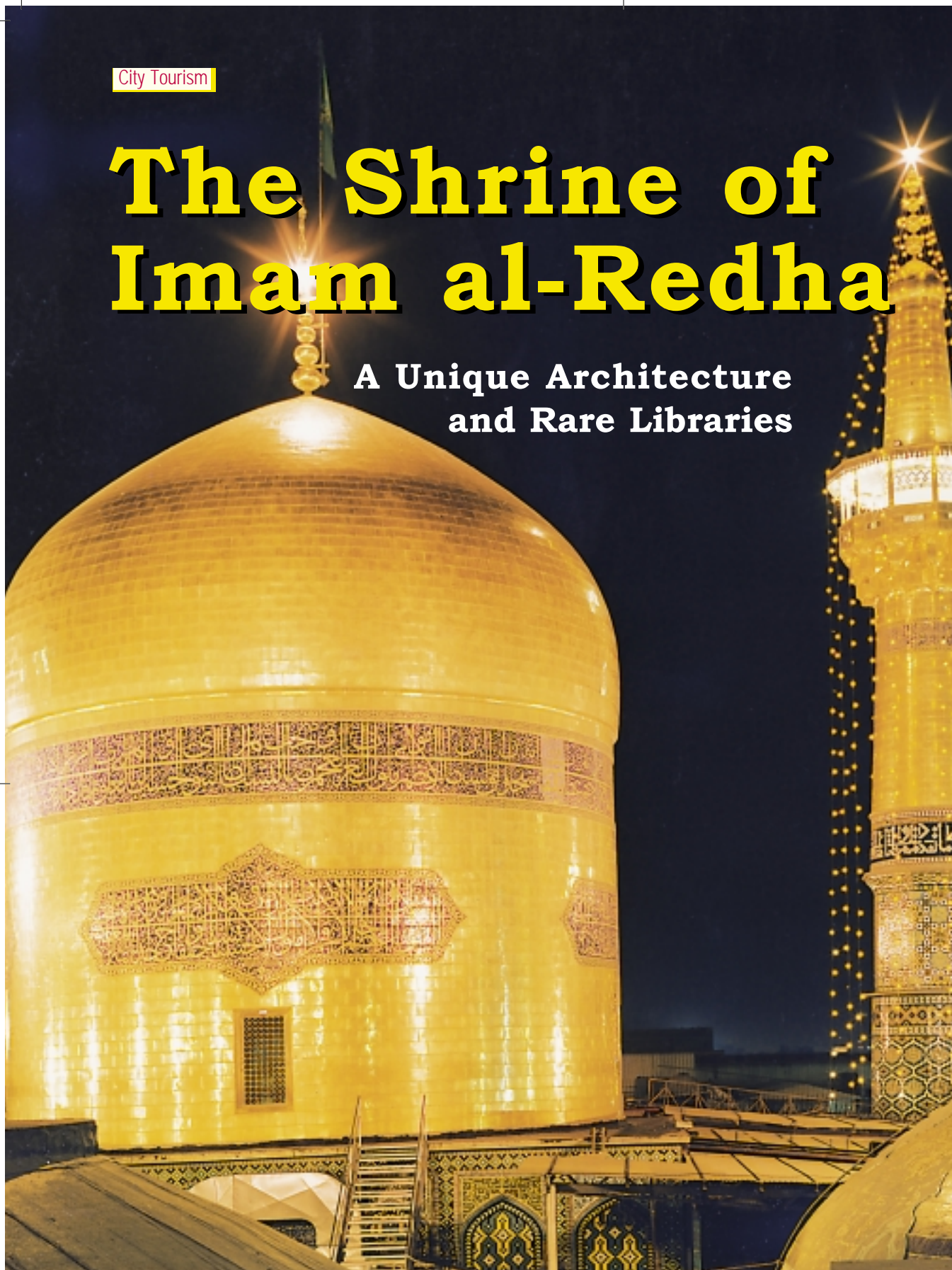


City Tourism

# The Shrine of Imam al-Redha

A Unique Architecture  
and Rare Libraries



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**Photographs:**  
**The centre for**  
**Artistic creativity**  
**- Mashad**

قبة الإمام الرضا ومنازته  
The Dome of Imam  
al-Redha

The Mausoleum, or Holy Meadow, of Imam Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far ar-Ridha (lit. The Satisfied) is situated in the city of Mashhad, Iran.

