

Volume 32 No 2  
February 2011

# Travel digest

**IRAN** inspires  
dress designer  
Jane Daniels

**Crocodile  
done indeed  
CAIRNS**

**VANCOUVER**

Historic gardens

Balloons over  
**WAIKATO**

**CAMPING &  
Campervans**  
for the simple life

# Only in Iran

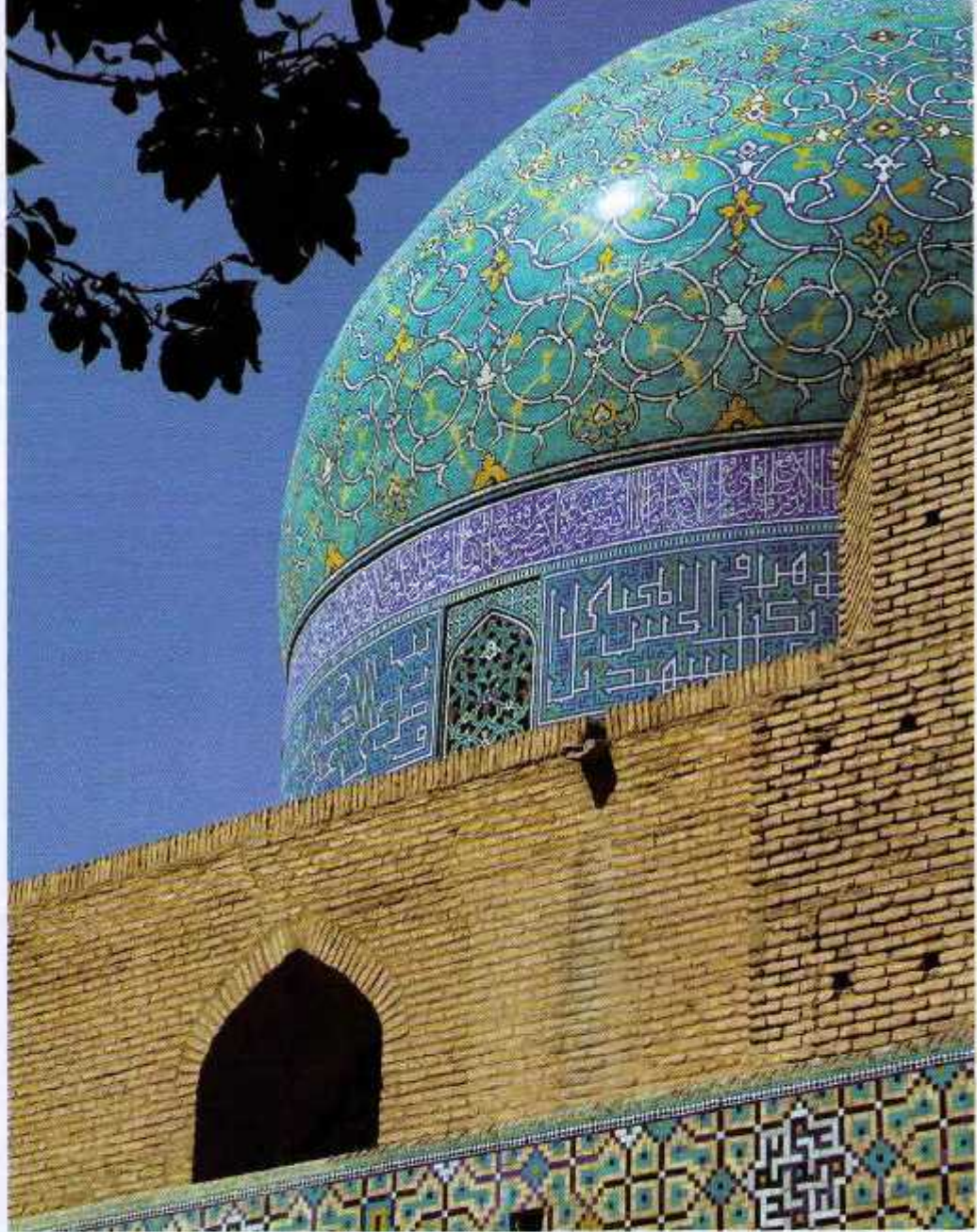
Innovative Travel brand ambassador **JANE DANIELS** is a fashion designer and inaugural member of the New Zealand Fashion Hall of Fame. Travelling to Iran, she says, provides inspiration for her fashion designs, a subject she often shares with groups of travel agents, their clients and her own fashion clients.

