



Central Iran

ایران مرکزی

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Why Go?

The expression 'history resonates' is bandied about with gay abandon in guidebooks, but here in central Iran it really does apply. Ever since Cyrus the Great's dramatic rise from provincial overlord to ruler of the largest empire on earth, this part of the country has been a showcase for the region's greatest civilisations. The imperial majesty of Esfahan, the refined and understated elegance of Shiraz and the weathered desert ambience of Yazd stand in fascinating contrast, three points on a journey offering history, culture and challenges in abundance.

This is a region where it pays to stay moving. Nomadic people and trading caravans were common sights in the past, and modern travellers often follow in their footsteps, crossing mountains and deserts en route to towns, cities and villages that are as rich in history as they are in hospitality. It's one of the great cultural pilgrimages of our time. Enjoy it.

Best Places to Eat

- » Abbasi Hotel Teahouse (p167)
- » Fereni Hafez (p167)
- » Restaurant Shahrzad (p167)
- » Sharzeh Traditional Restaurant (p195)
- » Shater Abbas 1 (p195)

Best Places to Stay

- » Ateshooni (p175)
- » Barandaz Lodge (p178)
- » Manouchehri House (p150)
- » Niayesh Boutique Hotel (p194)
- » Silk Road Hotel (p181)

When to Go

The best times to visit are generally autumn (fall) and spring, although weather conditions do vary from province to province. Avoid travelling here in summer, particularly in the desert areas, as it can hit 50°C. At the other extreme, winter brings snow to the Zagros Mountains and freezing nights in the desert.

If you are keen to experience a local festival, Ashura (in July) is particularly fascinating (especially in Shiraz and Yazd), but we suggest staying away during No Ruz (Iranian New Year; 21 March to 3 April), when the entire region is swamped with Iranian holidaymakers.

Iran's second-holiest ci-ty after Mashhad, Qom (Ghom) is home to both the magnificent Hazrat-e Masumeh shrine and the hardline clerics who have ruled the country since 1979. One of Iran's fastest-growing cities (the population has doubled since

the revolution), its skyline is being transformed by ugly new apartment blocks and there are more large infrastructure projects underway here than anywhere else in the country.

Despite these changes, Qom remains one of Iran's most religious and conservative cities. Shiite scholars and students come from across the world to study in



Central Iran Highlights

- 1 Kick back in the courtyard of a traditional hotel in **Yazd** (p181)
- 2 Admire a cluster of Qajari mansions in **Kashan** (p146)
- 3 Soak up the silent surrounds and star-filled skies of the **Dasht-e Kavir** (p173)
- 4 Lose yourself in the labyrinthine laneways of the Bazar-e Bozorg in **Esfahan** (p155)
- 5 Sample home-cooked meals and true Iranian hospitality in a guesthouse in the desert (p173)
- 6 Experience Iran's fast-disappearing nomadic culture at **Bavanat** (p202)
- 7 Follow in the footsteps of Darius I while wandering through **Persepolis** (p198)
- 8 Pay homage at the shrines of two Persian poets in **Shiraz** (p187)