It is considered to be one of the key religious shrines which many Muslims from around the world will visit in

the form of a ziyarat, or pilgrimage.

Born in Medina on the 11th of Dhu'l Qida, 148 AH, Imam al-Ridha, the eighth of twelve holy Imams from the direct lineage of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, was martyred in Tus, Iran, on 17 Safar 203 AH. ➤





رواق دار الولاية

### The Home of Governorship (Dar al-Wilayah)

years 1006 - 1016 AH on the orders of Shah Abbas following an Uzbek attack.

The Mausoleum has two domes: The first is several centuries old, deep and concave inside the tomb; the second was built on top of the first by order of Shah Abbas II. This Dome is more than 31 metres high. In addition, there are two lighthouses, one close to the dome, the other opposite it in the Abbasid Hall (both coated with gold). These lighthouses are separated by distance so that visitors who enter the Mausoleum suppose that the dome is located between both lighthouses. There are six additional lighthouses, two built on the northern and southern gates of the aisle (courtyard), which are adorned with gold and porcelain; another two smaller ones on the southern side of the Courtyard of Imam Khomeini (facing one another); and the last two on the Gawhar Shad Mosque. Thus, there are a

total of eight lighthouses, symbolically representing the Eighth Imam.

The Mausoleum's other parts include the following: Tomb and gravestone, Mosque of Balasar, Galleries, Aisles (Courtyards), Halls, The drum building, The Sanctuary, Shoe Wardrobes.

### The Mausoleum

The Mausoleum in Mashhad is the fifth such tomb built on the gravesite in 1421 AH, coinciding with the Feast of Immolation. As for the other four tombs, the first one was built during the reign of Tahmasb in 957AH (preserved in the Central City Museum and made of wood with gold and silver-type leaf; the second one is made of steel set with emerald and ruby - around two thousand stones in all; The third is also of steel, its ceiling covered with golden-leaved wood and its door set with precious stones; the fourth

one is known as "the shining tomb", or "the tomb of gold and silver"; the fifth (current one) has a thick layer of gold and silver.

A remarkable feature is the capping which is done without any tying or binding tools, and which has fourteen holes. The design of the dome along with its ornaments, arches, paintwork and decoration is in harmony with the artistic features of the architecture of the Mausoleum and its symbols. The floral paintwork is a particular attraction, symbolizing the Holy Prophet and his immediate Family, and their descendants, the Holy Imams. Looking at it all closely, one's belief in the Almighty is reinforced.

### The Gravestone

This has changed over time. The oldest rock on the grave dates back to more than nine centuries and is of marble, with Arabic engravings that include chapters of the Holy ➤





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مسجد المكتبة المركزية  
Central Library Mosque

Qur'an. It is currently on exhibition at the ground floor of the Holy Asetana Museum. As for the newer rock, this is also finely carved bright marble.

### Other Artistic Features of the Mausoleum

The attractive artistic features of the Mausoleum, with its arabesque design, has particular characteristics such as entwined floral branches and ornaments.

The arabesque consists of two parts:

- The Floral Design based on abstract, circle and twisting branches, flowers, blossoms, and trees shapes.

- Geometric Design based on straight lines and different angles (the so-called 'Making lines') Most of the time, both of these designs are used together with the handwriting to produce a unique masterpiece of art from all these things.

Indeed, the Mausoleum itself is generally considered to be an artistic and Islamic architectural masterpiece, not to mention a legendary tourist attraction in its own right.

