

During the more recent period of the Islamic Republic, a Culture and Heritage Department has been set up to preserve the monuments of Esfahan. This governmental bureau has renovated and maintained many historical and traditional buildings and bridges.

Specialist departments within Iranian universities have been created in the wake of the Islamic Revolution that rightly emphasise renovation and preservation of older buildings. This not only helps the city to flourish but also increases the number of tourists and visitors.

Historical Landmarks

Historical landmarks in Esfahan include a plethora of public parks, mosques, minarets, religious sanctuaries and schools, old houses and palaces, and bazaars. Most of the historical landmarks belong to the Safavid period since it was the latter who promoted, perhaps more than any other did, the city as their quintessential capital. Some of the better known among these landmarks are described below:

Midan Naghsh-e Jahan (Midan al-Emam)

This is located in the centre of the city and is popularly regarded as one of the most beautiful squares, or midans, in the Islamic world. It is large and rectangular, about 507 metres long and 158 metres wide. It is surrounded by iwans with two floors on top of which are stood pointed arches. There are shops in the ground floor and rooms on the upper floor.

The park is set against the backdrop of perhaps the most prominent Islamic landmarks in the city, namely the Emam Mosque, the Shaykh Lotfollah Mosque, the Palace of Ali Qapu, and the Entrance to the Qayseryyeh Bazaar.

Ancient and modern squares can be found throughout the city, and these include, among others, the Midan Darvazeh Doulat, Midan Bazaar Gamhar, Midan Azadi, Midan Inqilab, Midan al-Shuhada, Midan Ahmed Abad, Midan Khaju, Midan Emam Husayn, Midan al-Quds and Islamic Republic Midan.

The Mosques of Esfahan

Esfahan has many mosques and sanctuaries from the various Islamic eras, in particular those built during the Safavid period. Among these is the Jame', which is located in Allama Majlisi Street and is today regarded as one of the oldest mosques in the city. It was built in 23 AH (644 AD) and has been reconstructed and maintained many times since then.

The Emam Mosque (formerly Shah Mosque) is one of the greatest of the structures left to us by the Safavids. It is a magnificent piece of object d'art built by Shah Abbas, probably the grandest of the Safavid rulers, between

1021 and 1040 AH (1612-1630 AD). This is located in the centre of the city with its main gate overlooking the Midan Naghsh-e Jahan.

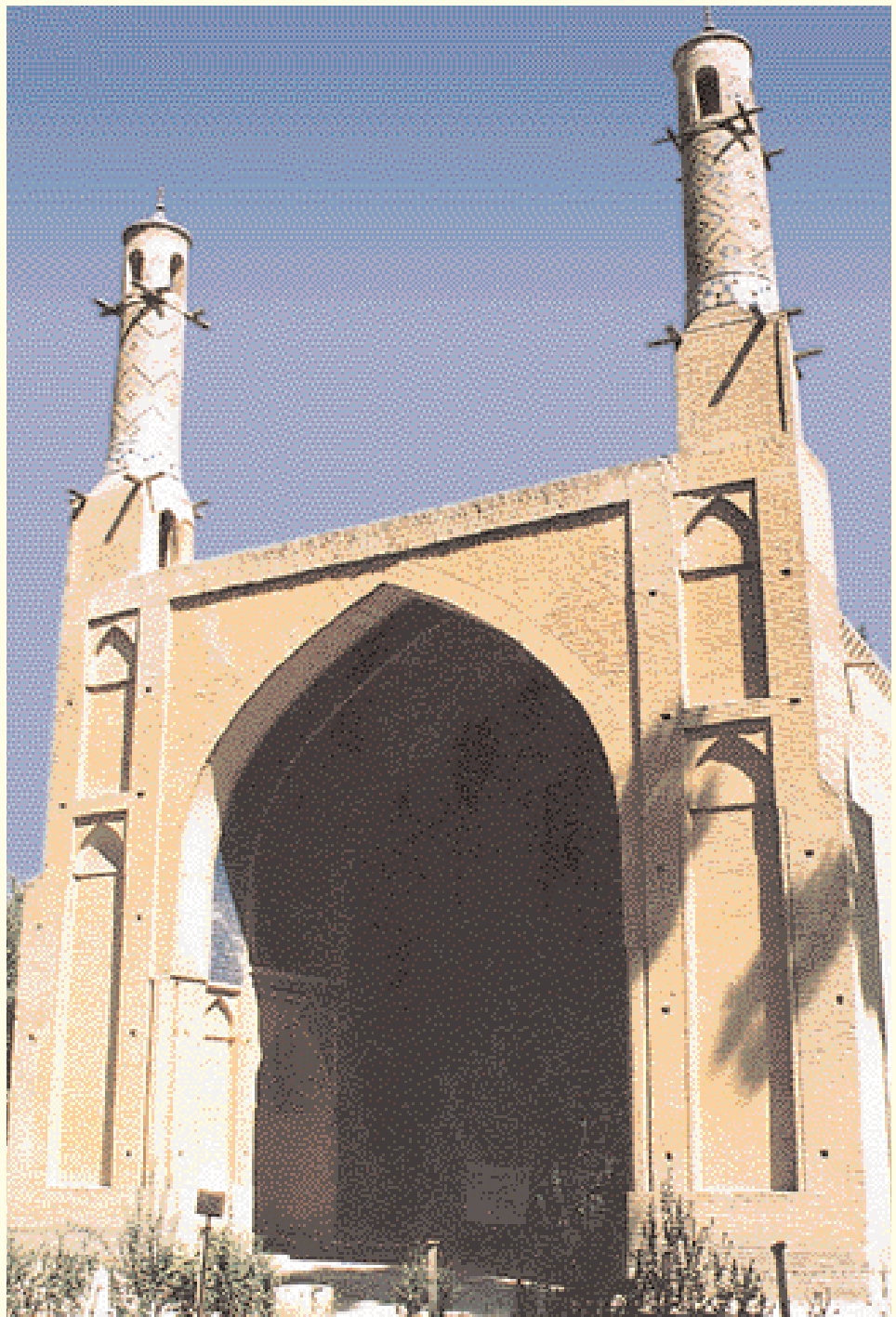
The Mosque of Shaykh Lotfollah is, in addition to the Emam Mosque, considered one of the most impressive examples of Safavid mosque construction in the whole of Iran. It too is located in the centre of the city, and its entrance – which even in moderation can be described as

