

Iran Triplog

October 10 to 12. We started the trip with an overnight, 13-hour Qatar flight to Doha; followed by a 7-hour layover; and then a 2.5-hour flight to Tehran, arriving at 4 am on the 12th. We whisked through security and immigration (unlike others whose luggage was thoroughly searched) and we were met at the airport by a driver and the assistant guide, Javad. The drive to the Espinas Hotel (which turned out to be the best hotel of the trip) took about an hour and we checked in and napped for 3 hours or so before going to breakfast.

October 12. We were pleased to discover when we checked in that the breakfast was included. It was a selection of yoghurts, cheeses, breads, cereals, various fruits, dates, honey, a spinach frittata “cucu sabzi”, etc., as well 3 or 4 hot selections and an omelet station. To varying degrees, this was the breakfast at each hotel, so we had lots of options and plenty of food.

After breakfast, we walked around the neighborhood a bit, then walked to Laleh Park and spent some time walking there. It's a very large park, and each time we walked there we discovered a new section. There is a small Japanese area with stepping stones, a stage with cement seating, an area where locals blocked off sections and put up nets for net games, a long waterway flanked with blooming oleander, sculptures of historical figures, and flower beds in various areas, a pond, an area of woods...oh, and lots of very well-fed cats. On the way back to the hotel, we walked past the Contemporary Art Museum, which has a sculpture garden that you can see from the sidewalk outside, and then past the university. The road past the hotel had a pedestrian walkway in the middle of the road with trees and a small canal, so we often used this in our walks. We went back to the hotel for a brief stop, but fell asleep, so it was a while before we ventured out again. We walked in the opposite direction from our earlier walk, to a very large traffic circle and then to a mosque that was lit. The call to prayer had sounded, and people were rushing into the mosque. Since this was Ashura, it was a national holiday with religious observations. We had been told that everything would be closed, but small shops were open to supply the needs of the observant. We were particularly interested in the small processions and candle ceremonies. We went back to the hotel for dinner, since the restaurants were all closed, then met Prof. M. R. Darafsheh, a leading mathematician in Iran, and his student, Hadis, for coffee in the hotel lobby. Hadis brought Judy a lovely bouquet of flowers, and Darafsheh drove us around the area a bit, including to the old American embassy (now called the “den of US espionage”). When they dropped us off, there was a procession (people beating their breasts in memory of the Shi'ite martyr Hussain) going on outside the hotel, so we all watched as it passed.

October 13. After breakfast we walked in Laleh Park again, and then met Richard and John (who had been on the 2013 Turkey trip with us) and had lunch with them at a restaurant across the street from the hotel. We walked through the park with them to the Contemporary Art Museum. It's a very interesting building and the current exhibit was mostly beautiful photos of sand dunes. We all walked back through the park to the hotel, where the tour group was slowly gathering. We met our local guide, Amin, who arranged for the whole group to meet at one of the hotel restaurants for dinner. We were able to sit with Paul Viita and Rosanna King, who were at Oxford with Steve.

Stefano and Rita (from the 2000 Egypt trip) and Jim and Carol (from the 2013 Turkey trip) came into the dinner just as it was about to start, so we said hello to them, but they ended up at a different table.

October 14. After breakfast, we went back to Laleh Park for a while. It was very interesting to see families out having picnics and playing volleyball and soccer in the park. Shops were closed, since Friday is the Muslim equivalent of our Sunday.

The tour officially started at 1pm when the bus picked us up to go to the UNESCO-listed Gulestan Palace. It began as a fortress by the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century. It includes the Marble Throne, created from 65 pieces of yellow Yazd marble. Mirror mosaics covered many of the walls and ceilings. (Unfortunately photography was not allowed in many of the rooms.) From there we were taken to the Carpet Museum, which had some very interesting old carpets, including a replica of the oldest known carpet in the world. We walked back through the park with Paul and Rosanna and Stefano and Rita. We were taken out to a restaurant for dinner.

October 15. A four-museum day: the Reza Abbasi Museum, the National Museum's Archeology and Islamic Museums, and the State Jewels Museum.

The Reza Abbasi museum is named after the Safavid artist, Reza Abbasi, and was created by Queen Farah Pahlavi in the 1970's. It is an outstanding collection, from the 2nd millennium BCE to the early 20th century, of coins, pottery, textiles, paintings and manuscripts as well as metal objects. The golden rhyton (drinking horn) from the Sassanian period is especially lovely and iconic.

At the National Museum (no bags allowed, so we left them on the bus), we were met by a group of archeologists and museum people, who took us to an area of offices in the basement that contained the Gold Room. This is an area that is off limits to the public, and we were allowed in because our Oriental Institute (OI) leader, Gil Stein, knew some of the archeologists and was able to arrange for us to see the objects. For us, the most astonishing objects were the gold and silver foundation tablets of Darius, king of Persia 550-486 BC, from Persepolis. We had read about them and seen photos of them, but I never thought I would actually see them! These are astonishing pieces; the inscription on each of the plates was the same and reads, "Darius the great king, king of kings, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid. King Darius says: This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Sacae who are beyond Sogdia to Nubia, and from Sind to Lydia – [this is] what Ahuramazda, the greatest of gods, bestowed upon me. May Ahuramazda protect me and my royal house!" It is inscribed in cuneiform script in three different languages, Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite.

