

TRAVEL WITH FRIENDS IN 2015

Masjed-e Jameh, Friday Mosque, Yazd. By Fulvio Spada, via Wikimedia Commons

Cobalt and Lustre Treasures of Ancient Persia

TEHRAN – ZANJAN – TABRIZ – SHIRAZ – YAZD – ISFAHAN

with John Tidmarsh
01–21 October 2015 (21 days)



R
Renaissance
Tours

Cobalt and Lustre

TREASURES OF ANCIENT PERSIA



TOUR LEADER

Dr John Tidmarsh was part-time Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney. He is currently President of the University's Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation and Co-Director of the University of Sydney's excavations at Pella in Jordan and the ANU University of Melbourne excavations at Jebel Khalid in Syria. His main areas of interest are the archaeology of Alexander the Great's conquests, the Hellenistic Period in the Near East and Asia, and the Islamic world.

Few countries can boast of such an illustrious past and diversity of cultures as Iran. From Tehran, Zanzan and Tabriz in the north to Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan in the south and centre, this tour will thoroughly explore the extraordinary historical, architectural and cultural legacy since Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire in the 6th century BC.

In addition to exploring the major sites such as Persepolis, Pasargad and Naqsh-e Rostam, you will also enter the lesser known world of the Sassanians whose opulent palaces at Bishapur and Firuzabad, along with the remarkable religious centre of Takht-e Sulaiman, with its bottomless lake and great Fire Temple, represent some of the finest monuments seen in Iran today.

Stay in the enchanting mud-brick city of Yazd with its brooding Zoroastrian Towers of Silence, narrow winding lanes and opulent merchants' houses with their tall wind-towers. In Shiraz, 'the city of roses and nightingales', enter the enchanted world of Persian gardens and poetry through the wonderful gardens of the Bagh-e Eram, the Narenjastan Pavilion and the tombs of Hafez and Sa'adi.

At a glance...

- Visit Tabriz, a place of cultural exchange since antiquity
- Explore the enchanting mud-brick city of Yazd
- Be enchanted by Shiraz, 'the city of roses and nightingales'
- Discover the stunning gardens, bazaars and mosques of Isfahan, the 'Pearl of Islam'
- Visit Persepolis, 'the city of the Persians'



Itinerary

Wed 30 Sep 2015

Depart Australia

Suggested departure from Australia on Emirates via Dubai to Tehran.

Thu 01 Oct

Arrive Tehran

Arrive Tehran in the morning. Transfer to the hotel located in the centre of Tehran.

In the afternoon, begin your exploration of Tehran with a visit to the fabulous National Jewels Museum, housed in the vaults of the Central Bank of Iran, displaying the most dazzling and priceless collection of jewels and gems in the world.

Tonight join John Tidmarsh and fellow art lovers for a welcome dinner.

D

Fri 02 Oct

Tehran

This morning visit the Reza Abbasi Museum displaying objects from the pre-historic era until the 20th century. The two galleries in this museum show different schools of painting and calligraphy from various periods in Iran's history.

After lunch continue to the Archaeological Museum, displaying an authentic collection of pottery, bronze and valuable pieces from millenniums BC until the Islamic era. **B L D**

Sat 03 Oct

Tehran

This morning visit the Glass & Ceramics Museum with a beautiful collection of glass and pottery from different periods. Finish at the Golestan Palace and Museum Complex, the former residence of the 19th and early 20th century Qajar Kings of Iran, with several museums including the Marble Throne Room and the Ethnographic Museum.

