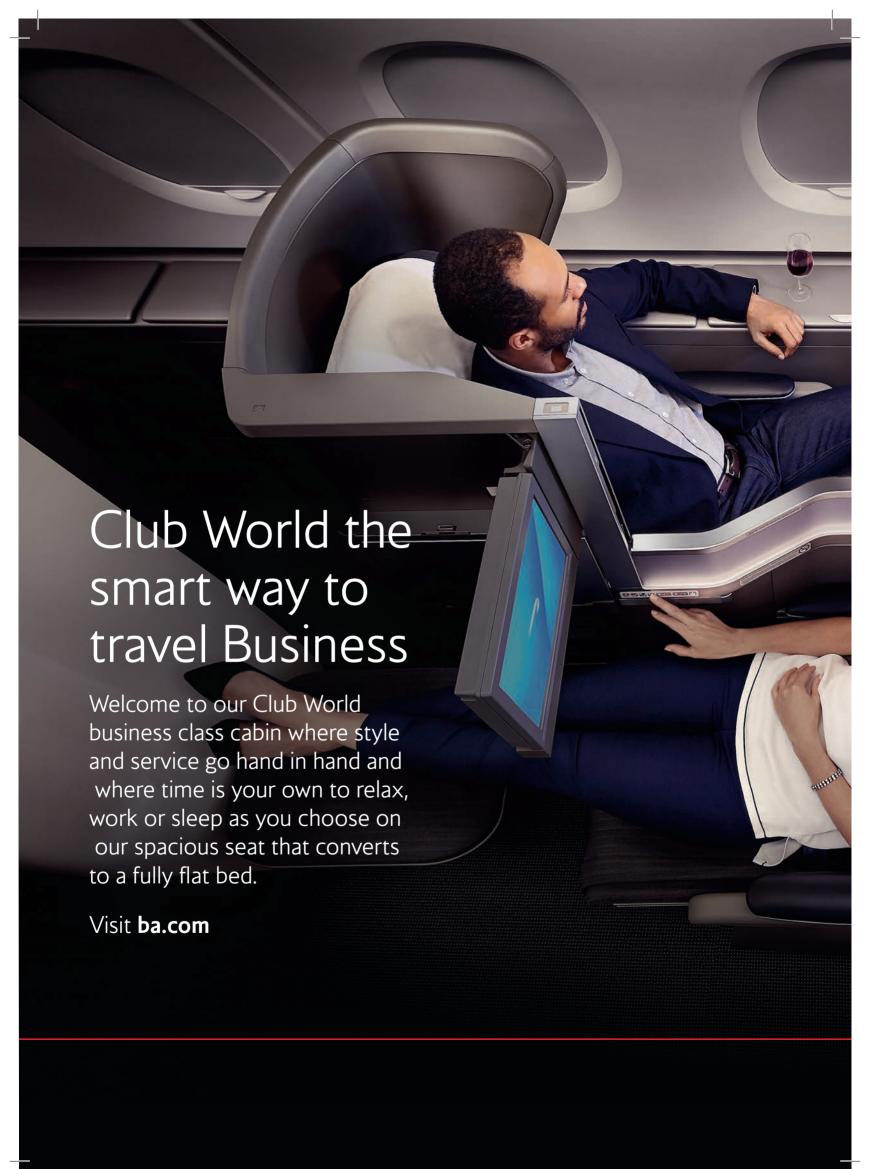