no less than magnificent – also overlooks the Midan Naghsh-e Jahan. Built between 1011-1028 AH (1602-1618 AD), its name is attributable to the father of Shah Abbas's wife.

Other mosques in Esfahan include Sayyed Mosque, Linban Mosque, Rukn al-Mulk Mosque, Hakim Mosque, Aqa Noor Mosque, Ilchi Mosque, Sardar Mosque, Zulfiqar Mosque, and many other mosques all over the city of Esfahan. ➔

منارتا جنبان – اصفهان

The Shaking Minarets of Junban





بازار قیصریه - اصفهان
Qaysariyeh Bazaar - Esfahan

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Minarets

The minarets of Esfahan reflect the splendour of the city's Islamic heritage. The older examples include the minarets of Seen Mosque, Bagh Qooshkhaneh, Sha'iyah Mosque, Sarban, Ghaar, Ali Mosque, the minarets of the city's Guest House and the two Shaking Minarets of Junban.

Sanctuaries and Shrines

A variety of sanctuaries, mausoleums and shrines of prominent Muslim personalities throughout different Islamic periods are paid homage to in Esfahan. These are often religious establishments with grand architectural designs surrounded by exquisite gardens. Among the more important of these are the Maqam Shah Zayd, Maqam Emamzadeh-ye Ahmad, Maqam Emamzadeh-ye Ismail, Maqam Emamzadeh-ye Jafer and Maqam Sitti Fatemeh.

The main shrines within Esfahan include the Mazaar Takht-e-Fulad, Mazaar Baba Rukn al-Din, Mazaar al-Sayyed Hassan al-Khowsari, and the Mazar Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk.

Religious Schools

Religious schools, or madressas, are cultural landmarks in themselves, reflecting the importance that Islam attaches to maintaining the acquisition and furtherance of knowledge. Muslims have therefore traditionally made the mosque itself the very basis of one's first schooling.

The significance of madressas and knowledge-based learning in Islam spans all Islamic periods without exception. Esfahan, as a cultural centre par excellence, developed many religious schools within its environs. For their part, the Safavid rulers were arguably the most expansive in terms of promoting madressa-based teaching. The most popular madressas

in Esfahan were – and some still remain – the Chahar Bagh (Emam al-Sadiq Scientific School), Jiddah Bozorg, Jiddah Kucchik, Shafiyyeh, Mirza Husayn, Jalaliyeh school, Sulaymaniyeh, Emamiyeh, Aqa Kafoor, Emami, Saddar Bazaar, Nasiri, Kaasa Gran, and the Neem Oudh school.

