

UNDER WESTERN EYES



Lucinate is a British tourist who entered Iran (along with a tourist group) from Turkey. After visiting Tabriz and Zanjan, she set off for Qazvin. The following is her travel account in Qazvin and the next cities. (Story of her stay in Tabriz and Zanjan and her acquaintance with Mona were published in the previous issues).

Incredible hospitality

By Lucinate
(Part 1)

We visited Mona's family's farm where they had a little wolf pup and some other puppies. Mona told us that during the winter people had been killed by the wild wolves that come down near the villages in search of food!!!

I was thankful it was summer. We walked round, picked apples and walnuts, and then drove back. We were still full from lunch but sat down to dinner with all of them.

The mother and sister could eat now because the sun had gone down and ate like they'd never had food before!! After dinner, we rolled back into the lounge and talked for hours about different things.

Politics, religion, families and other things. They were intrigued that we were not religious but respected our decisions.

Her mother was a teacher of philosophy and taught at the local high school and her father was a sales manager for exporting goods at their extended family's business.

Mona ended up nearly losing her voice because she had to translate so much!! It was such a shame that her mother and father couldn't speak English as they were really interesting people.

They had participated in the protests against the Shah and tried to explain why they liked the Ayatollah. We eventually retired, way after midnight.

So now, I found out where they slept. On the floor on, light cotton mattresses that they fold away during the day.

Up early the next morning for a breakfast of cheese, jam, bread, milk, and tea. We chatted some more and were trying to work out how David and I would get to Qazvin when they decided they would go and visit their grandmother and cousins just outside of Qazvin and would drive us there!

We couldn't believe how much trouble they were going to for us! They dropped us right at the door of the hotel and made sure we got the right room.

We waved our adopted Iranian family goodbye and prepared to hit Qazvin.

Waving goodbye to our Iranian family friends we dumped the bags and went to see what this town was all about. There are some mosques, shrines, old town gates a palace and of course, the bazaar.

We went to see the Jameh Mosque, which every city has. They are tiled and usually quite large and impressive.

I liked the Nabi Mosque. It had a lovely courtyard with big trees. Quite tranquil and an escape from the raging traffic!! We found one gate, the Tehran Gate.

We took some photos of the tiles adorning the walls and went to find some shrines. The insides are usually covered with little mirror shapes in designs that cut your reflection into tiny pieces.

There was a more unusual one that we saw as well. It was the 14th century mausoleum of the Qazvin historian Hamdollah Mustawfi (1281-1350 A.D.) that was more of a large turret shape and was set amongst some roman road ruins.

Bit different and in the middle of a square surrounded by the walls of houses. We eventually found the Rah Kushk Gate with lots of tiles on too. People were lazing around in the shade on the grass watching a group of boys play football using the gate as a goal post.

I needed to buy another top of some sort to wear, as my only suitable manteau was getting really dirty from my backpack and of course wasn't smelling the best!!

We took a wander round and round the bazaar looking at the hundreds of dark and boring manteaus hanging all over the place.

We found a sort of acceptable colored one but the price was outrageous so we moved on. I then thought, stuff it, I'll just get a boring black one and it won't show the dirt.

So we tried to find a cotton one that was a bit easier on the eye. I tried a couple on but David's patience was wearing thin. I couldn't bring myself to buy any. They look awful on me, so we decided to leave it and I'd just have to wash this one more frequently (like every night)!

There was the alternative of David's very large shirt that he had in his bag, but only as a last resort.

We dreaded searching for a place to eat dinner as the food here isn't the most inspiring. The place we had decided on was shut so we had to make do with the available one.

(To be Contd.)

Vank cathedral, grand and glorious in the heart of Iran



The interior of the church which is richly decorated with wall painting and tilework.

Compiled by our staff writers

Vank Cathedral (also known as Holy Savior Cathedral and the Church of the Sainly Sisters) is located in Isfahan province. Many tourists visit the complex every year.