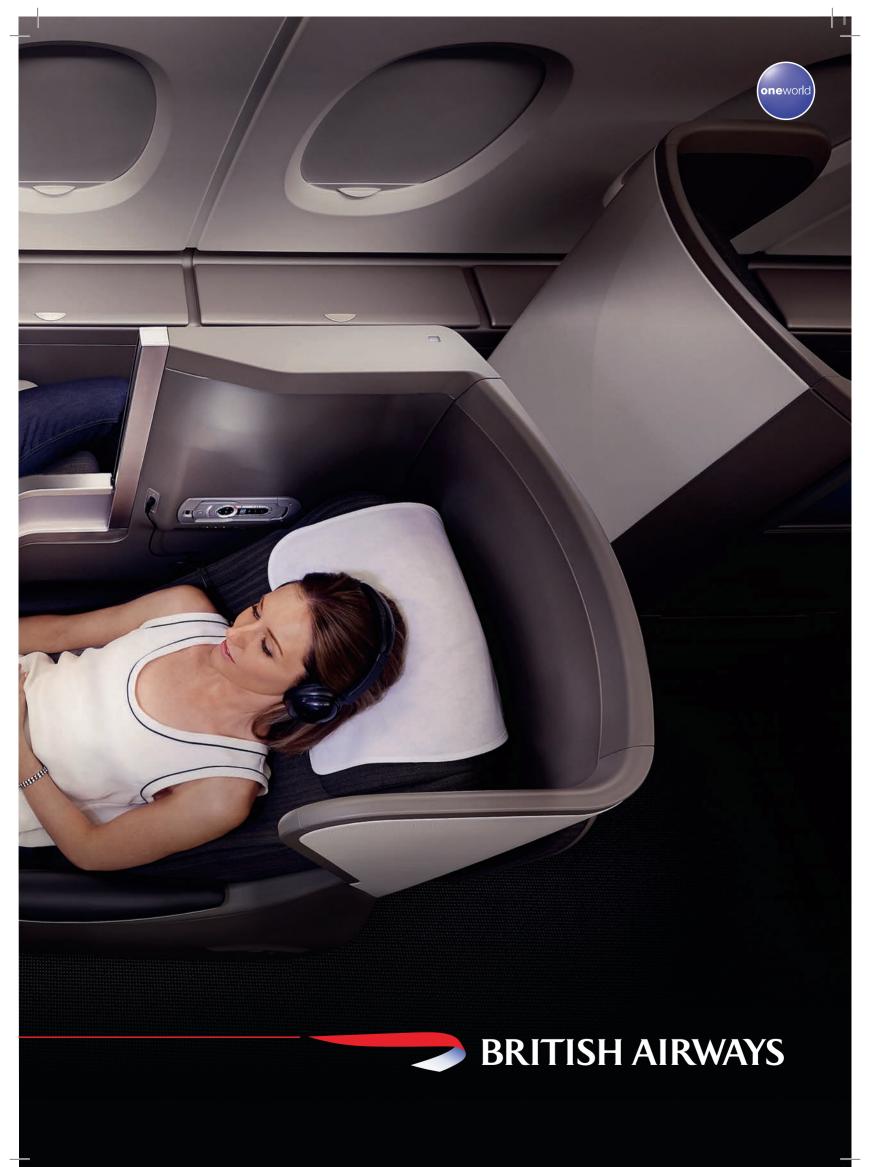
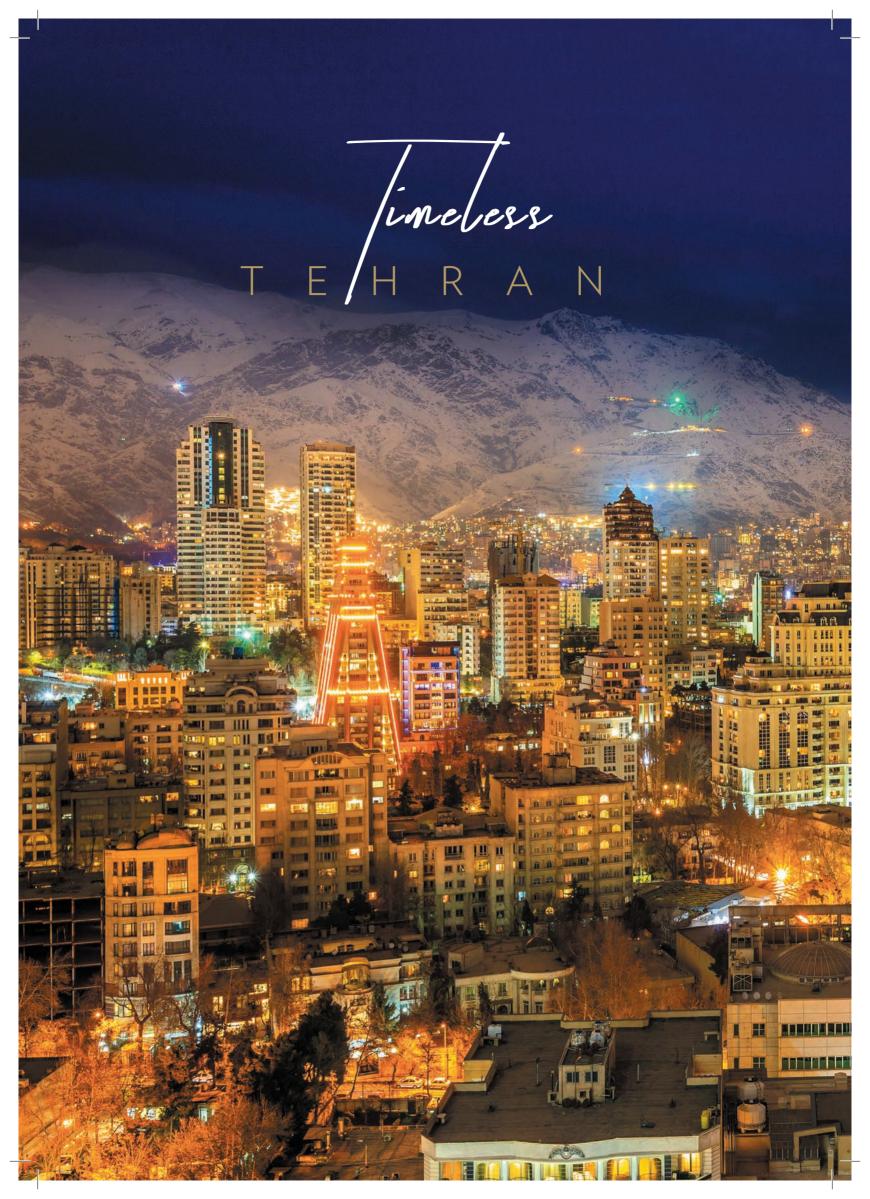