Time permitting, finish the day with a visit to the Carpet Museum, which has an excellent collection of Persian carpets from different regions of Iran on display. **B L**

Sun 04 Oct

Tehran – Zanjan

In the morning journey from Teheran to Zanjan. After lunch visit the magnificent Mausoleum of Uljaitu, set like a gem in the formerly vast plain of Soltaniyeh, constructed during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Khoda Bande (1304–1330). The monument is remarkable, its huge

dome is about 51 metres high and ranks amongst the largest domes in the world. The stucco-work, the tile-work, and the designs decorating this monument are unique. **B L D**

Mon 05 Oct

Zanjan

Excursion to Takht-e-Soleiman, the 'Throne of Solomon', located in a remote mountain valley near Takab, one of the most interesting and enigmatic sacred sites in Iran. At the centre of a flat stone hill rising twenty meters above the surrounding lands, is a small lake of mysterious beauty. Brilliantly clear but dark as night due to its depth, the lake's waters are fed by a hidden spring far below the surface. Places like this were known in legendary times as portals to the underworld, as abodes of earth spirits.

The massive stone walls and remnants of the thirty eight watch towers, together with remains of the palaces, the fire temple and the Anahita temple, built around the lake mainly by the Sassanians in the 3rd century AD, are part of what is left of the complex. The crater of Zendan-e-Soleiman (the Prison of Solomon) can be glimpsed in the distance. **B L D**

Tue 06 Oct

Zanjan – Tabriz

This morning travel from Zanjan to Tabriz. This afternoon time to visit the Bazaar of Tabriz. **B L D**

Wed 07 Oct

Tabriz

This morning take an excursion to the troglodyte city of Kandovan, (50 km) a small picturesque village whose landscape is reminiscent of Cappadocia in Turkey. Covering a much smaller area, the cone formed volcanic rocks have been eroded to strange formations and are homes which have been carved into the rocks and inhabited for the last 600 years.

This afternoon enjoy a tour of Tabriz including a visit to the Blue Mosque and Azerbaijan Museum.

One of the historical capitals of Iran and the capital of East Azerbaijan Province, Tabriz is situated at an altitude of 1,350 meters at the junction of the Quru and Aji Rivers, and is rich in many historical monuments dating back to the Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar periods. **B L**



Kandovan © Adam Jones via flickr.com/photos/adam_jones



Takht-e Soleiman lake © Ninara via flickr.com/photos/ninara

Thu 08 Oct

Tabriz

Enjoy a full day trip out of Tabriz (125 km, each way) to the Armenian church and monastery of St Stephanos, situated in the Aros River valley with beautiful mountain scenery around. Across the other side of the river is Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan). **B L**

Fri 09 Oct

Tabriz – Shiraz

Morning at leisure before our early afternoon flight from Tabriz to Shiraz. Late afternoon arrival in Shiraz. **B D**

Sat 10 Oct

Shiraz

Morning excursion to Persepolis, one of the most important sites of the Ancient World, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings with remains of the palaces of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes. See the famous bas-reliefs, depicting kings and courtiers and gift bearing representatives of tributary nations of the Persian Empire.

At Naghsh-e-Rostam see Ka'be-Zardosht (fire temple/sanctuary) and the Royal Tombs as well as the seven magnificent Sassanian rock-reliefs including the relief depicting Shapur the First's famous victory over Roman Emperor Valerian.

Return to Shiraz for visits to the delightful Eram Garden and the tomb of one of Iran's greatest lyric poets, Hafez, which is set in pleasant gardens. **B L**

Sun 11 Oct

Shiraz

Morning excursion to Firuzabad, once the capital of Ardashir I (224–241AD) who founded the Sassanian empire, the last ancient Persian empire before the arrival of the Arabs. At Firuzabad we visit Ardashir's great palace, probably the finest Sassanian monument in all Iran with its great iwan and domed audience halls, as well as a fine rock relief celebrating his accession to the throne.

