IRANIAN ODYSSEY

Shiraz to the Caspian Sea

Dates: April 19 - May 3, 2017
Cost: $6,995 (Double Occupancy)
Join Cross Cultural Journeys and The Traveler on an odyssey to the Republic of Iran, commonly called Persia by the West. A multicultural nation with many ethnic and linguistic groups (mostly Shi’ites), this ancient country straddles Eurasia, Western Asia, the Caspian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Already a crossroads culture of great geo-strategic significance, Iran has endured invasions by the Greeks, Arabs, Turks and Mongols. Meet indigenous communities from the Zagross Mountains; Nomadic tribes near Tehran; Armenian Christians, and the people of remote Abyaneh, who have kept their traditions, dialect and costumes intact for hundreds of years.

One of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, Persia was once a major empire of superpower proportions. It played a vital role in the Islamic Golden Age, producing hundreds of influential scientists, scholars, artists, and thinkers. Let us introduce you to our network of off-the-beaten-track locations and peoples, who care deeply about celebrating and sharing the artistic, architectural, religious and intellectual traditions of Iran through the lens of an unique cultural identity.
Daily Itinerary

Day 1 | Wednesday, April 19, 2017 | Tehran Early morning arrival in Tehran. Meet our guide and transfer to the hotel. After a chance to freshen up, depart on a city tour where you have the opportunity to observe Iran’s bustling capital with a population of twelve million. Our first stop is at the Golestan Palace Complex, the former residence, working offices and ceremonial center of the Qajar (19th century) and Pahlavi kings (Shahs). Visit its painting galleries and mirrored palaces, which after the Islamic revolution of 1979 were changed into various museums for the public to enjoy. After lunch in a local restaurant, continue to the Archaeological (National) Museum. Walking through, you can see within arm's reach many different periods of Iran’s rich history. Time permitting; visit Tehran’s Grand Bazaar. Laleh Hotel or similar (L/D)

Day 2 | Thursday, April 20, 2017 | Tehran-Chalus-Ramsar After breakfast, we depart for Ramsar, located on the Caspian Sea. Our route takes us through the legendary Alborz Mountains towards the sea. Mythology plays a crucial part in the Iranian culture and many of the ancient traditional tales and stories of Persian mythology originate in this mountain range. Where the sea meets the town of Chalus, we proceed along the Caspian Sea to our overnight location; Ramsar. Before dinner, there is time to walk along the beach. Ramsar Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 3 | Friday, April 21, 2017 | Ramsar-Lahijan-Masuleh-Anzali This morning depart for Anzali passing by the tea plantations of Lahijan and Rasht, the capital of Gilan (Caspian Sea) province. Continue to the ancient medieval village of Masuleh, a UNESCO Historical Heritage Site. Here discover Masuleh’s unique architecture where the buildings have been built into the mountain and are interconnected. Courtyards and roofs both serve as pedestrian areas similar to streets. Masuleh does not allow any motor vehicles to enter, due to its unique layout. We overnight at a seaside hotel near Anzali. Grand Hotel Sefid Kenar or similar (B/L/D)