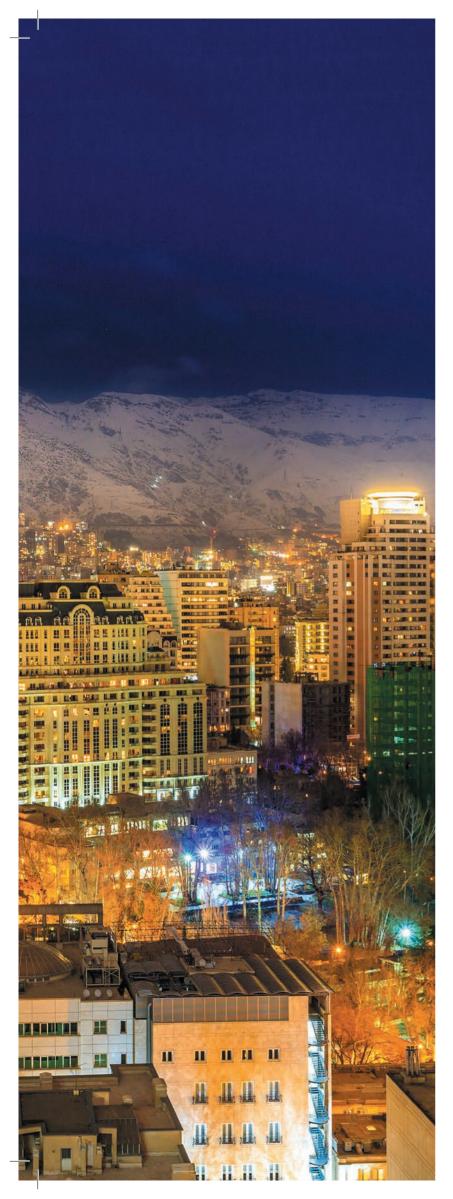


