Tourism opportunities and challenges in Iran

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Compte-rendu

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YADANPANAH Hojat is the dean of the geographic and tourism department of Isfahan University of Iran.

Founded in 1946, the University offers training courses in more than 70 fields, divided within 13 faculties. It is one of the biggest campuses of Iran, one of the best universities of Iran and it hosts 15 000 students of whom 2% are foreigners students.

The university offers a master degree course in « Geography and Tourism planning » since 2010. Focusing on tourism planning and management, the program takes a broad view of tourism planning and management, exploring issues and problems relevant to a wide range of situations and issues that managers and other professionals are likely to face.

Presentation of Iran

Named as Persia until 1935, the country is now called the Islamic Republic of Iran or shortly Iran. Tehran is the capital city and the official language is the farsi.

Part of the Middle-East, it has a superficy of 1 648 square meters and a territory populated by more than 79 millions inhabitants (2017 est.). The population is mainly composed of Shia’s Muslim - about 89% -, followed by Sunni Muslim - about 9% - and 2% of various religious minorities such as Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Baha’i.
The government in Iran relies heavily on hydrocarbons resources with 18% of the world’s total in gas and 11.4% of the global reserves in oil. First source of revenue of the country, it is also accompanied by many growing industry such as petrochemicals, car manufacturing, telecom, energy construction and food, etc.

The tourism industry is also growing with more than 6 million visitors in 2017. More accessible than before, Iran is now connected to the world with many large airlines companies and the visa requirements are now relaxed. There is three way to get a visa, by Iranian universities invitation for foreign university professors, through Iran’s e-VISA website and on arrival, in Iran. The number of tourists is expected to rise offering further investment opportunities.

**Why visit Iran ? The touristic assets**

1. **An imperial legacy**

People of Zoroaster, an ancient Iranian prophet, Iran descends from the Achaemenian Empires which once ruled a large part of the Middle-East from its capital Persepolis. Nowadays you can still admire monuments like the Gate of All Nations, Statue of Xerxes the Great, ruins of Persepolis and even the first Human Rights document ever made by Cyrus the Great Persia.

Iranian provided the world with well known inventions beginning with the Bank system, invented under the Sassanid Empire, and the letters of credit known as Sakks, ancient cheque, but also great inventors like Rhazes, inventor of sulfuric acid and alcohol, Khwarizmi, inventor of algorithm, or even Avicennia, known author in medical text fixing the standard in European universities for centuries.

2. **A natural wealth**

With the amazing variety of its natural scenery, tourists can experience 4 seasons at the same time with deserts with only 30 days without sun per year, you can experience summer through the year, moutains with Mount Damavand and its altitude of 5 610 meter, snowy areas are there to ski and large green areas, the natural assets of the country are truly touristic assets.
3. Culture
   
a. Local production
Iran is reputed for three of his local production: caviar, pistachios and saffron. It is the first producing country in the world for pistachios and saffron with respectively 478 600 and 80 tons. It is also one of the major producing country of caviar in the world.

b. The persian new year
Inhabitants follow the persian calendar (solar-hejri calendar). It is a solar calendar which is more precise than the gregorian calendar. The New Year is celebrated every 21st of march and is called Nowruz. The celebration is about two weeks with performances (fireworks, dance and jumping over fire).

![Figure 2 - Persian New Year, Fire Jumping Festival - Johnny Funcheap](image)

Figure 2 - Persian New Year, Fire Jumping Festival - Johnny Funcheap

   
c. Iranian artistic production
Iran has a rich heritage of arts including many traditional techniques in architecture, painting, literature, music, pottery and calligraphy between others. Modern Iran’s art is very developed.

It is also producing famous and award-winning film like *The salesman* or *A separation* and iranian movies have been nominated several times for prizes.
As of 2018, twenty-three sites in Iran are included (the three first Iranian sites were included in 1979). Among them, we can find famous places like Golestan palace in Tehran, Persepolis or the Persan Qanat inscribed as cultural properties and Lut Desert as a natural property.