### Balaster Mosque

This is also known as the mosque of the Direction of the Head, that is the head of the Imam's body, the closest place to the tomb. It is a small rectangular construct located on the western side of the grave, almost a thousand years old, and built by order of

Abul Hassan Araki, the Minister of the Ghaznavi Governorate. This mosque is a mere eight metres long and ten metres high, and the lower parts of its walls are covered with marble while the remaining part of the wall is covered with marbled porcelain.

### Galleries

The gallery, whose ceilings vary in height, is an expression of the religious nature of the Mausoleum's architecture, being an area between two lines of pillars that are parallel to the Qibla, (direction of prayer) wall stretching north to south. Some see it as an annex built onto the sides of the mosque in the vicinity of the courtyard.

The Mausoleum is distinguished by its many galleries (up to twenty-one, in fact) that are situated in an area space of 12,543 square metres of which 10,715 sq.m was recently modernized following the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Most of these galleries have beautiful Islamic names, such as 'Home of Happiness', 'Home of Peace', 'Home of Qur'an', 'Home of Thanks', and 'Home of Monotheism'.

What attracts the attention of visitors particularly is that these galleries also contain rare architectural designs and geometric patterns, stony knots, mirror ornaments and decorations. There are shapes made of plaster as well as gilt-edged paintings and drawings. The oldest gallery is known as 'Home of the Learners', and was built during the time of

Timur by order of the Lady Gawhar Shad Agha, wife of Mirza Shahrukh, son of Prince Timur, in 841AH, coinciding with the foundation of the men-only Gawhar Shad Mosque. Religious rituals, including recitations of the Holy Qur'an, take place in the southern end of the tomb, which consists of seven corridors that each have golden doors leading to the 'Home of Mastership', and on towards the farther parts of the Mausoleum itself. The porcelain at the northern wall is decorated with beautiful calligraphy that is considered to be the most important historical element of the architecture. The gallery known as 'The Dome of Hatim Khani' was built in 1011AH by order of the minister, Hatimbek, in one of the ancient historical buildings located to the east of the tomb. Its floor is marble, the walls covered with precious porcelain with attractive ornamentation and paintings along with chapters and verses from the Qur'an.

'The Home of Pleasure' is located on the western side of 'Freedom Courtyard' which is characterized by a fabulous golden door that leads to 'The Home of Peace'. The 'Dome of Allah' is one of the most precious examples of art and architecture in the Mausoleum, and is octagonally designed with halls, small and large. This was built by order of one of the Safavid princes during the reign of Shah Abbas, in the north-eastern side of the tomb, and incorporates a meeting or prayer room for women.

The gallery known as 'The Home of Mastership' (referred to above) covers an area of 2,700sq.m and has a marble floor, the edges of which are covered with Chinese marble.

'The Home of Mercy', finally, was inaugurated in 1992. At its centre, on top of the eastern wall, is a fabulous piece of art that depicts the afternoon of Yaum-e Ashura (The Day of Ashura), the holy festival in which Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at Karbala. There are also other paintings here that help create an overall spiritual atmosphere. Some galleries are used for religious studies, rituals (such as washing) and the preaching of sermons, whilst others are used for funerals and wakes, whilst yet others house the graves of religious masters and teachers of the past, such as Shaykh al-Bahai'i, the renowned Lebanese Islamic scholar who died in Isfahan in 1030AH, whose body was then transferred to Mashhad according to his will.

### The Courtyard

The courtyard in religious architecture is a type of space that is either covered or uncovered. In civil architecture, the courtyard is the essence of various styles of Islamic architecture - the doors lead to it ➔

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and the windows overlook it. Courtyards are also of great importance in relation to tombs, and might be utilized as meeting places for visitors or for praying, in addition to other religious rituals during feasts or funerals. Moreover, courtyards can be very attractive, their ornamentation and centuries-old porcelain capturing one's attention.

The first courtyard founded by order of Prince Ali Sheerwai during the reign of Sultan Husayn Baiqra (875 – 913AH) was originally called the 'ancient courtyard', but is nowadays known in Iran as the 'Islamic Revolution Courtyard', and is considered to be one of the most luxurious buildings in modern Islamo-Persian architecture.