The Vank Cathedral was one of the first churches to be established in Isfahan (in Jolfa district) by Armenian immigrants settled by Shah Abbas I after the Ottoman War of 1603-05 A.D.

Among the churches built in the Jolfa District, the magnificent and architecturally significant Vank Cathedral is the most famous.

An exemplary specimen of Armenian architectural achievement, the cathedral represents different stages of political, economic, and social status of this minority community in Iran since the mid-seventeenth century.

The varying fortunes of Jolfa (a suburban district across the Zayandeh River) and its eclectic mix of European missionaries, mercenaries, and travelers can be traced almost chronologically in the cathedral's combination of building styles and contrasts in its external and internal architectural design.

Construction

Construction began in 1606, and completed with major alterations to design between 1655 and 1664 under the supervision of Archbishop David. The cathedral consists of a domed sanctuary,

Abyaneh, magnificent village preserving long-standing traditions

Compiled by our staff writers

Abyaneh Village is one of the most attractive to visit in Iran. Abyaneh is a beautiful historic village at the foot of Karkass Mountain. This red village is a famous Iranian village near the city of Kashan in Isfahan Province and is considered as an entrance to Iranian history.

Along the road to Natanz, south of Kashan lies a good gravel road to the west, before the Hinjan Bridge, where a sign indicates Abyaneh and the magnificent Barzrud valley. Some 25 km along this road, passing Hinjan village, lies Abyaneh at the bottom of a gorge dominated by a small fort.

With a unique reddish hue, the village is one of the oldest in Iran, attracting numerous native and foreign tourists year-round, especially during traditional feasts and ceremonies.

This village is one of the well known in Isfahan province, the architectural facet in this village along with the rituals and apparel of its inhabitants is a sight to witness.

This is a village of living traditions, architectural styles (all in red clay), and probably the most interesting example of human adaptation to nature, wherein one can transcend the boundaries of time and space and experience the ancient civilization and culture of Iran.

The village is compact, with narrow and sloped lanes, and houses located on the slope as if placed on a stairway. Here, the roofs of some houses are used to serve as the courtyard for other houses higher up on the slope.

The language spoken by the literate people of Abyaneh is Parthian Pahlavi. They are deeply committed to honoring

much like a Persian mosque, but with the significant addition of a semi-octagonal apse and raised chancel usually seen in western churches.

The cathedral's exteriors are in relatively modern brickwork and are exceptionally plain compared to its elaborately ornamented interior.

Ornamentation

The interior of the church is elaborately decorated with wall paintings, tilework, and tableaus depicting the life of Jesus Christ.

The inside is covered with fine paintings and gilded carvings and includes a wainscot of rich tilework. The delicately blue and gold painted central dome depicts the Biblical story of creation of the world and man's expulsion from Eden.

Pendentives throughout the church are painted with a distinctly Armenian motif of a cherub's head surrounded by folded wings. The ceiling above the entrance is painted with delicate floral motifs in the style of Persian miniature.

Two sections, or bands, of murals run around the interior walls; the top section depicts events from the life of Jesus, while the bottom section depicts tortures inflicted upon Armenian martyrs by the Ottoman Empire.

The courtyard contains a large free-standing belfry towering over the graves of both Orthodox and Protestant Chris-

tians. A tilework plaque inscribed in Armenian can be seen by the entrance to the cathedral; graves are also placed along the exterior wall before the entrance, with inscriptions in Armenian.

In one corner of the courtyard is a raised area with a memorial to the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

The cathedral also houses a rather small but unique museum, a historic printing press, and a large library invaluable for research in Armenian and medieval European languages and arts.

The building that houses the library and museum is located across the courtyard and faces the cathedral; outside of this building are several carved stones showing scenes from the Bible.

The museum, adding to the significance of the site displays historical objects, manuscripts, and documents related to Armenian history. The oldest book printed in Isfahan and some edicts of Iranian kings dating back to the time of Shah Abbas I are among the exhibits.

