

# welcome to Iran



## In the Footsteps of Empire

Before you come to Iran, you might be thinking the main reasons to visit the Islamic Republic are because it's a bit adventurous and there's a lot to see from the years when Persia was a great world power. At some levels you'd be right. Walking around the sublime, turquoise-tiled domes and minarets of Esfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Square, the awesome power and beauty of the Achaemenid's ancient capital at Persepolis, the mud-brick alleys and rooftops in Yazd, and the wonderfully immense Elamite ziggurat at Choga Zanbil will put you in the footsteps of some of history's most outstand-

ing figures. And certainly you won't find yourself crowded out of any sights. Which is fun.

These highlights, together with the atmospheric teahouses, bustling bazaars, deserts punctuated by historic oases and rugged mountain ranges, gives Iran more than its fair share of fantastic places to see. But to think of Iran only in terms of 'sights' is to miss the real story.

## Redefining Hospitality

If you like people, you'll like Iran. The Iranians, a nation made up of numerous ethnic groups and influenced over thousands of years by Greek, Arab, Turkic and Mongol occupiers, are endlessly welcom-

*If travel is most rewarding when it surprises, then Iran might just be the most rewarding destination on Earth. If you fancy travelling somewhere neither East nor West, and exotic and fascinating yet perfectly comfortable, read on...*

(left) A Qashqa'i nomad girl looks out from her family's tent, Zagros Mountains (below) The skyline of Yazd.



ing. For those who have grown up on an endless diet of images depicting Iran as a dark, dangerous place full of fundamentalist fanatics, discovering the real Iran is the most wonderful surprise. Before long you're asking yourself: how can somewhere supposedly so bad be so good?

Beyond the stereotypes is a country desperate to be seen for what it is, rather than what it is depicted to be. Sure, not every Iranian you meet is going to invite you around to dinner. But if you're open to the idea, you probably will be, and through it experience the ancient and sophisticated Iranian culture first-hand. It's these experiences that will live longest in the memory.

## Politics & Safety – Should You Go?

If you make your travel decisions based on what your friends and family say, you'll probably never make it to Iran. This is a country whose politics are impossible to escape. For most travellers that will mean little more than some pre-departure questions about their sanity, but it can make getting a visa a challenge. Except for Americans, who must be accompanied, once in Iran independent travel is easy and, through the people you meet, rewarding and sometimes sobering. However you chose to plan your travel, a journey in Iran will change the way you see this part of the world.