

Transportation in Iran



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Most visitors are pleasantly surprised by the transport system in Iran. Once you accept that the driving is... erm... more imaginative than what you're used to at home, you'll appreciate that services on most forms of public transport are frequent, fairly punctual and very cheap. For planes and trains it's worth booking ahead if you're travelling on a weekend or any public holiday, especially NoRuz, Ramazan and Eid al-Fitr. At No Ruz bus fares usually rise by about 20%.

Bus

In Iran, if you can't get somewhere by bus (or minibus), the chances are no-one wants to go there. More than 20 taavonis (bus companies) offer hundreds of services all over the country, so business is highly competitive, fares cheap and, on busier routes, departures are frequent. Most buses are comfortable, with your own cushioned seat and, except on very short trips, standing is not allowed. Fares don't vary much between companies, but they do vary between classes of bus.

Don't be confused by the names of the destinations on a bus. It's common for a bus travelling between, for example, Khorramabad and Ahvaz, to have 'Tehran-Istanbul' written on the front or side in English. Similarly, phrases like 'Lovely bus' are not always a fair reflection of reality. There are no bus passes.

The cost of bus tickets is very low in Iran. For example, the purchase price of the best V.I.P bus ticket from Tehran to Isfahan is about 6USD. The same way with normal bus is about 4USD

Most Iranian towns and cities have local bus services. Because local buses are often crowded and can be difficult to use unless you know exactly where you're going, most travellers use the ubiquitous shared and private taxis instead.

Bus numbers and destinations are usually only marked in Farsi, so you need to do a lot of asking around – most people will be happy to help (even if you don't entirely understand their reply). Except in Shiraz and on one new private operator in Tehran, tickets must be bought at little booths along main streets, or at local bus terminals, before you get on the bus. Tickets on state-run buses cost between IR100 and IR500. Private companies cost a bit more.

Small children of both genders and all women have to sit at the back of the bus. This segregation can be complicated if you are travelling as a mixed couple and need to discuss when to get off. You must give your ticket to the driver either before you get on or after you get off, depending on the local system. Women must pass their tickets to the driver while leaning through the front door of the bus and then board the bus using the back door.

Local
Metro

transport

Metros are the great hope for Iranian cities slowly being strangled by traffic. The Tehran Metro is growing and

similar systems are being built in Mashhad, Shiraz and Esfahan; the first two of which should, Insha'Allah (god willing), be operational for some time to come.

Minibus

If you think using local buses is a hassle, don't even bother trying to use the infrequent and desperately crowded minibuses. Quite often they are so crammed with passengers that you can't see out to tell where you're going. You normally pay in cash when you get on – about IR1000 a ticket depending on the distance. Men and women get a seat anywhere they can; there is no room for segregation. Minibuses stop at normal bus stops or wherever you ask them.

Air

The days of US\$5 flights from Tehran to Esfahan are gone, but domestic air fares in Iran are still cheap; Airlines in Iran

Iran Air is the largest among a growing roster of domestic airlines and boasts an extensive network of flights, covering most provincial capitals. Domestic prices are set by the government, so it doesn't matter which airline you fly the price will be the same.

Of the others, Iran Aseman and Mahan Air fly the most routes, while Caspian Airlines, Kish Air and Taban Air have fewer. Generally speaking, Iran Air is the most reliable, but whichever airline you choose you stand a good chance of being delayed. On this trip all three domestic flights we took were delayed by more than an hour. Despite this, it's worth trying to get to the airport a good hour ahead of domestic departures (just in case it leaves on time).

Except for Iran Air, which has unnecessarily large offices across the country, airline offices can be hard to find. It's much easier to visit one of Iran's thousands of travel agencies, which can book you onto any airline. When making a booking, check the aircraft type and avoid, wherever possible, the clunking old Tupolevs still struggling through Iran's skies.

Booking domestic flights from outside Iran can be difficult in some places and nigh-on impossible if the flight is on a smaller airline. None of the airlines yet do online bookings. However, some readers report it's possible to book domestic flights by calling an Iran Air office outside Iran. They give you a booking reference which you take to an Iran Air office in Iran or to Tehran domestic terminal... You pay for it then.

Bicycle

Excellent roads, friendly people and a relatively small risk of theft mean Iran sounds like an ideal cycling destination. And indeed, there are usually one or two travellers pedalling across the country and reporting a fantastic experience full of selfless hospitality. It's not, however, all easy. Vast distances, dodgy traffic and hot, tedious stretches of desert road – not to mention seasonal winds – can get tiring. You'll need to carry plenty of water and food to last the long desert stretches, camping equipment if you are not sticking to major towns, a decent map, and a phrasebook.

If you arrive in a village or small town and find either nowhere to stay or only a hotel you can't afford – and if you can't persuade the caretaker at the local mosque to take you in – you might have to load your bike on a bus or truck and head for the next big town.

The biggest drawback with cycling, as with most other activities in Iran, is the need to stay covered up. We have received varying reports from travellers: some say that it's fine to wear cycling gear when actually on the road, as long as you have clothes at hand to cover up as soon as you stop; others say that women in particular must be covered at all times.

Spare parts can be hard to find and there is nowhere to rent bicycles for long distances, so bring your own.

Train

Iranian trains offer safe and comfortable connections to almost every major destination in the country. Since 1996 the service is organized and supervised by RAJA, a subsidiary company of the national railways RAI. Most long distance trains are operated by private companies which offer different standard from average to highest. A state-of-the-art highspeed train service connects to several destinations. Local trains used to be the domain of second hand European rolling stock but are replaced step by step with new and comfortable trainsets of domestic production.

Source:

irangazette.com