The Anthropology Museum is called the Museum of Ancient Iran, and has a vast collection. The earliest artifacts are Paleolithic tools, and there are figurines that are 9000 years old. Most artifacts are from the periods that we had been studying, Median, Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid periods. Many were from areas that we would be visiting later in the trip. The building was constructed in the mid-1930's, so there is lots of glass, which means the light reflects off the glass cases, making photography very difficult. The museum was full of groups, which made it difficult to hear Amin.

We went to lunch at a restaurant not far from the museum, but far enough that we were taken on the bus. The lunch was a sumptuous buffet with many tables of food.

We were then driven back to the National Museum to explore the Islamic Museum, which was reopened recently and includes artifacts from the Islamic period in Iran. (Our guidebook had said that this museum was closed, so we were very happy that it has now re-opened.) There are two floors of exhibits, with ceramics, paintings, woodwork, metalwork, a few carpets...To our astonishment; we were the only group in the museum, so we especially enjoyed our time there.

Next we were taken to the "Jewels Museum" which has a remarkable collection of royal jewels, including a Peacock Throne and a pink, uncut diamond, the Darya-e Nur (Sea of Light), weighing 182 carats and said to be the largest uncut diamond in the world. This was a fairly small room in a bank, so access was tightly controlled. (No bags or photography were allowed.) The number of people was carefully regulated, so each group waited until the previous group left. This really was necessary to be able to see the displays.

When the bus dropped us off at the hotel, the driver then drove the bus to Ahwaz to meet us at the airport there the next day. A different bus drove us around on the 16th.

Dinner was in the hotel at the restaurant where we had eaten on our first full day, a good thing since everyone was tired at this point.

October 16. After breakfast, our luggage was collected, we checked out of the hotel, and boarded the bus for a drive to the north of the city to the Saadabad Palace Museum complex, which had been the residence of the royal family of Iran during the Shah period. There are more than 180 hectares of natural forest, streets, qanats (underground aqueducts), galleries, and museums. We only had time to walk through one palace in the complex; we were able to walk a little on the grounds.

We were driven to lunch at a restaurant in the town near the palace complex, and had table service. A plastic box (like a carryout box) of greens with a small number of vegetables was the salad, and the plates were filled by a huge mound of rice (the mound of rice occurred repeatedly during the trip).

After lunch we were driven to the regional airport. Security required men and women to go through different sections. First the checked luggage was screened, and Steve could watch all of the luggage while I walked through the women's security area. But then when it was time to go to the gate, we went through another security area where every single thing was taken out of my carryon and put separately back through the screener. Everything was just dumped on a table, so I had to completely repack. I was especially annoyed later when I discovered that the screeners had lost my magnetic sunglasses. I had to wear a pair of Steve's clip-ons the rest of the trip. When we got to the gate, a TV show or commercial was being filmed in the gate area; the actors walked through their parts over and over again. Because of mechanical problems, our flight was delayed 3 hours, so it was late when we finally got to the Pars Hotel in Ahwaz (definitely the worst hotel of the trip, with a beeping safe and rusty water, but otherwise clean and an unlimited supply of bottled water, and the internet and air conditioning both worked. We were given a room with 3 beds, which was very convenient, because I could use one bed for the luggage and packing.) We were whisked directly into dinner, where we were offered a few choices by Amin, who helped the waiters take the orders and then sort them out when the food came. Again, lots of food, and quite good (plenty of the ubiquitous jello dessert, too...many colors, solid red, yellow, green, plus mixed rainbows). The hotel is on the Karun River, and we kept

saying we would walk over to the river and along the banks, but we never did, partly because we were back at the hotel after dark every day.

October 17. Susa! One of the reasons we booked this trip was the visit to Susa (a World Heritage Site), so we were especially excited when, after breakfast, we boarded the bus for the trip out to the archeological site of Susa. Susa was settled over 6000 years ago, and was occupied by many of the region's great cultures over the years. There was Uruk Mesopotamian influence (sometime between 4000 to 3100 BCE), then Proto-Elamite, then Elamite. In 647 BCE, the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal destroyed Susa and ruled until the Medians captured Susa in 617 BCE. Cyrus the Great took over in 539 BCE when the Persians conquered Elam. Darius the Great did major building programs at Susa and Persepolis. Alexander the Great was married in Susa.

Today, an extensive area has been excavated, and there is a museum and gift shop (with pots fired by an artisan just outside the gift shop). French archeologists, led by Jacques de Morgan, built a castle on the site, in which they lived in style. Because we were on an OI trip, we were allowed to walk around in the castle grounds.

After a late lunch, we were driven to Chogha Mish (a World Heritage Site), which was occupied first in the Neolithic. It provides an uninterrupted sequence of prehistoric cultures, and information about the formation of Persian writing. It was one of the areas where ancient clay tokens have been found, and clay tablets, as well. The OI excavated there for 11 seasons. Currently, there are just mounds covered in layers of pot sherds. We were given the assignment to look for 2 different kinds of pottery; Steve quickly found quite a few, which of course we had to leave in place. It was interesting to see how many types of things were lying around on the ground, including the bottom of a shoe, some odd bits of a modern water bottle, etc. Herds of very large sheep were roaming in the vicinity.

