Resting between the steppes of Asia and the fertile crescent of the Mediterranean, Iran is a stepping stone between East and West. Discover this country whose vast empire once stretched from the Indus River in the east, to Egypt in the west. It is a land dotted with carved reminders of the Parthians, the Sassanids, the Seljuks and the Mongols – their monuments serving as vivid testament to the extraordinary cultural heritage of this vast country. Join us on a program that seeks to unravel this country with a focus, not just on its rich history but with discussions on what lies ahead.

Begin in Tehran and admire the magnificent Crown Jewels stored in an enormous vault at the Bank Melli, once belonging to the Shah and his family, the profusion of crowns, tiaras, thrones, necklaces and other imperial regalia assembled here is impressive. Fly to Kerman and explore the town’s extensive bazaar, mosque and caravanserai complex. Drive to Yazd, one of the last strongholds of Zoroastrianism. On the hills outside of town stand the remains of the old towers of silence, which the Zoroastrians used for funerary purposes. Travel south to Shiraz and Persepolis – the greatest and best-preserved monument to the achievements of the Achaemenian kings. In Isfahan discover glittering domes, tiled with floral arabesques which tower above wide shaded avenues and terraced gardens. For years the city was reputed to be the most beautiful in the world and, at its center, is the enormous Maidan-e Shah. Seven times the size of St. Marks in Venice it was the heart of the city visited by travelers from all over the world. Return home from Isfahan.

STUDY LEADER: David J. Roxburgh (Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, 1996) is Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor of Islamic Art History at Harvard University where he has taught in the Department of History of Art and Architecture since he completed the Ph.D. In his publications, Roxburgh has focused on primary written sources, manuscript painting, arts of the book, calligraphy, Timurid art and architecture, exchanges between China and the Islamic lands, travel narratives, and the pre-modern through contemporary histories of collecting, exhibitions, and museums. In several courses, he and his students have examined the consequences of the Mongol campaigns of the 1200s throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran up to the late sixteenth century. He has published two books, Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran (Leiden: Brill, 2001), and The Persian Album 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), numerous articles, reviews, and chapters for themed volumes. He is currently working on two books about illustrated Arabic manuscripts of the late 1100s through early 1200s and the study of Medieval architecture in Iran based on the archive of Myron Bement Smith in the Freer | Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
**GROUP SIZE:** Up to 25 guests

**PRICING:** $8,995 per person double occupancy/ $10,260 single occupancy

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**SCHEDULE BY DAY**

*B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner, R=Reception*

**FRIDAY, MAY 6**

**DEPART U.S.**

Depart the U.S. on the recommended flights to Iran.

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**SATURDAY, MAY 7**

**ARRIVE ISTANBUL**

Arrive in Istanbul this afternoon and transfer to your hotel. Enjoy an informal reception and meet your fellow travelers.

Overnight: *Armada Hotel / (R)*

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**SUNDAY, MAY 8**

**ARRIVE TEHRAN, IRAN**

Arrive in Tehran late this afternoon and transfer to your hotel. Relax and unwind before an informal dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *Espinas Hotel / (D)*

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**SUNDAY, MAY 8**

**TEHRAN**

Enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Tehran. This morning visit the National Museum which is also known as the Archaeological Museum with its fine collection including a stone capital of a winged lion from Susa and a 6th-century B.C. audience hall relief of Darius the Great from the Treasury at Persepolis.

Continue on to the Glass and Ceramics Museum of Iran followed by lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch meet with the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation. The foundation promotes science and research, getting local communities involved in conservation, raising environmental awareness and working on national and local policies. Protecting the endangered Asiatic Cheetah and its environment is of particular importance.

Before returning to the hotel, visit the Carpet Museum which has a small number of excellent Iranian carpets.

Tonight’s welcome dinner is at the hotel’s Persian Restaurant.

Overnight: *Espinas Hotel / (B, L, D)*

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**TUESDAY, MAY 10**

**TEHRAN**

Travel to northern Tehran to visit 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.

Continue on to the modest home of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Jamaran.

After lunch at a local restaurant visit the Iranian Film Museum. Archives include footage of thousands of films as well as photographs, reviews, posters, advertising films, photography equipment and statues of actors like Ali Nassirian and Samira Makhmalbaf.

Afterwards enjoy a special visit to the Aaran Gallery where Nazila Noebashari, owner of the gallery – one of Tehran’s most important contemporary art galleries, will meet you and talk more about contemporary art in Tehran.

Before returning to the hotel, drive by the former U.S. Embassy.

Dinner this evening is at the hotel.

Overnight: *Espinas Hotel / (B, L, D)*
WEDNESDAY, MAY 11
KERMAN
After breakfast visit the Golestan Palace (Palace of Flowers. 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 on 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.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch view 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.

Late afternoon board your flight to Kerman. Upon arrival, transfer to the Pars Hotel where you will dine tonight.

Overnight: Pars Hotel / (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, MAY 12
KERMAN
Begin the day with a visit 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.

Drive about one hour back towards Kerman stopping in Mahan for lunch at the delightful Bagh-e Tarikhi Gardens, which were designed as traditional Persian gardens. Please note you may opt for sitting traditional Persian style (sitting on a raised platform) or there are a few western style tables and chairs.

After lunch drive to the beautiful tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali, who died in 1431 and was the founder of a Dervish order, centered in Mahan, which continues to be an active spiritual force in Iran today. His tomb is an excellent example of the importance that traditional Persian architecture places on the harmony between nature and building.

Later this afternoon return to Kerman where you will dine tonight.

Overnight: Pars Hotel / (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, MAY 13
YAZD
This morning continue exploring 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.