Day 4 | Saturday, April 22, 2017 | Anzali-Qazvin-Tehran We return to Tehran today, driving through another mountainous pass stopping in Qazvin en-route. Here we visit the
Chehelsotun Palace from the 16th century Safavid period, a typical mausoleum, Shazdeh Hussein, with dazzling colorful tile and mirror-works, then the 11th century Jame’ Mosque of Qavin, said to be built over a Zoroastrian fire temple. It has been remodeled over the ages and has a beautiful blue dome and interior relief calligraphy. After lunch, return to the highway, arriving in Tehran in the afternoon. Laleh Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 5 | Sunday, April 23, 2017 | Tehran-Kerman (by air)** Transfer to the Mehrabad Airport for a two and a half hour flight to Kerman. Upon arrival, we visit the 14th century Jame’ mosque, the Ghanj Ali Khan bathhouse and the paintings and tile-works of the Vakil teahouse contained within a bustling bazaar in Kerman. Tonight enjoy several courses of home cooked delicacies in a family run restaurant. Kerman Pars Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 6 | Monday, April 24, 2017 | Kerman** Begin our day with an excursion to the pre-Islamic, immaculately preserved castle known as the Rayen citadel. On the way, stop in the town of Mahan for a visit to the 15th century Shah Ne’mat ollah Vali Sufi shrine where we will discuss the art and artistic mentality of the Sufis, as we view the people praying, immersed in spiritual contemplation. Then we will visit the Baghe Shazdeh (prince’s garden), a 19th century green oasis in the midst of the surrounding desert with its water cascades flowing from an underground water system. Kerman Pars Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 7 | Tuesday, April 25, 2017 | Kerman-Shiraz** Today, drive to Shiraz known as the city of poets, literature, wine and flowers. The route will take us by the salt lakes of Neyriz and fig tree forests with opportunities for photo stops. In Sarvestan, stop to visit a Sufi shrine and a 5th century historical monument called the Sassanid Palace. This huge building is made up of stone and plaster, with several domes, terraces, rooms, and corridors. Crossing beautiful desert scenery, arrive at Shiraz. Pars International Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 8 | Wednesday, April 26, 2017 | Shiraz** Embark on a city tour, including 19th century Eram garden (heavens garden), a 17th century Khan theological school still in operation, the colorful nomadic bazaar of Haji, the famous pink mosque known as Nasir ol Molk, amongst other sites and sounds of Persia. Lunch in a beloved local traditional restaurant called Shater Abbas and on to visit Narenjestan Qavam, the residence of a former governor of Shiraz preserving the elegance and refinement enjoyed by the upper-class families during the 19th century. Next visit the marble tomb of poet Hafez and if we are lucky
enough to catch them, listen to the local and traditional music spilling over into the Persian night. Then we have a free time to enjoy the 18th century colorful, traditional, and crowded Vakil Bazaar, where you’ll discover textiles, spices, copper handicrafts, and antiques. End the day at Saray-e Moshir, an urban caravanserai used in the Pahlavi period as the art festival center and now functioning as an exhibition space for Iranian handicrafts and antiques. Pars International Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 9 | Thursday, April 27, 2017 | Shiraz-Persepolis-Yazd Today, we drive to Yazd and experience one of the many highlights of this journey- a visit to Persepolis, the 6th century B.C. ancient ceremonial capital of Achaemenids. Once the home of the King of Kings for over 200 years, it consists of the remains of several monumental buildings including the Gate of All Nations, Palace of 100 Columns, Palace of Darius, Xerxes’ Palace, Central Palace, and Apadana Palace. Then, journey to the nearby ancient necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam where many ancient royals have been interred. Lunch in a local restaurant, then visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Pasargadae town and battlefield, dating from the 6th century B.C. and the final resting place of Cyrus the Great. We cross Shirkuh (the lion mountain) at an altitude of 13,000 feet. Visit the 4,000 years old tree known as Sarv-e Abarqu considered an Iranian national monument, and an icehouse in Abarqu. Moshirol Mamalek Garden Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 10 | Friday, April 28, 2017 | Yazd Yazd, known for its very studious and religious people is also the center of Zoroastrian culture in Iran. Our first visit is to Dakhmeh, the “Tower of Silence”—a circular, raised structure used to expose the dead, much like the traditional Tibetan “sky burial.” Still in use today, we visit the Zoroastrian fire-temple holding a fire that has been kept alight continuously since 470 A.D. On to explore the 15th-century Mirchakhmaq square and the façade of the old Bazaar of Yazd, followed by a look at the precious Water Museum to discover how people have survived in such a dry, barren land for thousands of years. Yazd mosques are well known for their high and lofty minarets and you can find the tallest one on the Jame’ mosque which we will visit today along with the Seyyed Roknoddin holy shrine. From here, stroll through the spiral back alleys of the old quarters of the city, visiting the prison of Alexander, the 12-Imam mosque, and the traditional Lariha house. Lunch in an 18th-century public bathhouse, recently converted into a traditional Persian restaurant. The 18th-century Dowlat Abad garden and its lofty wind tower (badgir) is another wonder of Yazd that we’ll visit today. Wind towers, also referred to
as wind trappers or ventilation towers, are inseparable parts of the architecture of central and southern Iran, and have provided natural air conditioning in this hot climate for thousands of years. The wind tower in this garden stands almost 110 feet tall, and is considered an architectural masterpiece. We’ll experience firsthand how one can be so in harmony with nature. For dinner you will enjoy the Yazdi gastronomy. Moshirol Mamalek Garden Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 11 | Saturday, April 29, 2017 | Yazd-Isfahan Drive to Isfahan via Na’in, an ancient Hebrew settlement (538 B.C.) in the center of Iran. In Na’in visit a 17th century traditional Pirnia House with miniature wall frescos that houses the Ethnological Museum. Next see the Jame’ Mosque, one of the first four mosques built in Iran after the Arab invasion. We have lunch in a nice mud-brick restaurant before continuing on to Isfahan. Stop in Balabad at a 17th century caravanserai. Also see a 5000 years old Qanat, an underground water system in ancient Iran. Arrive in Isfahan in time for dinner. Abbasi Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 12 | Sunday, April 30, 2017 | Isfahan Welcome to Isfahan, a wonderful and colorful city filled with Islamic art and architecture. Twice serving as the capital city of Iran, most recently in the 16th and 17th centuries under Shah Abbas the Great, the Persians called it Nesf-e-Jahan (half the world), meaning to see it was to see half of the glories in the world. Our tour begins with the Vank Cathedral, also known as The Church of the Saintly Sisters, which belongs to the Armenian Christians who came to this area in the early 17th century by the order of Shah Abbas the Great. In addition to the main cathedral, it houses a museum, a historic printing press, and a large library, which includes the first book printed in Iran, as well as an array of Armenian textiles. From here we’ll drive to the Sio-Se-Pol and Khajou bridges and then to Chehel-Sotoun Palace, which we’ll view large frescoes depicting court life, counterbalanced by miniature paintings of the 17th-century Safavid dynasty. Later we’ll visit the Jame’ mosque where you can study and enjoy the thousand-year history of the art and architecture of the Islamic world in Iran. At the end of the day we’ll have some time to watch the beauty of a Persian carpet being woven in a carpet shop. Enjoy dinner in the famous Shahrzad restaurant in order to test the delicacies of Iran cuisine. Abbasi Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