THE **CLASSIC** TRAVELLER









DANIELLE AND PHIL HARTE



understatement.

anielle and I were privileged to be invited to visit Tehran in February of this year and to say that our trip was life-changing would be a gross

As it was our first trip to Iran, we were completely unprepared for what was to unfold. We arrived on board one of the first British Airways flights to Tehran, with the flight attendants as excited as we were—for many, this was also their first visit to Iran.

From the time we touched down and throughout the next five days, we were showered with Iranian hospitality and incredible cultural experiences. What's more, we had arguably the most remarkable culinary journey of this year's travels.

It has been well documented that the tourism market to Iran is bursting at the seams. Perhaps surprisingly, I now find myself positioning Iran at the top of everyone's bucket list. I must say I am saddened to read the unwarranted negative press, but I only hope that common sense and the savvy traveller will see beyond the rhetoric.

Tehran is the stepping-stone to a country that will thrill and amaze you. This population of 88 million strong is eager to impress you with its culture, history, and hospitality.

There is no doubt business relations and longterm partnerships will fast track as the economy continues to evolve and integrate with its new commercial allies.

FIVE YEARS AGO. I WAS WATCHING BEN AFFLECK'S 2012 THRILLER ARGO ON A BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT FROM LONDON TO SINGAPORE. THE OPENING SCENE SHOWED A BA 747 PREPARING TO TOUCH DOWN IN TEHRAN'S IMAM KHOMEINI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

WORDS BY : PHIL HARTE

ast forward to 2017, and I found myself on one of the first British Airways flights to return to Tehran. I would soon begin my time in one of the most misunderstood countries in the world. Having travelled to Iran, I was astonished by some of the uninformed impressions of that country that I encountered upon my return home.

As in most nations of the Middle East, Islam plays a major role in daily Iranian life. As such, it is important that visitors abide by Iranian culture and laws—a universal sign of respect that is expected of all tourists, regardless of destination.

As with all foreign tourists, upon arrival, my wife Danielle and I were whisked off to activate our visas.

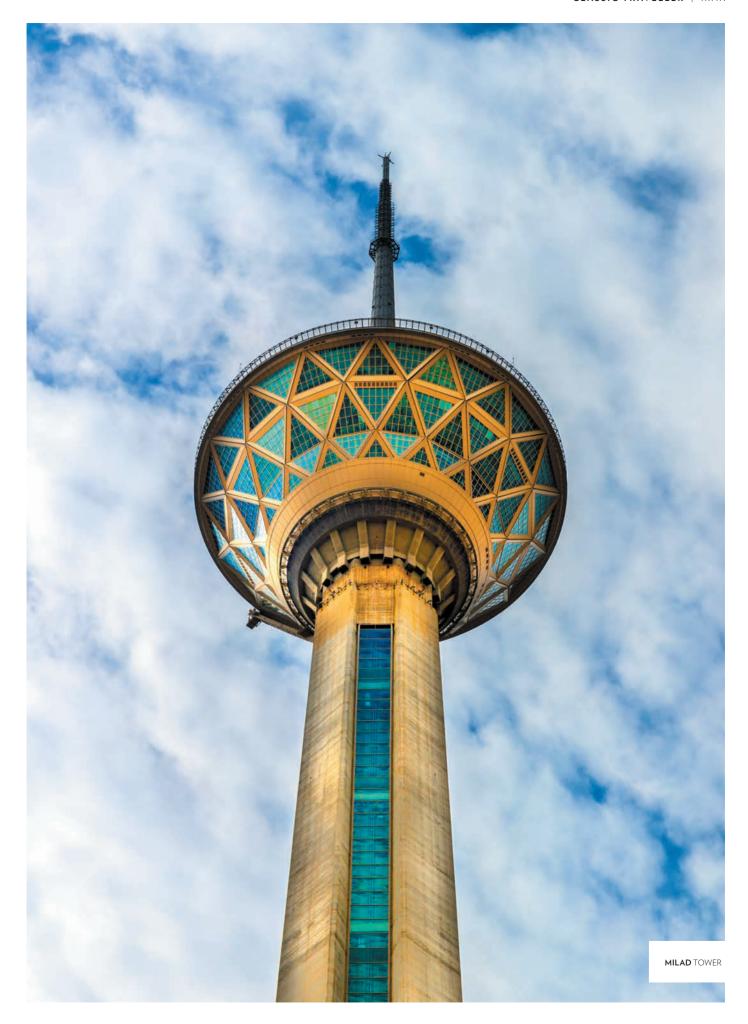
While waiting for our visas in the business lounge, we were served a lovely breakfast by a team of locals.

