **Are You Ready For This Adventure?**

On most of our itineraries there are long travel days and some rough travelling in areas away from main tourist routes. Mountain passes, bumpy and windy roads can sometimes make for some real challenging travel experiences. If you have experienced motion sickness in the past, we highly recommend you consider medication to help ease the discomfort. On some occasions, we depart very early in the morning to make sure we get the most our time in the next destination.

Temperatures vary from the very cold (usually in the early morning and late evenings) to the extreme heat in the summer (usually during the day). Please be prepared for these extreme temperatures and don't forget to pack to correct correctly. If you suffer health issues when experiencing these temperatures, consider if this trip is right for you. A decent level of fitness is recommended and will certainly help increase the enjoyment of the trip.

Iran is a land that is without a doubt very different to your own and will probably lead to a dose of culture shock. However, the difference you encounter should be viewed as a wonderful and exciting challenge, rather than a deterrent. From our time in Iran, we have grown fond of this incredibly diverse and varied land. Patience, understanding and a sense of humour will see through and you'll no doubt grow this love this amazing place.

## **Money**

Iranian Rial (IRR) is the currency in Iran. As of December 2010, EUR 1 = IRR 14,300

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

Iran is purely a cash economy. This means you cannot use your Visa Card, Mastercard, ATM Card or any kind of western Travellers Cheques while in Iran. Only Cash can be used in Iran. Euros and US Dollars are the only hard currencies accepted at Iranian banks and money-changers (please don't bring British Pounds as it is very difficult to find banks that will change these notes). Having those notes changed into Iranian Rials is a fairly simple exercise. Please make sure that all the notes are unmarked and undamaged in any way and should have been printed since 1996. New and fresh notes are preferred in most banks.

You'll get a slightly higher rate for larger notes (50 and 100 notes) but bring plenty of smaller denominations also (5,10,20 etc). Banks and money-changers can be found in most of the places that we'll visit throughout the country. The largest Iranian Rial note is the IRR 20 000 note (EUR 1.5) but the IRR10 000 notes (EUR 50) are far more widely used. Thankfully new Iranian Travellers Cheques make dealing with such large numbers of Rials much easier. It's a lot safer and easier than carrying around huge wads of notes. It's especially useful for people who plan to buy expensive souvenirs. These cheques are available in 1 million and 500,000 Rial denominations and can be organised easily in most Iranian banks. Changing them back into Iranian Rial notes is trouble free.

Note: you cannot change Iranian Rials into hard currency outside of Iran. Upon arrival at the Tehran airport there are a few places where you can change money and we recommend you change some money at the airport before departing. Remember if you run out of money while in Iran it can be difficult, expensive and time consuming to find banks that can transfer money over to you. Before leaving for Iran calculate how much money you'll think you'll need in either EUROS or US dollars and take that, and a bit extra with you.

Babel Travel recommends you take at least EUR 500 with you for your 15 day trip in Iran. This will cover all optional activities, meals, special clothing requirements, some souvenirs and other items. If you're a big shopper (and there are so many great things to buy in Iran, especially carpets!) we recommend you bring more! Please take into consideration the safety issues of carrying so much cash with you so bringing a money belt with you is absolutely essential for your trip to Iran. Thankfully Iran is one of the safest countries that you'll probably ever visit and crime against foreigners is very rare.

## **Tipping**

Any tip that you wish to give your group leader, local guides or drivers in recognition of service is always appreciated.

## **Local Dress**

Iran is a traditional Islamic nation and a strict dress code is enforced throughout the country. The code of dress must be adhered to at all times. Men must wear long trousers at all times and generally keep themselves neat and tidy. Loose fitting cotton pants are preferable for the Iranian heat. Short sleeved shirts that cover your shoulders and open toed sandals are

now acceptable for men - ankles must be covered. Men must wear full length shirts at religious sites.

Women must wear the hejab at all times, apart from in their hotel bedrooms of course. A hejab consists of the manteau, a loose fitting trench coat that comes down to just above your knees plus a headscarf. A headscarf can be of any colour but you'll be better received if you're wearing darker tones. It is now perfectly acceptable for women to wear their headscarf that shows some of their fringe and you'll see many ladies doing so.