We then were driven to Shushtar, which has the remains of a Roman bridge and a wonderful Sassanian qanat water-works area, where water gushes from underground channels. Lots of water birds were swimming around, and you can still see the remains of some of the original brickwork.

From here we drove 2 hours back to Ahwaz, and had dinner in the hotel. This was a "dinner on your own" night, but Amin told us that the hotel was the best place to eat in Ahwaz, so most of the group ended up there.

October 18. After breakfast, we were driven to Chogha Zanbil (a World Heritage Site), which is an Elamite site built 1340 to 1300 BCE by King Untah-Napirisha and destroyed in 640 BCE by Ashurbanipal. It had an irregular outer wall, 3 palaces, 13 temples (4 are somewhat conserved) and a ziggurat (step pyramid), one of the few still extant. The ziggurat is now about 80 feet high, less than half its estimated original height. Its facade was once covered in glazed blue and green terra-cotta, and its interior was decorated in glass and ivory mosaics. I have always wanted to see a ziggurat, but never thought I would actually see one. After being allowed to spend time at the site, we were taken to Haft Tappeh, an Elamite city built around 1000 BCE, and then to the Choga Zanbil-Haft Tappeh Museum, where we spent quite a bit of time looking at excavated artifacts there before going to lunch at the same restaurant as the 17th. We were near Susa, so went back to the town and went into the Islamic shrine reputed to be the "Tomb of Daniel", before driving back to Ahwaz. The women needed to put a sheet over themselves to be (allowed into the shrine, so of course we had to all line up and have our photo taken.

Dinner was again “on you own” at the hotel, and we had time to pack before and after dinner.

October 19. Every morning on the trip we woke up from jetlag at 3:30 or 4 am, and would be too excited to go back to sleep, so we had plenty of time to shower and change and have a leisurely breakfast each morning. We had breakfast, then put our luggage out to be collected and taken to the bus. (Each time we moved hotels, the luggage was taken to the lobby, where we identified it, then it was taken to the bus, where we watched it being put into the luggage compartment.) This was a long day on the bus, at least 12 hours across the Zagros Mountains to Shiraz, with a stop for lunch and a stop at Bishapur. The mountains were very beautiful, bare and eroded with alluvial fans and lots of beautiful bare rock, probably basalt. There must be limestone, because there were cave mouths periodically. I used the bus time to upload all our photos to the laptop, so I could later upload them to outlook. (The upload didn't work, since Microsoft Outlook was blocked in Iran, though I had been able to use it in Tehran. But at least we had a backup of the photos.)

Shapur I (the 2nd Sassanian king-of-kings) built Bishapur in 266 using the Roman emperor Valerian's soldiers, whom he defeated. He is famous for killing Gordian II, capturing Valerian, and forcing Philip the Arab to surrender. A few yards from the town, along the Bishapur River gorge, Tang-e-Chogan, either Shapur or one of his successors carved reliefs commemorating Shapur's triumph over Rome. We had quite a bit of time to explore the palace area, which was a huge site, but then had to quickly see the rock carvings since we were losing the light. The drivers and guides had chopped pomegranates waiting for us when we returned to the bus. A real treat on the trip was that the pomegranates were in season and fresh from the trees.

We drove the rest of the way into Shiraz in the dark, and quickly checked into the Homa Hotel and went to dinner, while our luggage was taken to the rooms.

October 20. After breakfast, we set up our laundry with the hotel, then joined the group on the bus to spend the day in Shiraz. We started with the Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque , called the Pink Mosque because of the beautiful colors in the stained glass windows. It was built between 1876 to 1888, during the Qajar era. Next was the Naranjstan Museum, which has a garden with an orange grove and a fountain area, and a pavilion with a mirrored porch that now houses the museum, including old musical instruments. It was built between 1879 and 1886 by Mirza Ibrahim Khan. Then the Pars Museum, a small octagonal building where royal guests were hosted during the Zand dynasty. For a complete change of pace, we then went to the Vakil Bazaar. The building was constructed in 1760, and the small stalls are packed with everyday goods and the tiny courtyard with tourist merchandise. After lunch we went to the Vakil Mosque near the bazaar, which was built between 1751 and 1773, during the Zand period. We next went to the Arg-e-Khan Citadel, also built during the Zand dynasty. Our last stop was the Tomb of Hafez, in honor of the poet. From there we returned to the hotel. Some of the group went to a carpet shop, and a lot of them bought carpets. We had been to carpet dealers before so used the time to sort our luggage and had an early dinner (for this trip) and were asleep by 9:30! Bliss!

October 21. Persepolis! After breakfast we drove the 30 miles to Persepolis, and it was as amazing as we had expected. Cyrus the Great may have chosen the site for

Persepolis, but Darius I initiated the building process, around 518 BCE, as a seat of government and a center for religious activities and governmental receptions. The building continued under his son Xerxes I and then under Artaxerxes I. Alexander the Great destroyed Persepolis in 330 BCE. The OI excavated from 1930 to 1938. Because we were traveling with the OI, we were allowed into the palace of Darius, which had been off-limits for 15 years. (A South Korean diplomat had stolen an object, which led to the ban.)