The last courtyard, which is still under construction, is a part of a huge project for the Mausoleum which was begun after the revolution. This is the 'holy courtyard', which has an area of 57,000sq.m. Two further courtyards are proposed for building on an area of 13,000sq.m, in the eastern and western sections.

Following the revolution, the Qods Courtyard was built along with the Courtyard of the Islamic Republic. In the middle of Revolution Courtyard is an octagonal watering place where visitors can drink 'holy water'. On top of this stands a golden dome, but surrounding the water area are four sinks that are used for performing ablutions. In one of the rooms of this courtyard is the grave of Shaykh Hur al-Amily, author of the famous treatise, Shi'a Methodology. He was one of the great Lebanese Islamic scholars who died in Mashhad in 1104AH.

A remarkable feature of this courtyard is the rectangular sink for performing ablutions before the prayer, as well as a dial which shows the noon-time throughout the whole year. People gather here often, especially during functions such as funerals, condolences, and so on.

The largest courtyard, therefore, is the Islamic Republic Courtyard and the smallest the Qods Courtyard.

### Halls

The architectural term, 'Hall', means a wide vaulted room with an open end that leads to a courtyard through a gallery, its other end closed by a wall. Generally, it is an architectural unit (square or rectangular) with either a vaulted ceiling or a flat one surrounded by three walls from three sides, the fourth side being left open. (NB. In Persian, 'Ivan' means 'Throne Hall').

The Halls are part of the Mausoleum:

The southern hall, or 'Hall of Gold', is one of the ways to visit the grave of the Holy Imam. It is a



قبة مسجد جوهر شاد

The Dome of Gawhar Shad Mosque

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beautiful section of the Mausoleum, with golden ceiling & walls. It is sometimes known as 'Naderi Hall' after Nader Shah who ordered its gold coating in 1145AH.

The Northern hall, or Abbasid Hall, was built by order of Shah Abbas and was eponymously named. On its top is one of the two golden lighthouses of the tomb.

The Western Hall, or clock hall, has two sections that are set with painting and mosaic. On the top of its door is a large clock beneath a small dome (seen from all four sides). This clock tower, along with another at the end of Freedom Courtyard, is considered to be the highest places of Asetana.

The Eastern Hall, built on the orders of Shah Abbas is 26 metres high and incorporates two additional halls. On top of it is the Nakkara Building which is luxurious and worthy of the visitors' attention. 'Nakkara' literally means a kind of drum on which one knocks in order to announce the time of sunrise and sunset throughout the whole year except during the Islamic months of Muharram and Safar, as well as during funerals and condolence ceremonies.

### The Resorts

These are the gateways through which visitors enter the Mausoleum and exit it. They also serve as a shelter for visitors, especially in cases of accidents and emergencies. The area is also generally used by homeless people too, and as a place of immediate refuge for anybody.

### Shoe Wardrobes

These are the places between the galleries and the courtyards (halls) where visitors' shoes are kept.

### Annexes to the Mausoleum

The buildings connected with the tomb, around it or close to it, include: Gawhar Shad Mosque, Central Library, Library of Gawhar Shad Mosque (separate building), Museums, Seminary, Hospitality Home of Imam ar-Ridha (peace be upon him), Buildings around the Mausoleum, Hospital, Some scientific schools, Complex of Islamic research centres.

### Gawhar Shad Mosque

Built in 821AH by order of Gawhar Shad ➤



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Khatun, this mosque has a distinguished position in relation to other famous mosques that are also close to the Mausoleum. It is teeming with a myriad of visitors from all over the world throughout the year, and is still a place for learning, a centre of Islamic studies. It comprises a yard, four halls, seven galleries, six entrances, a turquoise dome, and two lighthouses. The southern hall, which is the larger hall, comprises an impressive pulpit made of precious woods, a masterpiece in its own right that is almost three hundred years old.