Day 13 | Monday, May 1, 2017 | Isfahan Begin another fascinating day with a walk in the harem garden of the 17th-century Hasht Behesht (Eight Paradises) Palace, where the
family of the king used to live. You’ll be enchanted by the peaceful sound of water fountains and birds throughout the garden. A short walk leads us to Naqshe-Jahan (Royal) Square, the second largest square in the world. The square was an entertainment site and the main polo ground for the Safavid kings, the first place in the world where polo was played at night. You can imagine the neighing of the horses, struggling and pushed to the limit and the roaring applause of the crowds. The eternal eyewitness to these games and parades is Ali-Qapu Palace, with a large platform from which the court boasted the power of their king. Crossing the square, visit Sheikh Lotfollah, the first mosque for women in the Islamic world. It was a place where women of the court used to come via the underground tunnel to say their prayers in privacy. Inside the dome, we’ll find a magnificent mixture of calligraphy and tiles, with a peaceful ambience created by the soft lighting system. As we depart the mosque, you can window-shop your way through the covered bazaar on your way to the Imam Mosque (in Meidan Emam). Built by Shah Abbas, it is a main gathering place, especially on Fridays, containing an ocean of blue tile work that embodies a spirit of peace and tranquility, with a pool in the center of the courtyard. We’ll relax and meditate, followed by a cup of tea at a traditional Sufi teahouse. After a short rest, we will visit a traditional restaurant. Abbasi Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 14 | Tuesday, May 2, 2017 | Isfahan - Tehran** Today we embark on a scenic drive through the central mountains of Iran, the Karkas (Vulture) mountains. En route, we’ll look at the façade of a Khanegah (monastery or Dervish-house), collections of tile-work and calligraphies, and observe a skillful artist in a ceramic workshop in Natanz. In the traditional village of Abyaneh we will greet people who have kept their ancient traditions, costumes, and dialect intact for hundreds of years. As we continue to drive towards Tehran, we will stop in Kashan to visit Bagh-e Fin (Fin Garden), a prime example of 17th century Persian style gardens and the oldest extant garden in Iran. A short drive will take us to the tiled mausoleum of Emamzadeh Ebrahim to see exceptional tile and mirror work. Then in the old quarter of this town, we will visit a traditional 19th-century home. After lunch in a local restaurant continue to Tehran arriving in the late afternoon. Gather this evening for a farewell dinner and discussion of our experiences in this fascinating country. Laleh Hotel or similar (B/L/D)