A manteau can be purchased in Tehran (approximately EUR 18) in some of the shops along Ferdosi street, a short walk away our hotel. Headscarves are available for about EUR 5. Your leader will advise you of what attire is appropriate during the welcome meeting. Upon arrival in Iran women not wearing a headscarf, long sleeves, sealed shoes and a loose fitting skirt or pants may be refused entry into the country (to avoid this problem bring with you a thin full length raincoat if you choose to buy a manteau after you arrive). Please don't bring any tight fitting clothing with you to Iran as it's forbidden to show any hint of the shape of your body. Many Iranian women wear western style clothing and you'll be shocked at how trendy these girls can be. Make up, lipstick and nail-polish are all the rage. The most comfortable clothes to wear underneath your manteau are full length, lightweight cotton garments like trousers or even skirts. Women must also wear covered shoes or sandals that cover their ankles and skin.

Good walking shoes are required for both sexes as we'll be do some walking over rough terrain in Abyaneh, Yazd and Abarqu. A light water and windproof jacket is useful and a hat essential. Although Iran is generally hot, warm clothes will be needed for the cooler nights.

### **Laundry**

Some of our hotels offer a laundry service however this may not be available in all accommodation. As self-service laundries are scarce in the country, we recommend you bring bio-degradable laundry detergent in case you need to hand-wash your clothes. Your leader can let you know the best places to do your laundry on the trip - usually at any 2 night stop to allow enough time for drying.

### **Email**

Internet cafes can now be found almost everywhere in Iran. The cost for an hour is approx EUR 2.

### **Telephone**

The Iran phone system is fairly good, although international calls can be expensive. A 3 minute call (to Europe) will cost approx. EUR 10 from a hotel and approx. EUR 8 from a telephone centre.

### **Post**

The postal service is relatively good and stamps are available everywhere. An overseas stamp for postcards will cost approximately EUR 1. Posting of parcels can be time-consuming however, and contents of parcels normally have to pass customs inspection before they are sealed for posting. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.

## **Alcohol and Drugs**

Alcohol is strictly forbidden in Iran and severe penalties will be incurred by anyone attempting to bring it into the country. Drug laws are also extremely strict and travellers face lengthy jail terms if caught. If found, pork, obscene material (magazines, DVDs etc), and controversial literature will all be confiscated by custom officials. Upon arrival, you as a foreigner will likely be whisked through customs but note that random bag checks do commonly occur.

## **Ramadan**

Ramadan is a Muslim religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. It is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims do not eat or drink anything from true dawn until sunset. Fasting is meant to teach the person patience, sacrifice and humility. Ramadan is a time to fast for the sake of God, and to offer more prayer than usual. During Ramadan, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

This period is actually a wonderful time to travel to Muslim countries (we encourage you to travel then) as it gives you an opportunity to view first hand, the sacrifices people make for the sake of God. Sitting with a group of locals when they break their fast, can be one of the more rewarding aspects of your adventure. Approximate dates in 2011 are 1 August – 29 August 2011.

## **Your Fellow Babel Travellers**

On group trips you will be exposed to all the wonderful things that comes with experiencing a destination with like-minded people. Your fellow Babel Travellers will most likely come from all walks of life, and from different countries. We ask you to have patience with all travellers for the sake of group dynamics. We want every one of you to have the best travel experience of your life. Being punctual helps the group. If you are asked to be in a place at a particular time, please ensure that you do so. Being late may mean you'll miss that special cultural performance, spend less time with a local family - or in some cases completely miss an important connection or journey. The best groups are the ones that work together as a team!

## **Trip Leader**

Your Babel Travel trip leader is there to ensure that all aspects of the trip run smoothly. He/she will share their local knowledge, advise you on how to fill your free time and coordinate the day to day running of the trip, although occasionally he/she may need your understanding if things do not go according to plan. If you have any problems on the trip, please let your trip leader know so that steps can be taken to put it right.

In Iran we also use the services of specialist guides at places of particular historical interest, and specialised guides for any hiking activities in mountain regions. At Babel Travel we aim to support local guides who have specialised knowledge of the regions we visit - and who better to hear it from than the locals themselves?