We approached the ruins along a broad path, and saw the remains from 1971 of tents that the last Shah had used for an extremely extravagant party that he had held at Persepolis. We climbed shallow steps of the Persepolitan Stairway to the Gate of All Nations and took lots of photos of the winged bulls (lamassus). A few yards further in, we took turns posing in front of a column topped by a capital in the shape of two griffins back-to-back. We walked around the Apadana and spent a lot of time at the symmetrical Apadana staircases. After the palace, we went to the museum, and then we climbed up to the rock cut tomb of Artaxerxes.

After lunch at a restaurant near Persepolis, we continued to the rockcut tombs at Naghsh-e Rostam. The tomb of Darius I has an inscription, and it is thought that other tombs belong to Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. The tombs were looted by Alexander the Great's army. The OI excavated between 1936 and 1939.

Our next stop was brief, at Istakhr, which had been the Sasanian capital from 224 to 242. We were not allowed into the site by the guard.

We drove back to Shiraz, where a sitdown dinner had been arranged in a building with 7 restaurants (most of the others fast food). The food was the about the best we had in Iran in a restaurant, and we finally had good bread, fresh from the oven, which was served with butter that had mint chopped and mixed in. We had noticed flags of lots of countries displayed on stands at the entry and on a high shelf. We remarked on the fact that the US flag was included. While we were eating, a lovely woman came over and asked where we were from (a frequent question), so we said Chicago. She thought for a minute and said, "Oh, the US." We all said yes. She smiled and said "welcome". She went over to the display and found the US flag and brought it over and put it on our table. Then she found an Iranian flag and put it on the table next to the US flag, and said "welcome to our country!" We beamed and said thanks she beamed, it was really lovely. Our Iranian driver said he had never seen this happen and he is delighted that everyone is welcoming the Americans. In fact, we were extremely pleased by how welcoming people were throughout the country.

That night we packed again.

October 22. Another long bus day: 11 hours, driving to Yazd with a stop at Pasargadae and Cyrus's tomb. Our luggage was out by 7:15 and we were told we would be off at 8 am, with a planned arrival in Yazd by 7 pm. However, after breakfast we discovered that we were delayed by the illness of a tour member, so we were first taken to the Eram Garden and Shiraz Botanical Garden. This was delightful; we had seen photos of the garden in books before the trip, and recognized it almost immediately.

We returned to the hotel to collect the luggage and started out. We stopped at the same restaurant for lunch as the 21st.

Our next stop was Pasagadae, where we were able to see the remains of the palace area and Cyrus' tomb. Unfortunately we did not have time to walk out to Gate R,

which still has the remains of a winged figure thought by some to be Cyrus. One of the highlights was the remains of a long, white limestone water channel that allowed the early Achaemenid garden to survive for 200 years.

The rest of the drive was uneventful, and with some careful driving, we managed to arrive at the Moshir Garden Hotel in Yazd about 9:30 instead of midnight, and again we went straight to dinner and our luggage was sent up to the room. The hotel was very interesting. It had been a caravanserai which was converted to a hotel. Our room had a beautiful vaulted brick ceiling, and the hotel had a long pond along the axis of the two wings of rooms. There were replicas of lovely old paintings in the stairwells.

A note about the laws for buses: the speed of buses is carefully monitored, so we had to frequently stop at police stations where the bus's GPS was checked to make sure the driver had not been speeding. On this last bit of the drive into Yazd, the driver carefully took us around a back route to avoid the police station, thus saving us quite a bit of time. Whenever we approached the police stations we had to make sure our seatbelts were on, cameras were down, the women's scarves were on, etc., though we never had a problem.

October 23. We were allowed to rest up, and our touring didn't start until 9 am. We spent the day in Yazd, which has a very interesting "old town".

Our first stop was a Zoroastrian Tower of Silence, places of funeral rituals. There were two, close together, with a group of buildings around the base, and an entry to a qanat. We were able to climb up one of the hills to the tower on top. Our next stop was a Zoroastrian Fire Tower that included an area with a flame and a small museum.

Then we went to the Yazd Jame ("Friday" or congregational) Mosque, built in the 1200's, where we were met by the Director of the qanat system. He led us through the old town, with lots of wind towers and mud brick, to the qanat, and we were allowed to go down into the system. We walked downhill, underground, several stories, to an old watermill area. The system is 100 to 130 meters under the city (the main well is 300 meters deep) and 50 miles long back to the mountain water source..

Lunch was at an Italian restaurant (the big seller was a vegetarian pizza that was very good). The restaurant had very modern color-block decorations and a spiral staircase up to the restrooms.

We were then taken to the Dolat Abad Garden, which was built during the Zand era. It had a wind tower that we could stand under and feel the breeze collected from above.

From there we went to the Amir Chakhmaq square, and visited a pastry shop where Amin bought a "sampler" and passed it around. Some people bought boxes to take back home with them.

We had dinner in the hotel and packed for the next move, to Esfahan.

October 24. After breakfast, we were back on the bus for the trip to Esfahan. Our first stop was Maybod, where we were allowed to scamper around inside the remains of a great citadel, the Narin Castle, about 2000 years old and still 130 feet high. We then drove to Naenin, where we first went to the bazaar, and then we were allowed to go into an Ice House and a Pigeon Tower.

