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PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
to help you put together your perfect trip

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Travelling in Iran

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UNDERSTAND IRAN

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you
can make sense of what you see

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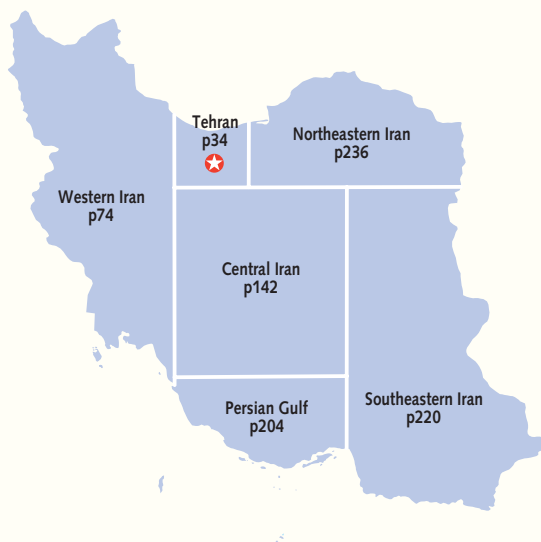
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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Andrew Burke
Virginia Maxwell, Iain Shearer

➤ Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first.

➤ Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



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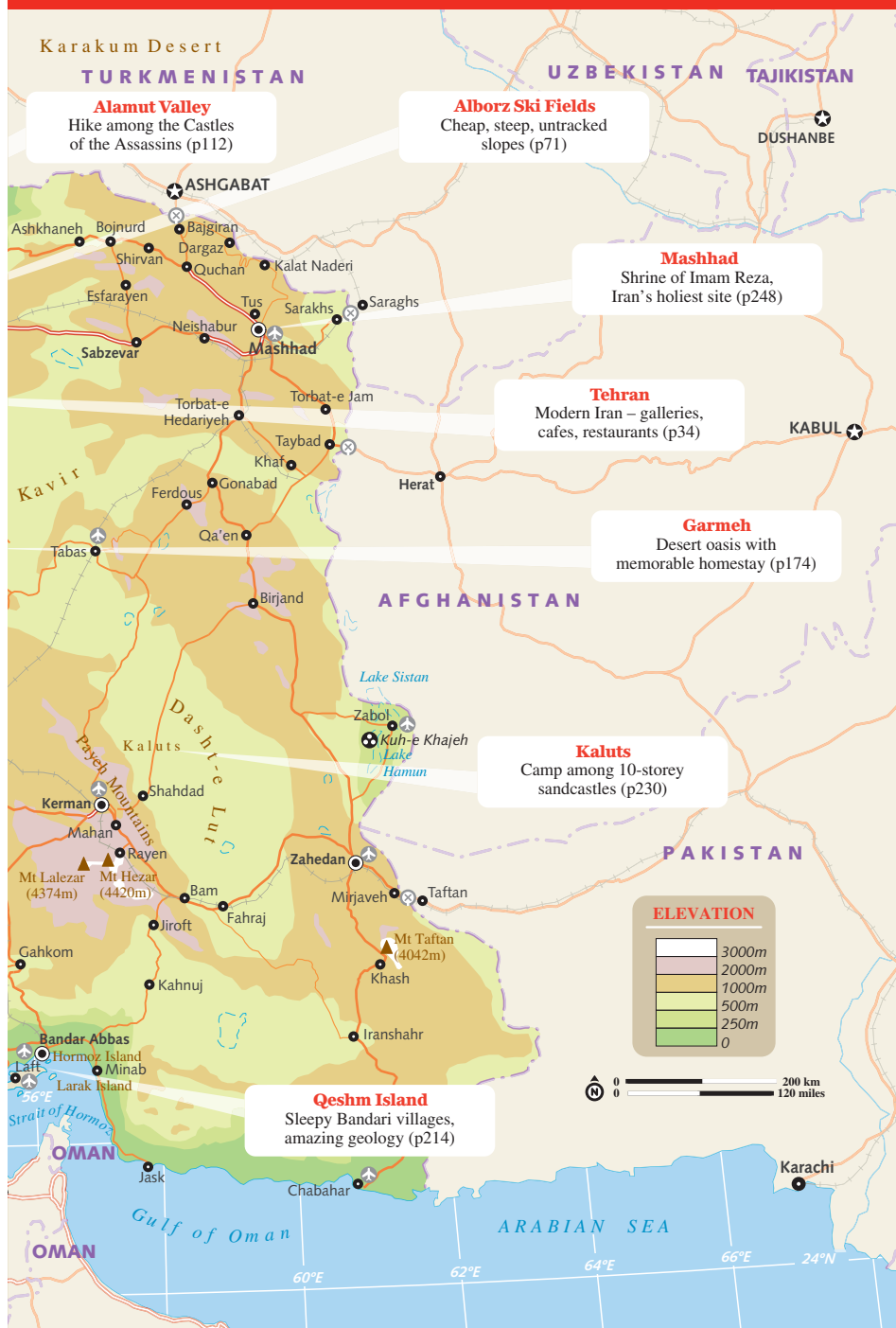
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Iran