## **Sustainable Travel**

We strongly believe that wherever we travel, we should take a responsible attitude with us. Sustainable Travel is about respecting the country we have chosen to visit. Your enjoyment of the trip should never be at the expense of the culture or the environment of the host country. Therefore, we believe that giving back to the communities we visit is essential.

In Iran we have built strong links with local communities, aid agencies, charities, women's and children's groups, hospitals - all of which directly rely on the assistance of donations and products purchased by our travellers and other visitors. We offer Babel travellers an opportunity to interact with locals at these organisations. It is the goal of this program to introduce you to people who are helping to changing the world for the better.

## **What To Take**

What you need to bring will vary according to the trip style you have chosen, the countries you are visiting and when you are travelling. As a guideline, you should pack as lightly as possible - under 10kgs is a great idea! On the vast majority of our trips you are expected to carry your own luggage over short to medium distances (no longer than 20 minutes). Packing light is also crucial as there may be weight restrictions on local aircraft.

Due to the nature of this trip, cumbersome suitcases and wheelee bags are not recommended for Babel Travellers! Most group members carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags with wheels are acceptable (if it has carry straps) but you will need to carry these bags up and down stairs, over bumpy roads, through muddy streets etc. You will also need a day pack/bag to carry water and a camera etc for day trips or walking tours.

It is very important that your bags can be locked. It may be necessary to store your luggage separately (and unattended) from the group.

## **Checklist**

The following checklist is to be used as a guide only and is not intended to be a complete packing list. Any other items that you wish to pack are at your own discretion however you should attempt to comply with the suggested luggage weight limit.

Travel documents: (your passport, visa, updated travel insurance, flights tickets, travel voucher)

Health requirements and any necessary medication

Money: cash/credit cards/travellers cheques, money bag or pouch

First Aid Kit

Alarm clock and torch (flashlight)

Lightweight travel towel

Ear plugs can be very useful

A scarf or face mask for dust and sand

Phrase book

Sunscreen (with high sun protection factor and lip balm)

Sunglasses - gets very sunny in the Middle East!

A hat

Antibacterial hand gel (wet wipes etc)

Day pack to carry your personal needs during the day

A lock for your backpacks - small and large

Comfortable shoes with good grip and ankle support

Trekking trousers (the type with zip off legs are ideal)  
Tampons (can be difficult to find on tour)  
Sunhat, sunscreen and sunglasses  
Lock for your bag  
Sleeping sheet for the Overnight nomad stay  
Small travel towel - for use at the nomad stay  
Small pillow (inflatable type) for those long bus trips and for nomad stay

Babel Travel leaders collect clothing for poorer village communities. If you have room in your luggage, warm children's clothes and shoes are particularly appreciated.

### **Your Belongings**

Although it can be traumatic and distressing to lose personal belongings, remember that almost everything can be replaced. Your valuables are your responsibility so look after them. Keep items like cash, tickets and passports on your person in a hidden money belt or stored in the hotel safe. Leave all non-essential jewelry and other expensive items at home.

Once on the road you will find that most of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables.

Please be aware that while on this trip there is the risk of pick-pocketing. We recommend that you exercise caution when walking alone at night and encourage you to walk together and only on main, well lit roads. Precautions such as carrying your day pack on your chest, not placing your bag over the back of your chair and wearing a money belt will reduce any chance that your valuables should be stolen.

### **Participation Form**

All group members on a Babel Travel trip are required to sign a participation form on Day 1 of the trip. This will take place during the important welcome meeting. Please be aware that signing this form is an essential part of travelling with Babel Travel and is a requirement of all travellers.

### **Feedback**

One of the many unique features of our Cultural Engagement journeys is that we put together a mini documentary and website to show the world what life is really like inside Iran. You are explorers and your input along with the interviews, documentation and notes is important to show our hosts how they can better understand or get involved. You are responsible for giving a voice to the new friends we make along the journey.

In addition, this trip is the first of its kind and we encourage you to provide suggestions, improvements and enhancements.

**Thank you and we look forward to welcoming you.**