The Ice House had a shallow pool in front where water was poured in a thin layer on cold nights. When it froze, it was broken into sheets and placed in the ice house. The ice house is built with very thick walls, of mud brick, and has a deep bowl with stairs

leading to the bottom. There is a very high conical roof with a small aperture at the top. We could walk around a ledge between the two sections, but my photos were really dark and grainy, since there wasn't much light. As we stood on the ledge, we all spontaneously started saying "Ommmmmmmm" on different notes. The harmonies were incredible. Then on to the pigeon tower was no longer in use, but had been used to provide nests for pigeons, who in return provided guano. The design was very beautiful.

After lunch we went to the Jame Mosque, which had a qanat connection and very beautiful card stucco patterns. We then continued our drive to Esfahan.

We arrived after dark, but had time to get into our room at the Abbasi Hotel before the group dinner. This hotel was totally different, decorated as a palace in the Safavid style, and billed as the best hotel in Iran.

October 25. We had 3 full days in Esfahan (the 4th largest city in Iran), including some free time to walk around on our own, which we especially enjoyed. Each morning, after breakfast, we boarded the bus to tour different parts of the city.

We put a few things in to the hotel laundry, had a nice leisurely breakfast, and then got ready to meet the bus.

We first spent a couple of hours at the Friday Mosque (a World Heritage Site), parts of which are 1000 years old. The brick work and architecture were amazing. Then we went to the office of an artist that does miniature paintings, with everything made in their workshop, including the brushes, pigment, etc. The colors were extremely rich. They were selling the work, and it was extraordinarily expensive, but people were buying them!!

We walked in an old area of Esfahan then went to the Pol-e Sharestan Bridge. The foundations of the bridge are from the 3rd to 7th century Sasanian era, but the top was renovated in the 10th century by the Buyids and finally during the 11th century Seljuk period. We were allowed to walk over and around the bridge and out onto the dry (because of a drought) river bed. The water was held upstream by a dam.

We had lunch at an Armenian restaurant, KhanGostar, that had the best salad bar we had in Iran (every restaurant had a salad bar, and they were pretty identical), with artichokes, wonderful spinach, a very good potato salad, a really good eggplant dish with some other vegetables and spices mixed in that we couldn't identify, and some outstanding cooked mushrooms.

Then we went to an area that had an interesting Armenian church and museum. The church was a mix of three cultures, with lots of Iranian tile work, very garish paintings on the walls, and a Sasanian influenced ceiling. Very different from the simpler Armenian churches we saw in western Turkey. The museum had some interesting artifacts, including the "world's smallest book" which was about 1/2 inch square, an "attributed to Rembrandt" sketch, and lots of Armenian things. Again, taking photos through the glass cases was difficult.

We returned to the hotel for a bit before meeting the group for dinner at 7:30.

October 26. We didn't have to meet the group until 9am, so we had plenty of time for a leisurely breakfast and some light packing.

We spent the touring day on the main square, the Naqsh-e Jahan Square, a World Heritage Site, also known as Imam Square. The buildings on the square are from the Safavid era, started in 1598, when Shah Abbas moved his government to Esfahan.

Our first stop was the Imam Mosque. The entrance-iwan has a particularly beautiful stalactite tilework ceiling and two minarets, with a goldast-style minaret on top of a perpendicular iwan. There is an internal garden and a very beautiful dome. Next we went to the Lotfollah Mosque, which has an interestingly off-set dome.

Next we went to the Ali Qapu Palace which has a large porch overlooking the square where the royals watched polo; there was lots of old art on the walls.

After lunch, we were given the option of staying around the square and catching the bus back to the hotel, shopping at the Bazaar or just spending time on the square, or walking back to the hotel. We decided to spend a little time in the Bazaar and then walk back to the hotel. As we approached the hotel there were a lot of emergency vehicles in the area. It turned out that the King of Finland had been staying in hotel, and was leaving. We didn't see him. After a few minutes in our room, we walked across the street to a small shopping area that was mostly book stores. We had been told that we could buy CD's of Iranian music in one of the stores, and found the store pretty quickly but it was closed. We spent some time in the bookstores and the CD store re-opened, so we had a great time with the shopkeeper having us listen to different CD's and telling us about the different Iranian instruments and musicians.

For dinner the group walked to a restaurant at 6:30 and then by bus to a gymnasium to watch a zoorkhaneh. This turned out to be some twirling like the whirling dervishes we saw in Turkey, some juggling large pins (like bowling pins), lifting huge slabs of wood, etc. to a drum beat. We were late getting back to the hotel.

October 27. After a leisurely breakfast, we started the touring day at the Khaju bridge, built by Shah Abbas II. We were not allowed on top of this bridge, but could walk inside it. We were then taken to the Chehel Sotun Palace, which had a pretty pavilion at the end of a long pool. It was next to the Natural History Museum, so we could see the models of dinosaurs on the grounds. We then went to a traditional restaurant on the main square where we sat on large traditional couches with a plastic sheet to hold the dishes. We weren't very impressed.