This historic mosque also has a library in the form of a separate building (with an area of 1,200sq.m) located on the western side of the Shaykh Bahai'i Resort where there are two bookstores, a store for manuscripts, and three reading halls. The stores contain more than 3,000 priceless manuscripts and around 37,000 books of many disciplines. It was founded in 1373AH.

### Central Library

This is one of the oldest Islamic libraries (more than six centuries old in fact!) in existence, which has a distinguished position in the Islamic World. It is famous for its valuable collection of books as well as manuscripts and copies of the Qur'an. Indeed, scientists, researchers and academic visitors, as well as laymen, still come here from all over the world to benefit from its unique catalogue.

After the revolution, the library was extended and removed to newer building which has a wonderful architectural design and is well worth a visit. It is located in an area of 28,800sq.m and boasts a million texts, with a capacity for five million. At the present time, there are more than 550,000 books in forty-two languages, 36,000 manuscripts, 1,500 copies of the Qur'an, and a host of other printed books. Visitors can marvel at the

halls – both open and covered - the reference section, the audio-visual department, the reading room with its varieties of magazines & newspapers, a films section and a department for copying. The library also contains a special room for research, a laboratory, a store for printed books and manuscripts, and an archive for books that are controversial or banned.

### Museums

Iran boasts a wealth of museums and the country has leading Islamic cultural and artistic centres that attract many visitors from all over the world. These include the following:

Central Museum, Qur'an Museum, Museum of Gifts (of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution), Philatelic Museum, Mashhad Historical Museum, Carpets Museum, Museums for medallions, Chinese and crystal vessels, watches, weaponry, astronomy, sculpture, porcelain, painting, and modern artefacts. ➤



رواق الشيخ البهائي العالمي ومرقده  
The Mausoleum of Shaykh  
al-Baha al-Amily



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أحد أروقة الحرم الرضويّ الشريف  
One of the galleries  
of the shrine

**The buildings around the Mausoleum offer various services to the visitor, such as tour guidance, safekeeping, health insurance, cleaning, welfare (especially of poorer pilgrims), meals, missing children agencies (locating lost children and returning them to their parents), security, and services for the disabled, elderly and infirm.**

### Islamic Sciences Seminary (Hawza Ilmiyyeh)

Founded on the basis of both religious and academic studies, one of the main sections of the seminary, or theological university, consists of two schools:

School of Khayrat Khan and School of Mirza Ja'far. The scientific center, which was influential in bringing about the success of the revolution, comprises seven schools, a mosque, a large conference hall, and a self-service restaurant.

The university began its activities in 1404AH, and hosts more than seven hundred students from Iran and other countries.

The branches of learning include:

Qur'anic Studies, Arabic studies, Philosophy, Laws, and Islamic studies.

### Hospitality Home of Imam ar-Ridha

Since hospitality is one of the virtues of Islam, many Muslims have given over as gifts some of their own properties for this purpose. The Imam ar-Ridha (Imam Reza

in Persian) Hospitality Home, or guest house, is one of the oldest foundations in Mashhad, established at the start of the Safavid era. It consists of three storeys and is furnished with all the necessary mod-cons for the traveler and pilgrim. It receives visitors day and night (around 4,000 people eat here daily) and more than a million people come here annually.

### The Buildings around the Mausoleum

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### Healthcare and Recovery Centre

This medical centre consists of departments

that offer different levels of healthcare service to patients as well as the indigent.

### Scientific Schools

Three schools for religious studies were founded in the Ninth Century AH.

### Islamic Research Complex

This is the most important centre for scientific research in Khurasan Province, incorporating various branches under the study of Islamic Sciences, including classification, writing, translation, correction, communication, jurisprudence, traditions (Ahadiths), history, geography, computer science, general knowledge, children's literature, planning, and so on. The complex also issues a seasonal magazine called al-Mishqah (lit. oriental lantern) as well as hundreds of books that are classified, edited and translated.

The centre is run by Shaykh Ali Akbar Elahi Khurasani, is supervised by the Holy Asetana and sponsored by Shaykh Abbas Vaez Tabarsi. ■