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OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Andrew Burke

Coordinating Author, Tehran, Southeastern Iran Andrew has been fascinated by Iran and captivated by its people since his first visit in 2003, when in three months he was invited home to lunch more than 30 times. As well as enjoying endless tea and unforgettable hospitality, Andrew has photographed and written about Iran for three editions of this guide and for Lonely Planet's *Middle East* guide, blogged for lonelyplanet.com and reported on the Bam earthquake and several elections for major newspapers. For Lonely Planet he has also covered Laos, Thailand, China, Burma and PNG, among others. When not travelling he lives in Sydney.

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itineraries

Whether you've got five days or are aiming, with an extension, for 50, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks, Tehran to Shiraz Classic Iran

In two weeks it's possible to see the jewels of Iran's rich history. Start in **Tehran** and spend two days seeing the major sights, including the Golestan Palace, National Jewels Museum and Tehran Bazaar. Take a bus to **Kashan**, where you can explore the bazaar, check out the Qajar-era traditional houses and chill out in the Fin Garden.

Stop for a couple of hours to check out the mosque and tomb in **Natanz** en route to architecturally magnificent **Esfahan** and spend three days exploring the blue-tiled mosques of Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Square, the bustling Bazar-e Bozorg, the sublime bridges across the Zayandeh River and the Armenian community at Jolfa.

Head to the desert trading city of **Yazd** for a couple of days wandering the maze of lanes, gazing at the Masjed-e Jameh (Jameh Mosque) and climbing to the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence. For a change of pace, stop in the desert village of **Fahraj** for two nights before spending a day visiting ancient **Pasargadae** and **Persepolis** on the way to Shiraz. Spend two days in **Shiraz**, where you can see the Zand-era gardens and bazaar, and wander the old city. Fly back to Tehran.



One Month, Maku to Mirjaveh Turkey to Pakistan

Travellers with an adventurous bent have been following this 4420km overland route from Europe to subcontinental Asia for centuries. It's doable in less time, but you'll need a month to really appreciate Iran's diversity without feeling you're constantly on the move. The journey is serviced by regular buses and some trains.

With its soaring canyon, **Maku** makes a pleasant introduction before spending three days in **Tabriz**, which has a fine bazaar, then checking out **Jolfa** and the troglodyte homes at **Kandovan**, before heading via Zanzan for a look at the remarkable Oljeitu Mausoleum at **Soltaniyeh**. Continuing east, historic **Qazvin** is the staging point for excursions into the spectacular Alamut Valleys to walk among the ruined **Castles of the Assassins**. Head north via Rasht to lush **Masuleh**, a charming village ideal for chilling out before dashing along the Caspian Coast to reach **Kelardasht** in a beautiful setting, then zigzag up through the dramatic Alborz Mountains to Tehran.

Spend three days in **Tehran** seeing the museums, galleries and taking in the hustle and bustle, then head south for a couple of days to **Kashan** with its World Heritage-listed Fin Garden. Bus it to **Esfahan** where you'll need three or four days to soak up the sights of the Safavid-era capital, and then head east for a village homestay in **Farahzad** or **Garmeh** in the vast Dasht-e Kavir desert. From the desert head south to the Silk Road trading city of **Yazd**, stopping in the spectacular Zoroastrian pilgrimage site at **Chak Chak** en route.

Plan to spend three days exploring the narrow lanes and desert architecture of Yazd before heading to Shiraz via **Pasargadae** and **Persepolis**. Spend two days in **Shiraz** taking in the bazaar, gardens and poet's shrines, and another on a day trip to **Bishapur** or **Firuz Abad**. Continue to **Kerman**, stopping for a night with nomads in **Bavanat** (during spring or autumn) or in a cave at **Meymand**. Using Kerman as a base, plan for three days exploring **Mahan**, **Rayen** and the desert stars in the **Kaluts**. Stop in **Bam** to see what remains of the Arg and just rest a while in this ancient oasis town. Then blast through **Zahedan** to the Pakistan border at **Mirjaveh** before your visa expires.