After lunch visit the Qajar period Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, popularly known as the 'Pink Mosque' because of its colourful tile decorations. Finish the day with a visit to Vakil Bazaar. **B L D**



Mon 12 Oct

Shiraz

Full day excursion to Bishapur to visit the remains of the Sassanian city built by Shapur I (241–273AD), the second Sassanian king. The building complex includes a central chamber, a large courtyard which had been covered with impressive mosaics, plus the remains of a temple dedicated to Anahita, the goddess of water and fertility. At Tang-e Chogan, on either side of a narrow gorge, there are six Sassanian rock-reliefs commemorating Shapur's victories over the Romans and other adversaries. **B L**

Tue 13 Oct

Shiraz – Yazd

Today journey to Yazd (438 km, 7–8 hrs including breaks). En-route stop in Pasargadae to visit the remains of the palaces and tomb of Cyrus the Great, the Founder of the Persian Empire, located in the magnificent Dasht-e-Morghab. Stop in Abarkuh, a typical desert town, and have tea under the shade of a 4,000-year old Cypress tree before arriving in Yazd in the afternoon. **B L D**

Wed 14 Oct

Yazd

Full day sightseeing in Yazd, the centre for Iran's small Zoroastrian community who, seeking refuge from the invading Arabs, found a safe haven within its fortified walls. Visit one of the two Towers of Silence (Dakhma), dating back to the 18th century, where until some 40–50 years ago, the dead were carried and left to decompose and be devoured by birds.

See the active Zoroastrian Fire Temple, the fire of which has been burning for about 1500 years. Among Yazd's Islamic sites is the Friday Mosque (1324AD), with the highest portal and minarets in Iran. Other notable Islamic monuments in Yazd are the Seljuk shrine dedicated to the Twelve Shi'ite Imams; and the Ziaieyeh Theological School, known as Zendan-e-Eskandar or Alexander's Prison.

There are also many beautiful old houses in Yazd, among them the Dowlat Abad Garden, with an 18th-century feudal hexagonal house. **B L**



Thu 15 Oct

Yazd

Full day at leisure in Yazd. **B**

Fri 16 Oct

Yazd – Isfahan

Today travel from Yazd to Isfahan (313 km, 7–8 hr including stops). En route stop to visit the caravanserai and Zilu textile museum and shop at Meybod. Continue to the village of Mohamadiye, to see the traditional workshops weaving the camel cloaks worn by the Moslem clergy in Iran. Also stop in Na'in, another charming desert town to visit the 10th century Friday Mosque and the 17th century Pirnia House, containing the Ethnographic Museum. Arrive in Isfahan in the afternoon. **B L D**

Sat 17 Oct

Isfahan

Full day tour of the beautiful city of Isfahan, the 17th century capital of the Safavids, referred to as Nesf-e-Jahan (Half of the World). Start with a visit to the famous bridges of Shahrestan, Khajou and Sio-se-pol, the Armenian Quarter with several churches, including the important Cathedral of Vank.

After lunch, explore the buildings surrounding one of the world's grandest squares, the Maidan-e-Naghsh-e-Jahan, including the Ali-Qapu Palace with its enchanting music rooms and balcony overlooking the Maidan, from where the Safavid Kings watched polo games, and two of the Islamic world's greatest mosques, the Sheikh Lotfollah and the Shah. Finish with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world-famous. **B L**

Sun 18 Oct

Isfahan

Continue your exploration of Isfahan with a visit to the magnificent Friday Mosque, with the famous Uljaitu Mihrab (Prayer Niche) of the Il-Khanid period. The Friday Mosque is considered a museum of a thousand years of Persian religious architecture and is truly one of the world's greatest mosques.

Also visit the Chehel Sotun Palace, built by Shah Abbas II in the 17th century. Its wooden columns reflected in the surface of the pool give rise to its name 'The Palace of Forty Columns'. **B L**



Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan

Mon 19 Oct

Isfahan

Day at leisure in Isfahan. Tonight, celebrate the conclusion of the tour with a special farewell dinner. **B D**

Tue 20 Oct

Isfahan – Tehran

Full day drive to Tehran (460 km, approx. 7–8 hrs, including stops). First, stop at the town of Natanz to visit a beautiful Islamic complex consisting of the Friday Mosque, Monastery and Tomb of Sheikh Abdol Samad Isfahani.

