

AL-ASR

Striving For Education
and Cultural Awareness

In the name of God Most Compassionate Most Merciful

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A Brief Orientation of Iran For Short Vacation Course Organised By Al-Asr

Background

Known as Persia until 1935, Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979 when Imam Khomeini returned from exile. During 1980-88, Iran fought a bloody, indecisive war with Iraq.

Geography

Weather: Mashad 25 C (50%), Qum 34 C, Isfahan 29 C (20%), Tehran 34 C (20%). Dry, warm, no rain, clear skies and no wind.

Borders 7 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan

Size: 1.648 million sq km over 7 times larger than the UK

Terrain: mountainous, deserts, subtropical coasts, vast plains

Natural resources: petroleum, natural gas, coal, chromium, copper, iron ore, lead, manganese, zinc, sulfur

People

Iran has a population 67 million people of whom 89% are Shia. Sunni Muslim 9%, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i 2%. The national language is Farsi.

Literacy: rate (that is percentage of people aged 15 and over can read and write) is 72.1%. People are very hospitable and friendly. Average age is 24.

Government

Capital: Tehran

Administrative divisions: 30 provinces, we will visit only 4: Esfahan, Khorasan, Qom and Tehran

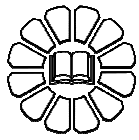
Constitution: the Constitution codifies Islamic principles of government

Chief of state: Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini-KHAMENEI (since 4 June 1989)

Head of government: President-elect Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD (since 25 June 2005)



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Elections: leader of the Islamic Revolution appointed for life by the Assembly of Experts; president elected by popular vote for a four-year term; election last held 17 June 2005 (next to be held in 2009)

Election results: Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD elected president; percent of vote - Mahmud AHMADI-NEJAD 62%, Ali Akbar Hashemi RAFSANJANI 36%.

Flag description: green, white, and red with a stylized representation of the word Allah in the shape of a tulip, which is a symbol of martyrdom in red is centered in the white band; ALLAH HO AKBAR (God is Great) in white Arabic script is repeated along the top of the red band and bottom edge of the green band.

Economy

Iran economy is reliant on oil.
Currency: Iranian rial (IRR)

Communication

While you are there you **will not** have a chance to use the Internet and call centers are few and far between. In every city parents can call the residence. There is also an emergency mobile number 00 98 912 143 77 41. Time difference is 3.5 hours

Transportation

Iran has a good rail and road network. We will fly between Tehran and Mashad. Travel between Tehran, Qum and Isfahan will be by road.

Clothes

Clothes: Iran is an Islamic Republic and has a particular dress code. Boys do not wear three quarter length trousers or short sleeves. You will see a lot of the men with their top button done up. Do not walk around with all your buttons undone!!! A tip for the brothers, if you sweat a then wear a vest or T-shirt underneath. Women in Iran wear full headscarfs and montos (a long coat) with a chador on top.

Wild Life

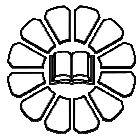
Iran is a very clean and beautiful country, however, like any hot country you have to protect yourself against the local insects. Just because it's an Islamic republic it doesn't mean that there are no cockroaches or mosquitoes!!!

Toilets

In Iran the toilets are slightly different to the one's you are used to. A while ago, There was a travel program on TV about Japan. The presenter was describing the continental toilets and told the viewers to practice the skiing position. If you have never used the continental toilets before just ask someone and they can advise you.



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Money

When taking money abroad, take large notes i.e. \$100 notes or £50 notes because these get the best rates out there. You will have a chance to exchange money once a week before going shopping.

The official currency is the Iranian Rial. [pass samples round]. On the streets when you are buying goods the price is usually written in Rials. However, when you speak about money, people use Tomans. 1000 Rial is 100 Toman.

The exchange rate in May 2006 was approximately 900 Toman (9000 Rial) to \$1 US dollar and 1,700 Toman (17,000 Rial) to £1 pound. Al-Asr's accountant on board is always available to help the students and assist in money exchange.

A money belt is very useful because you will have a big bundle of cash to carry around. £100 will give you 150 green notes.

Remember to keep your personal belongings safe and locked away. You are responsible for your own belongings.

Shopping

You will be given some time for to buy souvenirs. Different cities have different specialties. Mashad is well known for good quality precious stones, jewellery, tasbees and Safron. In Qum you will be able to buy books and dried foods like pistachio. Isfahan is known for handicraft. We generally do not do shopping in Tehran. It is like any metropolitan city, you can get anything you can get here. In Mashad, Qum and Isfahan you will be able to find real bargains. When you buy in the Bazaars always have a look around in other stores to compare prices. Also, try to haggle to get the best price. If you have any questions then ask the translators who are with you.

Prayers

Iran is a religious country. Every where you go you will hear the Azan. There are prayer rooms and mosques in the most remote places. Once Al-Asr group went to a big park full of huge trees and beautiful streams, when it was time for namaz, the group was wondering where we were going to pray, surprisingly, there was a purpose build namaz khana in the middle of the wooded park. It was so nice.

In Tehran you will pray Jumma Namaz in Tehran University compound with about ¼ million people. Normally the jumma khutaba and namaz is lead by the most senior ulema or political figure in Iran. It is such an amazing atmosphere.

Segregation

In Iran everything is segregated. Which means keeping a respectful distance between the opposite sex. Al-Asr group is always segregated. You can speak to family members who are mehram to you i.e. brother, sister, wife etc. but you must respect the sanctity of the other namehrams in the group.



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