Library

The library contains over 700 handwritten books and many invaluable and unique resources for research in Armenian and medieval European languages and arts. The museum displays numerous artifacts from the history of the cathedral and the Armenian community in Isfahan.

The old houses

There are a good number of old houses in Abyaneh, among them the homes of Gholam Nader Shah and Nayeb Hosein Kashi. In addition to the Zoroastrian fire-temple (from the Sassanid era) in the village, there are three castles, a pilgrimage site, and three mosques named Hajatgah, Porzaleh, and Jame, all worth a careful visit. Altogether, there are eight mosques in the village.

Porzaleh mosque

The mosque was built during the Ilkhanid reign in the oldest part of the village. It has a very vast nocturnal prayer hall. The ornamentations used here look very much like those of the tomb of Bayazid of Bastam, the great Persian mystic

The Jame mosque of Abyaneh

It dates back to the eleventh century. There are a number of inscriptions and a "manbar" (pulpit) in the mosque. The interesting thing is that the pulpit has many features similar to the architectural elements and column heads seen in Persepolis

Other mosques

About 300 m from the Atashkadeh (fire-temple), on the same lane, is an interesting mosque with a probably Safavid entrance and corridor, and next to it, below the present building, another mosque believed to be pre-Seljuk with an exceptionally beautiful and unusual carved wooden "mihrab" (alter) protected by a sheet of glass.

Archaeological excavations

Since June 2005, the village has been undergoing archaeological excavations for the first time ever, as a result of an agreement between Abyaneh Research Center and the Archaeology Research Center of the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization.



CELEBRITY

Nikkhah Bahrami, invaluable Iranian basketball player

By Khashayar Parvaneh and Mohammad Amin Mokarrami

Mohammad Samad Nikkhah Bahrami (born 1983 in Tehran) is an Iranian professional basketball player. He currently plays for Mahram in Iranian Basketball Super League as well as with the Iranian national basketball team, as a forward.

He went in for basketball when he was only nine. Bowling Abdu Club was the first place in which he got familiar with basketball.



In 26, he has gained all honors attainable by a basketball player in Iran. Highly successful captain of Iran national team is really a phenomenon in Iran basketball.

In the team, he dictates his leadership and is the source of inspiration. He is a good rebounder and a consistent and reliable scorer.

He enjoys high physical endurance, high intelligence, and matchless technique. These features make him unrivaled and irreplaceable in position 3.

He has been a member of national team as of 2001 and has attained many achievements with this team.

He has a firm belief in Mostafa Hashemi (Mahram coach) and he has gone along with him to every team that he serves as the coach.

His squad number is always 14, since he is interested in this number. He has been in many clubs and has achieved a lot; he was the first Iranian who joined French professional basketball league.

On August 22, 2008, Nikkhah signed a one-year contract with French Cholet Basket for an undisclosed fee. He left Cholet on September 30 by mutual consent due to administrative problems.

On October 21, 2008, he inked another one-year contract with another French team, Elan Bearnais Pau-Orthez.

The bitterest memory for him and for Iran basketball community was his brother unexpected death (Aidin who was also a member of national team) in a tragic car accident.

His physique makes him suitable as a guard; however, he has to fill in as the forward in the national team due to the death of his brother.

His best memory happened when he along with his teammates grabbed the Asian basketball title for the first time for Iran. He and his teammates are now ready to repeat this honor for Iran in 2009 Asian championship. Iran national team has reached the semi-final and Samad is among the candidates for the title of Best Player of the Year.

Awards and honors

National team

Asian Championship
Gold medal, 2007
Asian Games
Bronze medal, 2006

Club

Asian Championship Gold medal, 2007, 2008, with Saba Battery
Asian Championship Gold medal, 2009, with Mahram
Iranian Basketball Super League Champions, 2003, 2005, with Sanam, 2008, 2009, with Mahram