After lunch, we were given free time for the rest of the day, so we first did our shopping at the Bazaar. One interesting thing that happened was that a man asked us to find an old friend from Michigan for him. He made Xerox copies of letters and so forth and gave us his email. (We found her very quickly via google when we got back to the hotel and emailed him the information, but he didn't seem to know what to do with it. We think he thought she would take him to America.) We enjoyed walking around the shops with traditional crafts. We then thought we would go to some of the museums that we had not managed to get to on the tour, so walked first to the Natural History Museum, which was closed for renovation. So we walked to the Contemporary Art Museum, which had just closed for their weekend (Thursday and Friday). So then we walked to the Decorative Arts Museum, which was closed for the weekend, but they let us take a couple of photos of the building (which is covered in white plastic sheets because it is being renovated.) I think we have never covered 3 museums so fast!

We then walked to the Hasht Behesht Park that was between the museums and the hotel (it was open). There was a palace in the park that was also open, so we toured that. It is the only one of more than forty mansions in Isfahan from the rule of the Safavids that still exists. It had very similar decorations to the Ali Qapu Palace on the

square, but was not crowded so we had a great time walking around. We walked in the garden for a while, then back to the hotel to pack.

We were meeting Paul and Rosanna for dinner, and Steve made a reservation in the hotel's traditional restaurant for the 4 of us. While we were waiting for them in the lobby, Gil and Kiersten (the OI assistant guide), came in and said they were going to the restaurant as well. When Paul, Rosanna, Kiersten and we got to the restaurant, they were full and were turning away Jim and Carol, who had not made a reservation, so we asked if they could increase our reservation to 8 people. They put us with Paul and Rosanna; and Kiersten, Jim, Carol, and Gil at another table, so that worked.

October 28. Most of the group left in the middle of the night for a flight to Istanbul. There were 7 of us going to Tehran together. Jim and Carol were going on to the international terminal to start their flights home. Stefano and Rita were going back to the Espinas Hotel with us, spending one night then leaving late the next day. Amin was going back to Tehran for a few days off after he got us all onto our flights home. (There turned out to be a problem with the guides on another tour, so Amin went off to take care of that and Javad went with us instead.)

We had a leisurely breakfast, and the 7 of us were taken to the airport about 10 am for a noon flight. Again, I had everything taken out of my hand luggage at security, but I was expecting it this time and made sure they didn't lose anything. The flight was pretty much on time and they gave us a snack, so we didn't need lunch. Jim and Carol were met by a different guide to go off to the international terminal, and Javad took the 4 of us to the Espinas and got us checked in. At first we thought we were in the same room we had been in before, but it turned out to be the next room over.

We got busy repacking the suitcases and getting out the clothes we would need in Tehran, and then walked down to the square for sparkling water, which we were actually able to find. We met Rita and Stefano for dinner in the hotel restaurant.

October 29. This was a math day. We had our usual early breakfast, and then Prof. Darafsheh and Hadis came to the hotel to meet us and walk to the university with us. They gave us a tour of the campus, then took us to Darafsheh's office where we met several more math people. Darafsheh gave us several things: a certificate for Steve, saffron, a very large bag of pistachios, a painted miniature of polo players on the square in Esfahan, and a small box. Steve's talk was very successful, with the lecture room packed, and we chatted with various people during tea before the next talk. After that, Majid, one of Darafsheh's graduate students, carried all the things while we went to a coffee shop with him, Darafsheh, and Hadis. Majid then walked us back to the hotel, carrying everything.

We had gotten an extra key for our room to give to Rita and Stefano, so they could leave their things in our room while they went to lunch with a friend of theirs. They came in while we were there, so we got to chat with them while they got organized for their trip home. They went down to the lobby with their things and we got ready for an evening at Darafsheh's apartment. We went down to the lobby to see them off, and when the guide came, we confirmed the time he was picking us up to go to the airport the next day. Majid arrived to take us to Darafsheh's and Rita and Stefano went off to the airport. The drive to Darafsheh's took a while, with fairly busy traffic. We parked next to a small creek, and were told that a Russian diplomatic facility was across the creek.

The time at Darafsheh's was very interesting. The food was excellent, and it was especially interesting to be with a family and close colleagues in an informal setting. We women were allowed to take off the head scarves, which was a great relief. Darafsheh's nephew played some songs and we chatted. It turned out that Majid was driving Darafsheh's son to the airport, so Darafsheh and Hadis took us back to the hotel.

October 30. We had arranged a late checkout at the hotel, so we had a leisurely breakfast, tackled the packing again, then took a taxi to the National Museum. We first went to the Archeology Museum, and it was nice to be there on our own. There were a few tour groups, but we could move around them and get in to see things more easily. We then went to the Islamic Museum and again had it to ourselves. It was a very good way to say goodbye to Iran.

While we were waiting in the lobby for the guide, Denmark's minister of foreign trade just came in with a large retinue, which tied up traffic. The guide and driver showed up shortly after 6pm to take us to the airport. This time the women in security hardly looked at me (the woman in front of me had a baby that she handed over to the agent as she was putting things on the belt, so that might have been enough of a distraction) and I sailed through. When we checked in at the Qatar desk, we were escorted to a special passport line that had no one else in it, bypassing a very long immigration line. We were directed to a Qatar lounge and waited there until it was time to go to the gate. It was a great relief to take off the head scarf and put it in my carryon as soon as the plane left the ground! The flight to Doha was very easy, and our checked luggage was sent checked through to Chicago, so we didn't have to worry about that.