I have always dreamed of travelling to the ancient land of Persia, now the Islamic republic of Iran. My partner Brendon also showed an interest to return to the country where he had lived as a child with his family. His father was working for an American hospital supplies company and his mother taught herself the language and ensured five boys went to school.

Brendon remembers Iran as more Westernised in parts prior to the revolution in 1979. Travelling there now certainly offers a different and possibly more authentic experience.

My interest in travelling to Iran was to see the Esfahan's (Royal) Imam Square, the second largest square in the world, and to see the beautifully decorated buildings from the Safavid period (1600s – 1700s). Most of the splendid turquoise, yellow, and lapis blue tile work were created during this time under the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas 1st.

Having over time collected several books featuring examples of this architecture, I was not prepared for the beauty of seeing it set against desert



*Royal Mosque, Esfahan*

colours and offering such contrast.

Tehran, Iran's capital, also offers contrast. It is an essential stop on your tour with its well-appointed museums. Iran is blessed with beautiful ceramics, glassware, carpets and crafts. With such a long and rich history the museums are laden with treasure and apart from the throngs that queue to see the bling of the Pahlavi Crown Jewels the museums are peaceful and un-crowded.

Stepping outside, we found ourselves in a bustling city of 13 million beset by traffic where the car horn is the communication. A dual carriageway will almost always be divided into three lanes of traffic with the occasional motorbike going against the flow using the gap by the kerb to narrow the road further.

The 125cc motorbike, from probably around the 1980s is the most popular choice of transportation. Its utility is impressive carrying up to three students, workers with tools, delivery van with

impressive payloads carrying boxes, carpets, rolls of fabrics and it even becomes the family car for up to five.

The north of the city offers some relief in its relatively leafy suburbs and whilst in the area visiting the Shah's Summer Palace with its beautiful grounds under the towering Alborz Mountains, we took the opportunity to find Brendon's old home.

For our driver Ibrahim this was no easy task. Ibrahim was faced with all of the streets being renamed in respect of the martyrs from the Iran-Iraq war. As a result of this war, Iran also has a young demographic with 60 per cent of the population being under 25 years of age.

Ibrahim, whilst in his 30s was not old enough to remember the old street names in detail and did exceptionally well to find the place. The house number had changed from 51 to 80 with development, but was still there.

It is essential to travel with a guide in Iran. Our guide Ghasem was excellent and

was a war veteran (wounded four times). At a mature age he had returned to university to study English. A very devout man and one of great integrity, who we now consider a friend.

Meeting people in Iran is an experience. Iranians are very keen to practice their spoken English, are very friendly and curious about New Zealand and how they are viewed in the west. As a tourist we still presented as curiosities and this delightful experience happened many times a day.

The unconditional kindness of the Iranian people and their wonderful sense of family made a strong impression on both Brendon and I. Iran does not find itself in perfect times and the people generally conduct themselves well above any of their difficulties.

If we had not occasionally broken away from conversation or taken up every offer of a home-cooked meal, we would still be there.

## TOP FIVE THINGS TO DO

### 1 THE IMAM SQUARE, ESFAHAN

Spend the day in the magnificent Imam square. Surrounded by shops of the bazaar, headed by the Royal Mosque, the beautifully domed Lotfollah Mosque, Royal Palace, an ancient bazaar and its gate opposite. The scale is daunting, the shops are fascinating and the reflective pools and fountains in the middle allow endless photo opportunities.

### 2 VISIT THE WORKING BAZAARS

Here you will find craftsmen making things as they have done for centuries – carpets, silk, woodwork with delicate inlaid camel bone, metalwork called hammerwork in various metals and cooking pots. Each major town and city has a bazaar and each has a specialty.