Continue to Kashan and visit one of the most important archaeological sites in Iran known as Tepe Sialk. Later, visit the historical garden of Fin, which was first planted during the Safavid period. This beautiful garden was expanded by the Zand and Qajar monarchs, who added many open pavilions. Also visit a fine example of a 19th century merchant residence known as Taba-Tabai House.

B L D

Wed 21 Oct

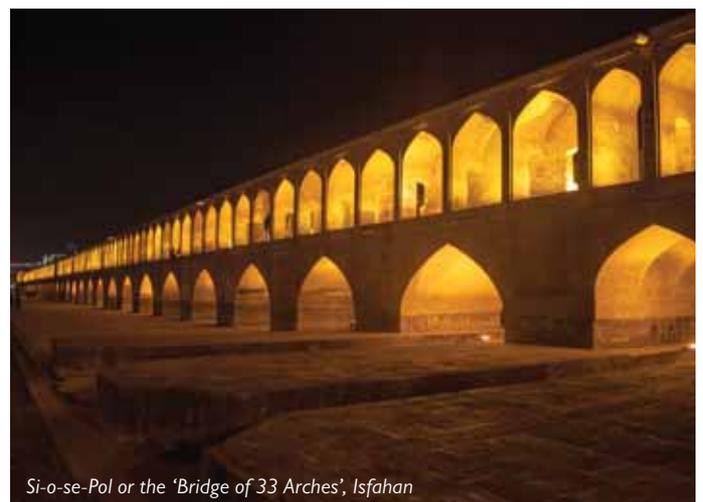
Depart Tehran

Day at leisure until the transfer to the airport. Evening departure on Emirates via Dubai to Australia. **B**

Thu 22 Oct

Arrive Australia

Evening arrival in Australia.



Si-o-se-Pol or the 'Bridge of 33 Arches', Isfahan

Tour prices

Per person, twin share	AUD 8,950
Single supplement*	AUD 1,500
Deposit per person	AUD 500
Final payment due	01 August 2015

*Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.

Tour code AGI516

Fitness level Challenging
Please see booking conditions for fitness level definitions.

Suggested airline Emirates
Please contact Renaissance Tours for assistance with current airfares and flight reservations.

Tour price includes

- Accommodation in centrally located hotels with private facilities and daily breakfast (B)
- Meals as per itinerary (L = Lunch, D = Dinner) including special Welcome and Farewell dinners
- Transfers on arrival and departure if travelling on suggested flights
- Comprehensive sightseeing, visits to museums and attractions with John Tidmarsh including entrance fees as per itinerary
- Lectures and talks with your tour leader throughout
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- Hotel portorage (one piece per person)
- Visa for Iran

Tour price does not include

- International airfares
- Transfers on arrival and departure if not travelling on suggested flights
- Items of a personal nature, including telephone, laundry, taxis etc.
- Drinks with meals
- Airport portorage
- Travel insurance

Your hotels

- Teheran – Laleh Hotel ★★★★★
- Zanjan – Grand Zanjan ★★★★★
- Tabriz – Pars Hotel ★★★★★
- Shiraz – Homa Hotel ★★★★★
- Yazd – Moshir Garden ★★★★★
- Isfahan – Abbasi or Kowsar ★★★★★
- Teheran – Laleh Hotel ★★★★★

NB. Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted

Visas

Australian and New Zealand passport holders require a visa for Iran. Renaissance Tours will assist tour members in obtaining their visa prior to departure from Australia.

Visa restriction: Entry will be refused to travellers with any evidence of visiting Israel: not just Israeli entry stamps. If you wish to visit Iran and have visited Israel you should renew your passport.

Dress code

The most visible daily expressions of Iran's Shi'ite Islam are the modest dress code, and rules for behaviour at mosques both of which apply for men and women.