October 31. The 8-hour layover (midnight to 8am) was very tedious so we were very happy to board the plane to Chicago! We slept some on the plane, and arrived in Chicago around 3:30 pm, got through US customs and immigration quickly and found a taxi. It was really great to be home!



M. R. Darafsheh and Hadis with Us



Contemporary Art



Laleh Park



Golestan



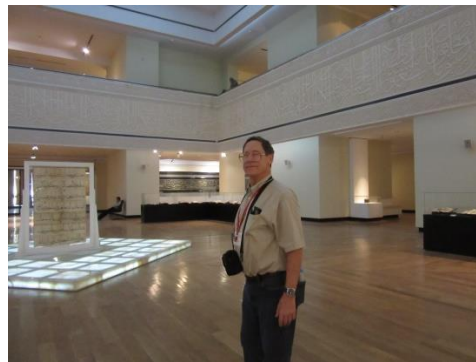
Carpet Museum



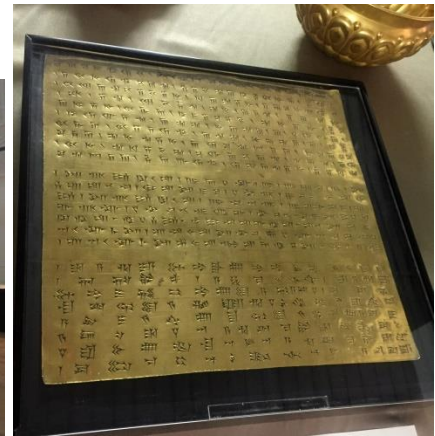
Rhyton at Reza Abbasi



National Museum



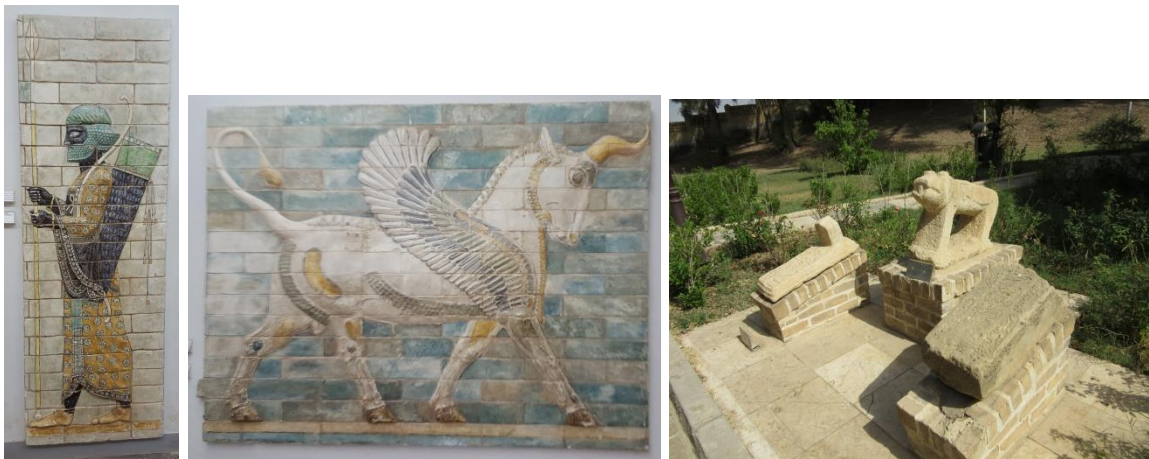
Islamic Museum



Gold Foundation Tablet



Archeology Museum



Susa



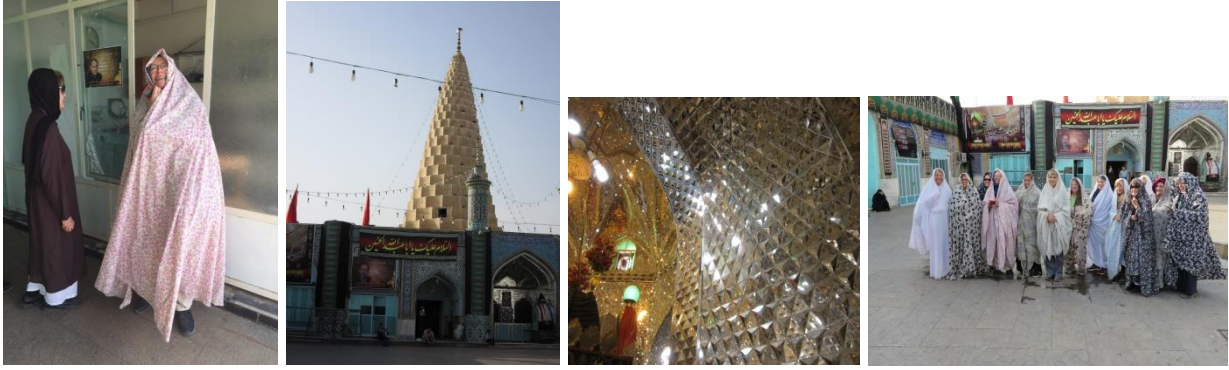
Chogha Mish (Rita & Stefano in photo on the right)