### 3 A TRADITIONAL PERSIAN MEAL

Sitting on a bed like platform, shoes off, food is laid in the middle. My favourite dish was fesenjun, a lamb or chicken dish with a sweet and sour sauce of ground walnuts and pomegranate molasses. Persians are the masters of cooking long grain rice, it is cooked slowly, in a pot a base layer called tahdig of potato or vegetable which separates the rice from the heat source and allows the rice to

steam slowly with saffron. Bread or noon is an essential part of the Iranian meal, a favourite being noon Barbari, from the north of Iran.

### 4 THE GARDENED TOMBS OF THE POETS

The Iranians revere their philosopher poets, two of these Saadi and Hafez (13th and 14th C) have beautifully tiled memorials set in park like gardens in the desert city of Shiraz. Iranian families love to meet here socially, rest in the gardens and pay their respect. Expect to be accosted in to many conversations and shared family photographs when you visit.

### 5 VISITING NATANZ, CLIMBING THE MINARET.

I had seen several references to Natanz in my books of decorative arts and though this small hillside town is a bit off the path it was worth the visit to take in an old Jame Mosque covered with the best examples of authentic blue and turquoise tiles that we were able to see. Better was to come, the very friendly gatekeeper Hadi, was to offer us a climb up the 125 very steep and tight turning internal spiral steps of the minaret. The views were great and the peace and trust of sitting on top of the minaret with a kind stranger with no English, just shared photographs, smiles and the shared experience was truly memorable.



Jane Daniels at Silence Towers, Yazd

## RESTAURANTS

In Esfahan the opulent dining experience of the Shahrz and the Sofreh Khaneh Sonnati, can be found behind the Lotfollah Mosque, where you sit on traditional divani beds covered in Persian rugs.

The restaurant in the huge internal garden of the Abassi Hotel is another. The caravanserai hotel in the desert city of Yazd, Hotel Garden Moshir, has an ▶

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# IRAN

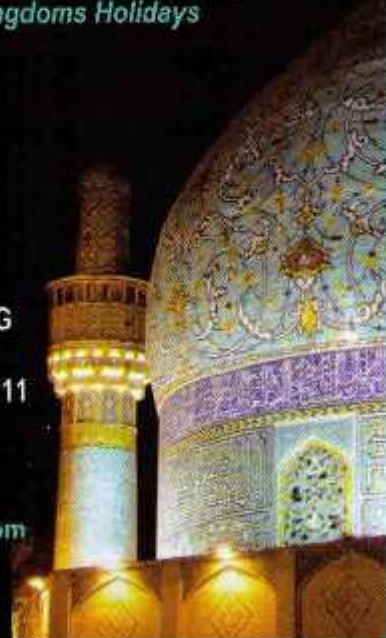
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internal garden with pools, fountains and orange and pomegranate trees. This is where we were absorbed into a 30-strong family reunion dinner and realised the true friendliness of the people.

For a traditional restaurant full of loud families and great food, I recommend the Talaryazd Restaurant in Republic St, Yazd.

The main difference about dining in Iran is that there is no alcohol served. Instead there is lemon beer, like Lemon and Paeroa, still water and tea.

On one occasion in Yazd we were invited to dine with a family reunion of 30. Circulating around the table during the course of the evening we felt truly we belonged.

## SHOPPING

The best shopping is surely in the bazaars. In Tehran the young Iranians love western brands and visiting the mall. For Westerners the prospect of buying the imitation of something that is readily available everywhere is not enticing.

The bazaars offer the prospect of purchasing goods not available elsewhere.

The Tehran Bazaar has over 10km of covered stores with people plying trades as they have for centuries. Many bazaars are ancient, selling almost everything you can think of.