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.

Stop for a break en route 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 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. There are currently estimated to be less than 500 Onagers left in Iran. It is not possible to visit the sanctuary, it’s often possible to see the Onager’s from the road if you look carefully.

Upon arrival in Yazd transfer to your hotel where you may enjoy dinner.

Overnight: Moshir Garden Hotel / (B, L, D)
SATURDAY, MAY 14
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 view from the dome of the 14th century Friday Mosque shows the sunbaked roofs and wind towers of the city. These wind towers are seen all over Iran, but are most highly developed in Yazd.

Visit 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.

Continue on to the bazaar before ending at 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.

After lunch drive to the Friday Mosque. The Mosque was built over a forty year period; the portal’s facade is decorated from top to bottom with dazzling tile work, predominately blue in color.

After visiting the mosque, begin a walking tour through Yazd’s covered streets of the old quarter of Yazd. 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.

Spend the rest of this afternoon concentrating on the Zoroastrian religion. There are about 400,000 Zoroastrians left in the world, of which about 60,000 live in and around Yazd. It was one of the first religions to postulate an omnipotent, invisible god. Zoroastrians worship fire as a symbol of God, and keep eternal flames burning at their temples.

Visit the Ateshkade. Zoroastrians believe in the purity of the elements and will not bury their dead as they believe that this pollutes the earth. Cremation is also not used as this pollutes the atmosphere. Instead, until recently, the dead have been exposed on ‘towers of silence’ where the vultures soon dispose of the remains.

The final stop for the day at sunset will be at two of these ‘towers of silence’ which were used until thirty years ago by Zoroastrians as a place for leaving their dead to be devoured by vultures, their souls freed. Climb up along a steep, dirt path to the top of one of the towers where you will come across two very impressive towers.

Enjoy an earlier dinner this evening at a café where many of Yazd’s young professionals come to eat and socialize.

Overnight: Moshir Garden Hotel / (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, MAY 15
SHIRAZ

This morning drive 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.

Enjoy a simple, fast, but well-prepared lunch.

After lunch continue driving towards Shiraz stopping en route at Pasargad which was excavated by Dr. David Stronach, now at the University of California, Berkeley. Cyrrus 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 Cyrrus stands apart from the scattered remains of gardens, palaces and temples at Pasargad.

Upon arrival in Shiraz transfer to the Homa Shiraz Hotel where you will dine this evening.

Overnight: Homa Shiraz Hotel / (B, L, D)

MONDAY, MAY 16
SHIRAZ

This morning visit the Eram Garden, built during the 19th century in a quadripartite Persian Paradise Garden structure. Continue to the Fars Museum. This octagonal pavilion was originally built by Karim Khan and was used for official receptions.
A short distance away by foot is the citadel or Arg-e Karim Khan. 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.

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 9th century although what is seen today largely dates from a Safavid rebuilding. The mosque gets its name due to the beautiful pink colored tiles used for its interior design. Colored glass is also used extensively in its design. Be sure to remove your shoes and step into the building on the side where the sun shines through the colored glass.

Enjoy lunch at the delightful Shaterabbas Restaurant 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. 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 poet lived in Shiraz his entire life (1300-1389) and is well known to Iranians.

Dinner this evening is at the Haft Khan Restaurant.

Overnight: Homa Shiraz Hotel / (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, MAY 17
SHIRAZ

Enjoy a full day excursion to Persepolis, Naghsh-e-Rostam and Naghsh-e-Rajab.

Drive to Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenian Empire and perhaps one of the most spectacular archaeological sites surviving today.

After lunch sitting in the shade of grape vines at the Laneh Tavoos Restaurant visit Naghsh-E Rostam which is located near Persepolis and which contains the carved tombs of four Achaemenian tombs. The tombs are widely accepted to be those of Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes and Darius II. There are also eight reliefs from later in the Sassanian Dynasty which are cut into the stone below the facades of the tombs. These fine reliefs depict various scenes of imperial conquests as well as a probable fire temple from Achaemenian times.

Opposite Naghsh-e-Rostam is Naghsh-e-Rajab with three Sassanian bas-reliefs which depict various scenes from the reigns of Ardashir I and Shapur the Great.

After a truly wonderful day return to Shiraz. Dinner is at a local restaurant this evening.

Overnight: Homa Shiraz Hotel / (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18
ISFAHAN

Drive about 6 hours to Isfahan stopping en route for lunch.

Upon arrival visit 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. Along with the Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotun, the Hasht Behesht was restored by ISMEO – Instituto 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.

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

This evening enjoy a Persian buffet dinner served in the hotel courtyard.

Overnight: Abbasi Hotel / (B, L, D)
THURSDAY, MAY 19
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. 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. Four jewels of 17th century architecture adorn each side of the square, symbolizing the political, economic and religious spheres of Safavid Persia.

Visit the Lotfallah 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 17th 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 to relax. This evening, enjoy a farewell dinner at a lovely local restaurant.

Overnight: Abbasi Hotel / (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, MAY 20
ISFAHAN

This 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 an excellent spot to learn about Iranian architectural history.

Continue on to admire some of the five bridges crossing the Zayendehrud River which is sadly now dry due to drought and the construction of a dam. After seeing the Bridge of 33 Arches, drive to the Armenian quarter of Isfahan. There are fourteen churches here, enjoy 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. The interior is covered with gilded carvings and intricate paintings of Biblical stories.

Dinner this evening is at the hotel.

Overnight: Abbasi Hotel / (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, MAY 21
DEPART

Transfer to the airport early this morning for a Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul to connect with your onward international flight.