Shushtar



Chogha Zanbil

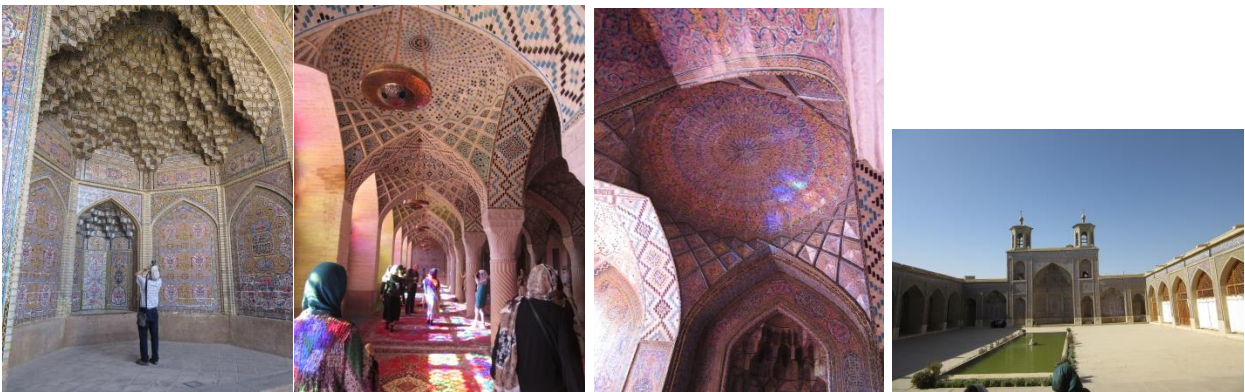


“Tomb of Daniel”

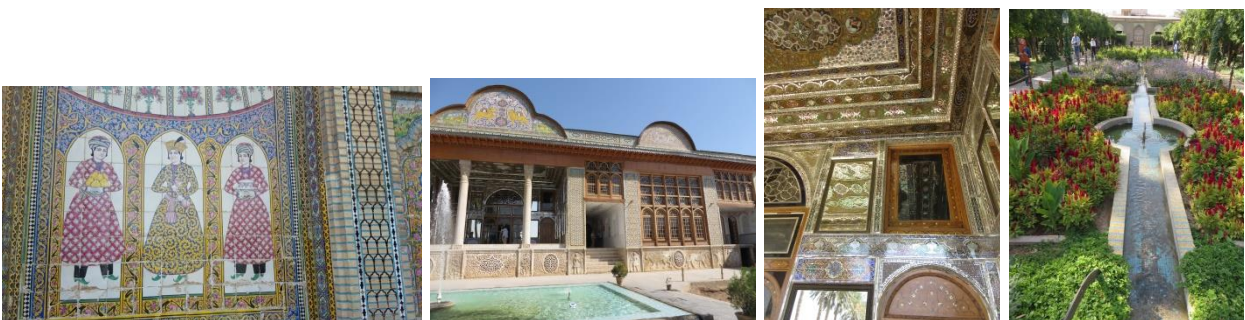


Bishapur (with John, Richard, Jim, Carol, and Gil)

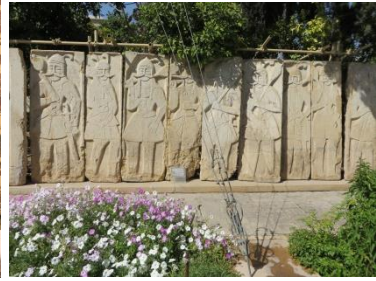
Tang-e-Chogan



Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque



Naranjestan Museum



Pars Museum



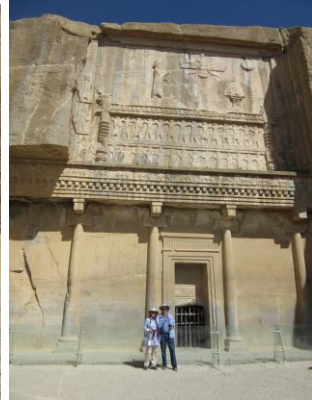
Vakil Bazaar



Vakil Mosque



Arg-e-Khan Citadel



Persepolis



Naqsh-e Rostam



Eram Garden



Pasargadae



Tomb of Cyrus



Tower of Silence



Qanat and Wind Towers



Fire Temple



Jame Mosque Yazd



Yazd Old Town



Qanat entrance



Dolat Abad Garden and wind tower

Amir Chakhmaq



Narin wind towers around a qanat entrance, castle

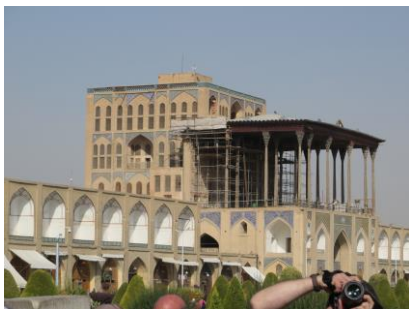
Pigeon Tower



Jame Mosque Esfahan

Pol-e Sharestan Bridge

Imam Mosque



Lotfollah Mosque

Ali-Qapu Palace



Khaju Bridge

Chehel Sotun Palace



Hasht Behesht Palace



Tehran University