18 days, Tehran to Shushtar Go West

This intriguing meander west is ideal for those who've seen the main desert city sites or are confident in navigating through areas often unaccustomed to foreigners. The route over mountains and valleys boasts eight of Iran's 13 World Heritage Sites (denoted here with an *), but should be just as memorable for the people you'll meet on the journey. The remotest sections will require charter taxis, but rides cost only about US\$10 per hour. Note that in winter, mountain roads can be cut by snow.

Starting in **Tehran**, head west to **Qazvin** and spend the afternoon exploring the historic city, before driving into the **Alamut Valley** to hike among the fabled Castles of the Assassins. From Qazvin go over the Alborz Mountains to **Rasht**, and on through paddy fields and forests to the stepped village of **Masuleh**. Spend a day exploring the village and surrounding hills, or hiking up to **Qal-eh Rudkhan**. Hire a taxi and, forsaking the dull coast, spend a memorable day climbing through nomad country to Ardabil via **Khal Khal**. In **Ardabil** visit the magnificent Sheikh Saft-od-Din Mausoleum* before settling in bustling **Tabriz** for a few days. Explore the brilliant covered bazaar* and the contrasting Valiasr District, do your laundry, and continue to an excursion to the quaint troglodyte village of **Kandovan**, and maybe another for **Jolfa** and the ancient **Church of St Stephanos***.

Refreshed, head southeast and use **Zanjan** as a base to see the magnificent Mongol-era Oljeitu Mausoleum* at **Soltaniyeh**. From Zanjan, take the starkly beautiful mountain road to lonely **Takht-e Soleiman***, once the world's greatest Zoroastrian fire-temple complex. Sleep in **Bijar** and continue to hospitable **Sanandaj**, capital of Iranian Kordistan. Spend a day exploring the city and another for a trip to **Palangan** or, for adventurers, a taxi ride through the endless hair-pins of the **Howraman Valley**. Either way, finish the day in **Kermanshah** and spend the following day visiting the Achaemenid-era stone carvings of Taq-e Bostan and **Bisotun***.

Hop south for a quick stop in the charming Lurish capital of **Khorramabad**, with its picturesque hilltop fortress, before continuing to **Shushtar**, with its mesmerising, Roman-built hydraulic irrigation complex*. Base yourself here for visits to the ruins of ancient **Shush** and **Choqa Zanbil***, a magnificent 3000-year-old Elamite ziggurat.



10 Days, Tehran to Mashhad Mashhad Pilgrimage

Take the train or bus from **Tehran** to **Gorgan**, nestled attractively in the Alborz mountains. Gorgan makes a great base for visiting the Turkmen steppe and the remote **Mil-e Radkan** tower. If you're impressed by this tower, you'll want to visit the incredible 1000-year-old tomb-tower of Mil-e Gonbad, in **Gonbad-e Kavus**, before visiting the forested mountains of **Golestan National Park**, perhaps staying at The Turkmen Ecolodge.

Next up, travel to Iran's holiest city of **Mashhad**, where you can revel in the ecstasy of pilgrims in the stunning and massive Haram-e Razavi complex and visit the beautifully proportioned Boq'eh-ye Khajeh Rabi mausoleum. Mashhad is a great base for exploring the hinterlands by foot, bicycle or horseback. Nearby **Kang** is a photogenic stepped village of stacked mud-brick homes. The mausoleum of 11th-century poet, Ferdosi is found in **Tus**, while Omar Khayyam has his tomb in **Neishabur**. The impressive mountain cliffs of **Kalat Naderi** lie to the north, or you can take tea with the Afghans at **Torbat-e Jam**.

Mashhad is a gateway to Central Asia; otherwise fly back to Tehran or continue south by bus or train into the desert.

10-12 Days, Esfahan to Kerman Desert Detour

If you've ever dreamt of the oasis towns of the 1001 Nights or are drawn to hospitable homestays, this trip is for you. It's doable by taking infrequent buses, but the odd taxi *dar baste* can reduce waiting time. Avoid the summer heat by travelling between October and April.

Start in **Esfahan** and take a bus to **Toudeshk** for a night and a morning in the shifting sands of the Varzaneh Desert, before continuing to see the traditional houses of **Na'in**. From Na'in take the bus east to **Khur**, where you get a taxi to **Farahzad** and/or **Garmeh** for desert homestays that redefine hospitality; plan for three days all up.

Continue to **Yazd** via **Chak Chak**, and check into an atmospheric traditional hotel in the old town. Spend two days exploring the old city, the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence and a *qanat*, the underground water veins that keep these desert cities alive and if you're fit perhaps a trek into the desert. Heading south stop in **Fahraj** or the restored **Caravanserai Zein-o-din** for one night, before moving on to **Kerman**, from where you can take a tour to the remarkable 'sand castles' of the **Kaluts**.

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