Dress code for women

Women will be required to wear a head-scarf, long-sleeve shirt, trousers, and a trench-coat (to the knee) at all times. During visits to some mosques women will also be required to wear a special robe provided at the entrance.

Dress code for men

Men are required to wear trousers and shirts with either long-sleeves or half-sleeves (no singlets). Shorts are not permitted.

Food and alcohol

Iranian cuisine is heavily based on rice, bread, fresh vegetables, herbs and fruit. Meat is mostly lamb or mutton. The national drink of Iran is chai (tea), always served scalding hot, black and strong. All sorts of delicious fresh fruit juices, milkshakes and yoghurt drinks are available throughout Iran. **Alcohol is strictly forbidden. Do not take any alcohol into Iran.**



The Bagh-e Narenjestan (Orange Garden) © dynamomosquito via flickr.

Terms & Conditions

HOW TO BOOK

Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit and page one of your passport.

DEPOSIT / FINAL PAYMENTS

Your deposit is due at the time of booking and is used to pay hotel, airline, performance tickets and/or other deposits. It is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation.

Final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make the final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit.

Payment by cash, cheque, direct deposit, American Express, MasterCard and Visa is accepted. 1.5% service charge applies to payment made by MasterCard and Visa. 3% service charge applies to payment made by American Express.

Payments for some international airfares can be made by credit card without a service fee. Please check for details.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

a) Cancellation by You – Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

60 days or more	Forfeit of deposit
59 – 45 days	25% of tour cost
44 – 31 days	50% of tour cost
30 – 15 days	75% of tour cost
Less than 15 days	100% of tour cost

The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above, cancellation charges may apply for additional arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours, such as air tickets, hotels and travel insurance premium. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

b) Cancellation by Us – We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach minimum tour participant numbers). Except for

force majeure, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability.

Cancellation and/or amendment fees may apply for additional travel arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours.

PASSPORTS, VISAS AND VACCINATIONS

All travellers must be in a possession of a valid passport – most countries require a 6-month validity from your date of entry or exit. For some countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, India, Russia), visas are included in the tour cost and will be arranged by Renaissance Tours prior to travel. For other countries, it is your responsibility to ensure you have the appropriate visa(s).

You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour.

TOUR PRICES

Prices quoted in our tour information are based on exchange rates, cost of services and applicable taxes at the time of publication. Prices may be subject to change in the event of significant currency fluctuations or the introduction of new taxes, up until final payment is received.

In the event of a price increase, whether because of a currency fluctuation, increase in taxes or a correction in advertised prices, we will advise you and you have the option of accepting the amended prices, inclusions and booking conditions or withdrawing from the tour and receiving a full refund of all monies paid.

Once final payment is received, all prices will be guaranteed and no surcharges will apply.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. Your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours.

FITNESS AND PARTICIPATION

Most of our tours require a MODERATE level of fitness.

However, in certain destinations (e.g. Silk Road, Central Asia, Outback Australia, tropical destinations) or in certain seasons (e.g. mid-winter, mid-summer) or because of the nature of travel (e.g. remote rail), certain tours will require an ABOVE AVERAGE or CHALLENGING level of fitness.

If you (or we) have any doubts about your level of fitness, you may be required to have a doctor's appraisal. This would require your doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour, including the fitness level, and provide you (and us) with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

MODERATE

For the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tour of 1–2 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark / disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

ABOVE AVERAGE

In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- undertake walking tours of 2–3 hours
- climb staircases of 100 or more steps