4. Touristic sites

a. Across the country …

Iran has several iconic places to present to the world like historical heritage as Kandovan, a man made village, or the underground city of Kariz.

It is also known for the salt lake of Urmia, a natural gem showing amazing scenery, or even Qeshm Island and its amazing salty caves.

Therefore tourism in Iran isn't just about cities or Tehran, it is the whole country that has places to discover.
b. Tehran

Tehran is the capital of Iran and has a population of approximately 10 million in 2016. Tehran is home to many historical collections, including the royal complexes of Golestan, Sa'dabad, and Niavaran. It’s the economic center of Iran, an important educational center (many universities, monuments, theaters) and one of the main touristic destinations with many cultural attractions (various museums and exhibitions). Tehran is also a city of hobbies (sport, restaurants, cafes, graffiti).

Touristic opportunities and challenges

The desert of Iran is one of the potential tourism attraction of Iran.

One of the main particularity of Iran desert is that it is warmer than other areas of the desert world. Consequently, it hosts the only place in the world that is deprived of life in the desert of lut. No animal, plant life nor even a bacteria has been seen in this area. It is called the earth thermal pole located in the shahdad Kerman desert. According to the Nasa Satellite, the temperature of the desert reached 70.5°C in 2005.

Nebka, Peikara and Klute are three peculiar geologic forms that can be encountered in the Iran desert. The first one emerges when dense sand particles pass from near the vegetation. Substantial size surrounds the vegetation and then, Nebka is formed. The length of some Nebkas in the Lut desert are 10 m and their environment are 40 meters. Peikara is a desert landscape made of mowing and crescent hills depending of the wind direction.

Last but not least, the Klute landscape that is one of the most amazing geomorphological structures in the Lut desert. The Klutes are the tallest sandy pyramids in the world. They can reach 480 meters. According to Chelvarforosh and Yazdi research workers the klutes region are the result of water and soil erosion. They are compared to the ruins of a great urban site. Thus they are called “the fantasy city” of Klute.
Moreover, tourists and visitors of the Lut desert, can benefit from the lack of air pollution which offers one of the best panorama for the observation of stars at night or they can take advantage from the sand dunes to practice safari sensational tour.

![Figure 7 - Klute Landscape - TripAdvisor](https://example.com/image)

These natural landscapes that represent a touristic asset for Iran tourism make Iran a potential destination of geotourism in the world. This is why, in 2016, Damadi and Ebrahimi researchers wrote that Iran “has an excellent opportunity for planning a sustainable development of the geotourism industry, along with social and economic benefits.”

Despite of all these solid assets of Iran, it is still hard to promote Iran as a touristic destination because of several factors.

Iran suffers from a negative image – about a country in war and its insecurity - by the media all over the world. Therefore there is a work to do to counter it, to show a better image of Iran and promote its true value and its true assets.

Moreover Iran deals with a negative image in regards of ladies’ dress code. Sure, there is a dress code but it is not as strict as some people may think, women don’t have to cover fully themselves.
With those two examples, we can see that one of the main challenges of Iran is to fight against misconceptions and the lack of informations of foreign countries, foreign people.

And then, there is a few things like not being able to use credit card, consequently, tourists need to foresee the amount of their consumptions and carry money with them. Lucky for them, Iran is one of the cheapest country in the world, you can easily have a meal for 2 to 3 euros. The saturation of the car traffic in Tehran or the lack of alcohol commercialization due to a governmental ban are things to be aware of, but nothing repulsive.

Finally, like most countries in the world, Iran is facing issues with the global warming and the water crises especially drought issues.

To conclude Iran has a lot of tourism potential through its traditions, gastronomy, history, cultural and iconic sites and its natural sceneries. People need to go beyond their misconceptions of the country and get informations by themselves and learning more the country, the real one.