

Iran is a country in Central Eurasia and Western Asia. The name *Iran* has been in use natively since the Sassanian era and came into use internationally in 1935, before which the country was also known to the western world as *Persia*. Both *Persia* and *Iran* are used interchangeably in the cultural contexts; however, *Iran* is the name used officially in the political contexts.



Iran has a population of over 74 million. It is a country of particular geostrategic significance owing to its location in the Middle East and central Eurasia. Tehran is the capital, the country's largest city and the political, cultural, commercial and industrial center of the nation. Iran is a regional power, and holds an important position in international energy security and world economy as a result of its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations. Iran is a founding member of the UN, NAM, OIC and OPEC. The political system of Iran,

based on the 1979 constitution, comprises several intricately connected governing bodies. The highest state authority is the Supreme Leader. Shia Islam is the official religion and Persian is the official language.

Geography and climate

Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world, with an area of 1,648,000 km² (636,000 sq mi). Its area roughly equal to that of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany combined, or somewhat more than the US state of Alaska. Its borders are with Azerbaijan and Armenia to the north-west; the Caspian Sea to the north; Turkmenistan to the north-east; Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east; Turkey and Iraq to



the west; and finally the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea to the south.

Iran consists of the Iranian Plateau with the exception of the coasts of the Caspian Sea and Khuzestan. It is one of the world's most mountainous countries, its landscape dominated by rugged mountain ranges that separate various basins or plateaux from one another. The populous western part is the most mountainous, with ranges such as the Caucasus, Zagros and Alborz Mountains; the last contains Iran's highest point, Mount Damavand at 5,610 m (18,406 ft), which is not only the country's highest peak but also the highest mountain on the Eurasian landmass west of the Hindu Kush.

The northern part of Iran is covered by dense rain forests called Shomal or the Jungles of Iran. The eastern part consists mostly of desert basins such as the Dasht-e Kavir, Iran's largest desert, in the north-central portion of the country, and the Dasht-e Lut, in the east, as well as some salt lakes. This is because the mountain ranges are too high for rain clouds to reach these regions. The only large plains are found along the coast of the Caspian Sea and at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, where Iran borders the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab (or the Arvand Rūd) river. Smaller, discontinuous plains are found along the remaining coast of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman.

Iran's climate ranges from arid or semiarid, to subtropical along the Caspian coast and the northern forests. On the northern edge of the country (the Caspian coastal plain) temperatures rarely fall below freezing and the area remains humid for the rest of the year. Summer temperatures rarely exceed 29 °C (84.2 °F). Annual precipitation is 680 mm (26.8 in) in the eastern part of the plain and more than 1,700 mm (66.9 in) in the western part.

To the west, settlements in the Zagros basin experience lower temperatures, severe winters with below zero average daily temperatures and heavy snowfall. The eastern and central basins are arid, with less than 200 mm (7.9 in) of rain, and have occasional deserts. Average summer temperatures exceed 38 °C (100.4 °F). The coastal plains of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea in southern Iran have mild winters, and very humid and hot summers. The annual precipitation ranges from 135 to 355 mm (5.3 to 14.0 in).



Iranian music

The musical culture of Persia, while distinct, is closely related to other musical systems of the Middle East and Central Asia. It has also affinities to the music cultures of the Indian subcontinent, to a certain degree even to those of Africa, and, in the period after 1800 particularly, to that of Europe. Its history can be traced to some extent through these relationships. Like that of most of the world's cultures, the music of Persia has depended on oral/aural transmission and learning.

Art and architecture

Iran is home to the richest artistic traditions in world history and encompasses many disciplines, including architecture, painting, weaving, pottery, calligraphy, metalworking and stone masonry. Carpet-weaving is one of the most distinguished manifestations of Persian culture and art, and dates back to ancient Persia. Persians were among the first to use mathematics, geometry, and astronomy in architecture and also have extraordinary skills in making massive domes which can be seen frequently in the structure of bazaars and mosques. The main building types of classical Iranian architecture are the mosque and the palace. Iran, besides being home to a large number of art houses and galleries, also holds one of the largest and valuable jewel collections in the world.



Iran ranks seventh among countries in the world with the most archeological architectural ruins and attractions from antiquity as recognized by UNESCO. Fifteen of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites are creations of Iranian architecture.