CHALLENGING

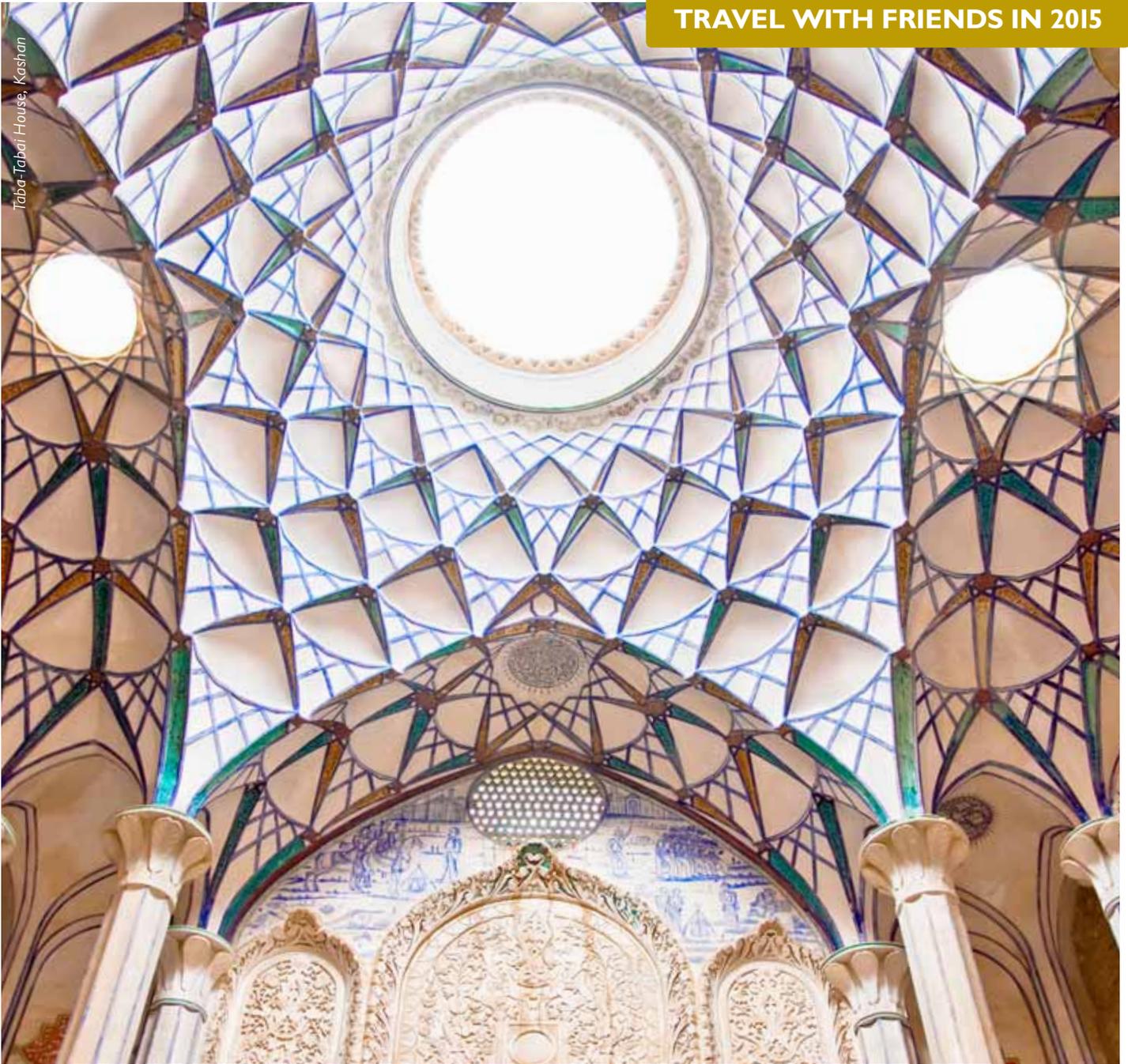
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- handle extremes of temperature (e.g. below 0 or above 35 degrees)
- handle extremes of altitudes (e.g. 4000 metres and above).

You can find the full terms & conditions at www.renaissance-tours.com.au/booking-conditions or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.



Tabq-Tabqai House, Kashan



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Your travel agent is