**Day 15 | Wednesday, May 3, 2017 | Tehran** Transfer to the International Airport to fly back home. (B)
Some notes about traveling in Iran

Iran is a fascinating and beautiful country and its people are extremely welcoming to visitors. They are especially eager to talk with Americans.

As travelers in the Islamic Republic of Iran, visitors are expected to follow local laws and customs. Women will need to cover their heads with a scarf whenever they are in public. They should wear loose fitting clothing that covers arms and legs and a top that reaches mid-thigh. Except for shorts, men can wear the same casual clothing they would wear at home.

Consumption or possession of alcohol is prohibited.

There will be a few days of long drives. The landscape is varied and interesting and there will be frequent rest stops. Exploring ancient sites and historic cities and villages may require walking on uneven terrain and participants should be able to navigate this.

As a courtesy to our Iranian hosts and fellow travelers, all participants are asked to stay with the group and be prompt for departures and gatherings. Our Iranian guide, Mr. Hadi will be available to answer any questions as we experience a culture different from our own.

National Guide

Saied Haji Hadi “Hadi”, a native of Iran, always dreamed of traveling and interacting with other cultures. He started his career as an air traffic controller, including three years of education in the United States. After 20 years, Hadi completed a tour guide course, and traded in his sky-watching days for tour guiding in his home country. Now, after 28 years in tourism, he has led over 330 tours for Western groups, along with a position of leadership as Chairman of the Iranian
Tour Guide Association (ITGA) for six years. Aside from leading tours, he spends considerable time exploring the nooks and crannies of Iran and other parts of the world. Hadi keeps up his passion for the skies by collecting war-bird planes, building and flying RC model aircraft, and seeking out aviation museums abroad. A diligent student of cultures and of life, Hadi is a warm and incredibly knowledgeable resource, the perfect person to impart understanding of Iranian culture on this cultural odyssey.

Journey Details

INCLUDED: Accommodations (first class hotels or best available); in-country ground and air transportation; all meals; English speaking National Guide; CCJ trip leader; guest speakers; all entrance fees; tips for baggage at airports, hotels, meals, locals guides; preparation materials; personalized luggage tags; bottled water on the bus.

NOT INCLUDED: International flight to/from Tehran; tips for National Guide, drivers; visa and passport fees; departure tax; travel insurance (strongly recommended, info will be sent upon registration). A tourist visa is required to travel to Iran. CCJ will send information after registration.

ACTIVITY LEVEL MODERATE: This journey requires participants to be able to walk a couple hours each day, often on uneven surfaces and pathways. There are many times to rest but ability to keep up the group’s pace is essential. Most people find no issues with the activity level but those with any conditions should call our office to discuss their limitations.

DEPOSIT: To hold your space for any of our trips, we request a $500 deposit by Visa or MasterCard.

Dates: Apr 19 - May 3, 2017
Cost: $6,995 (Double Occupancy)
Add: $1,498 (Single Room)

To Book This Journey
(800) 353-2276
Email: travel@crossculturaljourneys.com