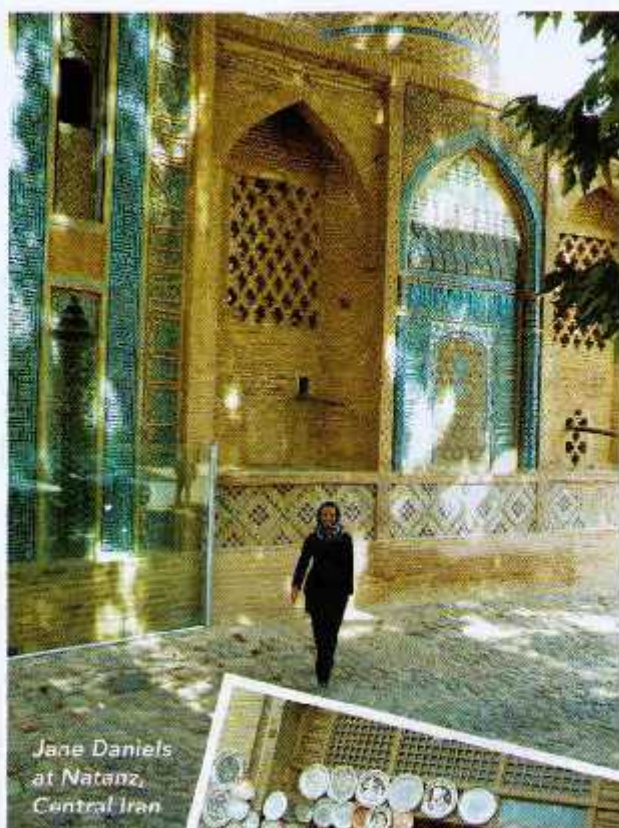
## PLACES OF NOTE

- The ruins of Persepolis, with its Apadana stairway, by car about an hour from Shiraz.
- Nashir el Molk Mosque with its stained glass that splash beautiful colours onto columns and carpets.
- Museums in Tehran; the carpet museum, the ceramics and glass museum, and for sheer bling the Bank Mellī display of the crown Jewels. We went to every museum we could go to.
- The Shah's Palaces of Tehran.
- Aabasi Hotel in Esfahan is at an old camel stop and a place that became rich as travellers to the area used to stop there. First built in the 17th century, it turned into a hotel in the 1800s and is now a five star hotel and when there at night visit the 33 arch bridge.
- The Moshir O Mamalek Hotel in Yazd also has 17th century beginnings and is now a very good three to four star hotel.
- The Arabian house in Yazd, filled with antiques and its massive tented dining area situated in a very old area of Yazd.

## INSPIRATION FOR FASHION DESIGN

In my fashion stores I hold workshops, talking about inspiration and a lot of this comes from trips to exotic places, especially the colours I use. Most of our fabrics are made in Italy to colour specifications from places I have visited. The colours this year for my winter collection will be Persian blue, henna, shirsz, gallano and indigo.

I will also be using a Persian rug design, particularly on belts and making use of scroll designs. All the fabrics for my collections are bought in February and September each year at the French Textile Fair just outside of Paris and this way I am able to present new trends in textile a season ahead.



Jane Daniels at Natanz, Central Iran



Coppersmith's bazaar

## NEED TO KNOW

- Iran has been under trade sanctions for quite a while and not all hotels will be modern, some hotels are very beautiful and unlike elsewhere.
- A man should not shake a woman's hand or make contact.
- A women must always wear hejab (covered hair)
- Good thick soled shoes are a good idea for walking and for some wet floors.
- You cannot buy anything on credit card, you have to take cash and preferably American dollars. You will also need some of the local currency, Iranian rials.
- Change money at a bank, the alternative change shops will devalue your money by about 40-60%
- Arms are covered down to your wrist and you cannot show your ankle. You do need to comply as there are moral police who are employed to enforce this. If you are going into a working mosque where people are praying, you will need to wear a chador [full length covering]. Men need to wear long sleeves.
- New Zealanders need a visa and so you need to make sure all your papers are in order, which is a fairly lengthy process. You need to have your itinerary set out.

They like to know what you are doing. I recommend Innovative do that for you, they have a strong relationship with an Iranian travel group and have experience in Iran.

- A private guide and driver are invaluable and not that expensive.

## BEST TIME TO GO

April and May or September and October are the best times to go. June, July and August, where the temperatures can get as high as 45 degrees, are too hot.

If you are not good at fasting, you might also want to avoid Ramadan. This is a month of fasting from 1 August, where you cannot eat after sun up or before sun down.

## GETTING THERE

There are flights from Auckland to Dubai with Emirates, Air NZ, Etihad, Cathay Pacific or Singapore Airlines and then a two-hour flight to Tehran with Emirates, Mahan Air, Gulf Air or Qatar. ➔