After breakfast, and with our visas secured, we ventured into the daily hectic and noisy traffic of Tehran, along with the fifteen million commuters that work in the capital city.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Tehran traffic is not for the faint of heart. Two hours into our journey from the airport, we had only traversed fifteen kilometres! In true Iranian fashion, however, our driver sweetened the experience by stopping by a bakery and returning with freshly-baked sangak bread. We made the mistake of calling our hot confection Turkish bread—a mistake that we did not repeat! Content and excited, Danielle and I relaxed in the back seat and enjoyed the beginning of a remarkable trip.

Upon entering the capital, we absorbed the aweinspiring Alborz mountain range that surrounds Tehran like a fortress, blanketed with snow and glowing beneath the spectacular rising sun.









We chose to stay in one of Tehran's best hotels, Hotel Niloo, where the entire team was waiting in the lobby for our arrival. The remarkable staff of the hotel ensured that our five-day stay in their establishment was flawless.

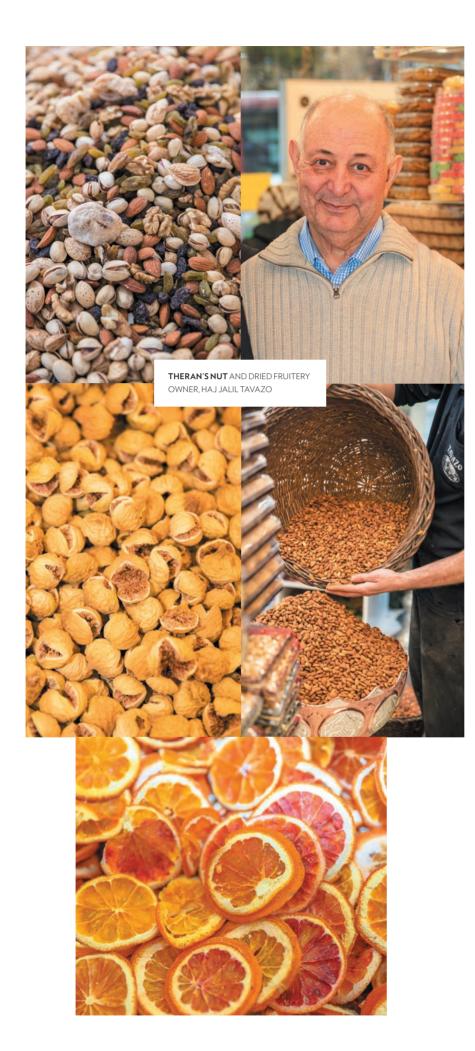
Our jam-packed Iranian itinerary had been planned for some time, including meetings, reviews, daily photo shoots and a gastronomic exploration.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that food and hospitality are Iran's second religion. All of our meetings revolved around coffee, tea, lunch or dinner. We would no sooner finish lunch before being asked our preference for dinner.

I particularly loved early mornings in Tehran, when the aroma of freshly baked sangak would waft through the streets. While Australians tend to hit the corner store for the morning bread run, Iran is renowned for its street-side ovens manned by multiple bakers. Locals drop by and return home with a one- or two-metre-long sangak under their arms.

We enjoyed lunch one day at the famous Dizi Sara Restaurant, an eatery almost impossible to book and even harder to find. Here, they only serve one type of traditional Iranian soup with fresh salad and condiments. I was invited into the kitchen and found myself pulling a metre of sangak out of the oven, alongside twenty chefs who together run the establishment.