The most important educational establishments in the city of Esfahan today are the University of Esfahan, The Islamic Free University, The al-Khoei Dar al-Ilm (House of Knowledge), al-Noor University, The University of Technology in Esfahan, The University of Medical Sciences, The University of Military Industry, The University of Oil Sciences, and The University of Arts and Architecture.

Historical Markets (Bazaars)

As in most cities of Iran, the old markets, or bazaars, of Esfahan have played an important role in the development of housing areas, or ➤

قصر جهلستون - اصفهان
Chehel Sotun Palace - Esfahan



There are also old houses in the Julfa area that were inhabited by Christians in the heyday of Esfahan's glory as the capital city of Iran. Among the well-known houses here are the Marta Peters, Sokyas, David and Peter. In addition to the many uniquely Islamic buildings in Esfahan, built under the patronage of the Safavids, there are palaces that continue to attract tourists to the city. These palaces include Chehel Sotun, Ali Qapu and Hasht Behesht.

quarters. Indeed, bazaars were the impetus for the establishment of various quarters in the city, most of which were roofed and were serviced by local shops, as well as containing public baths, madressas and khans.

The main old bazaars of Esfahan are those that surround the Naghsh-e Jahan Midan, notably the Qayseriyyeh Bazaar, Hadadin Bazaar (Smiths' market), Khayateen Bazaar (Tailoring) and Nuhasiyaat Bazaar (Copper), most of which have additional branches in other parts of the city. Many of these old markets situated among the quarters still exist today, such as the Dardasht Bazaar, Beed Abad Bazaar, Reesman and Gaz Bazaar.

Old Houses and Palaces

Most of the houses and palaces in Esfahan have, even long after the period of the Safavid dynasty in which they were constructed, retained their architectural elegance. They are more often than not characterised by a large, open and extended courtyard with a water fountain centre-piece that is surrounded by gardens containing a variety of indigenous fruit trees, flowers and shrubs.

The better known houses in Esfahan are the Haqiqi, A'alem, Qazwineyin, Quddsi, Yadullah, Shaykholeslami, Nilofershan, A'alem Va'ez and Mujtahidzadeh.

Handicrafts and Traditional Crafts

Handicrafts and traditional crafts reflect the culture and art of a people. Before the emergence of modern industry, these crafts were an outstanding and popular phenomenon in the city of Esfahan and they preserved their originality and splendour despite the emergence of modern industry. The most popular crafts are: rings, wood carvings and engravings, carpet-weaving, copperworks, miniatures, printing on texture, Qashani, mosaic, inscriptions, bookbinding (old valuable manuscripts), and gypsum ornamentation.

Tourist Sites and Service Buildings

The city of Esfahan is a cultural haven that embraces a plethora of must-see places of interest to satisfy the curiosity of any tourist or visitor. Some of the more familiar landmarks have already been mentioned in this article, but it is still perhaps pertinent to single out once again the Midan Naghsh-e Jahan which is located in the centre of this great city, as well as the historical buildings that surround the Midan.

Service buildings in Esfahan are also plentiful and include among them hotels and furnished houses that are generally reasonably priced. There are also many restaurants catering to even the most discerning of palates, and the city is, moreover, graced with beautiful parks and gardens that are rich with fruit-bearing trees, flowers and plants. Such sites may be visited within the city itself or indeed can be found on its outskirts. ➔

Main Hotels in Esfahan with their Telephone Codes

NB: International Dialling Code is 00 98 311.

Abbasi Hotel	5 stars	222 6011 / 9
Sadaf Hotel	4 stars	220 988 – 220 3236
International Kawsar Hotel	4 stars	224 0230 / 9
Ali Qapu Hotel	4 stars	223 1283 / 4
Perouzi Hotel	4 stars	223 6586 / 7
Esfahan Hotel	3 stars	236 0586 – 226 9737
Ispadana Hotel	3 stars	261 5273 – 262 9195 / 9
Saveet Hotel	2 stars	261 9482
Pol va Park Hotel	2 stars	261 2785 / 8
Azadi Hotel	2 stars	223 9011 – 223 5056
Julfa Hotel	2 stars	224 4441 / 2
Tourist Hotel	2 stars	226 3094