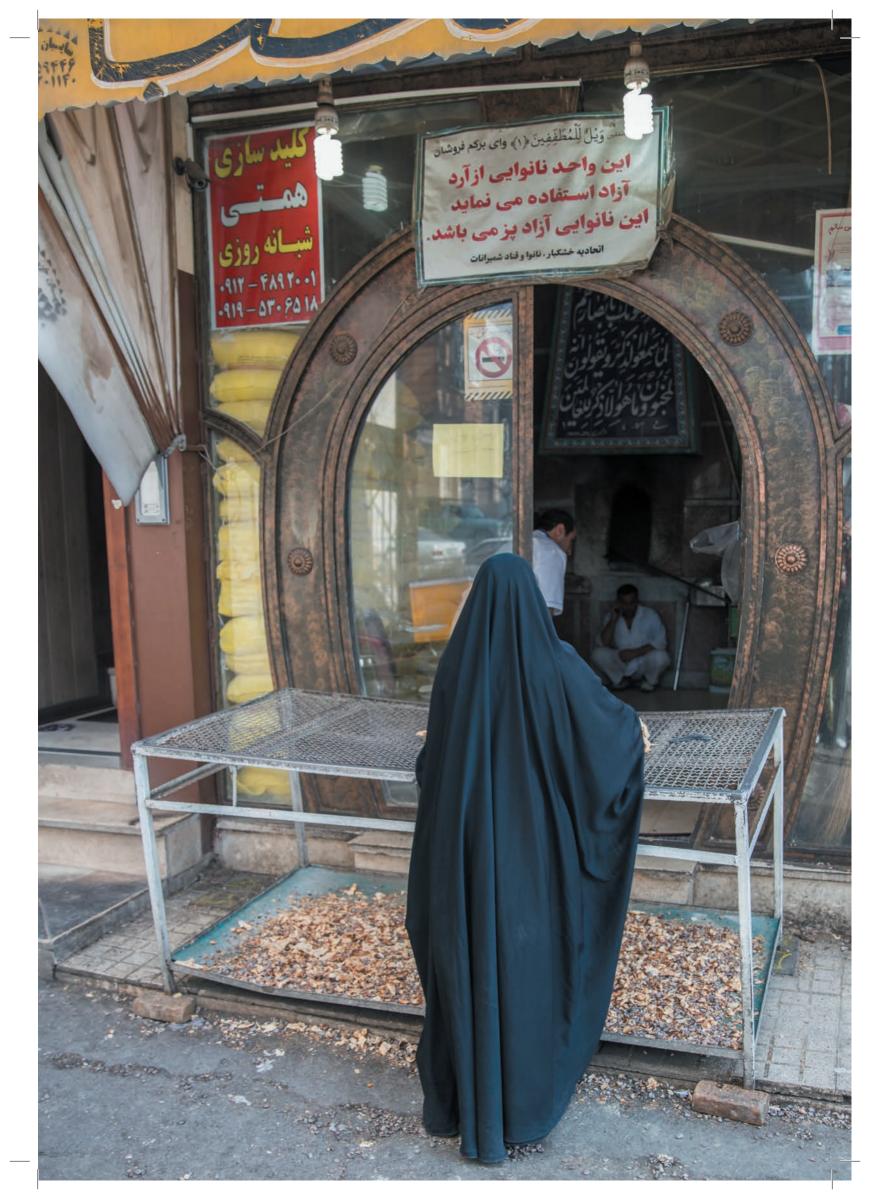


We had scheduled a breakfast meeting at the agency office for the following day. As this would be a home-cooked breakfast, we headed to the local market to purchase the needed ingredients. The vibrancy of an Iranian marketplace cannot be imagined until one has experienced its sounds, smell, and energy. The sale of farm-fresh produce was only a small fraction of the hundreds of simultaneous transactions that were taking place. I highly recommend a visit to any such bazaar.

During our visit, we were always conscious of our clothing and presence. Danielle was obliged to wear a headscarf at all times. All women must wear headscarves or traditional chadors, a long veil that envelops the body.

As night fell, we stopped at a footbridge, hoping to capture Tehran's iconic 'flag image', with the help of 50,000 automobile lights streaming along the landmark Tabiat Bridge, or 'nature bridge'." Danielle was able to perform photographic magic by contrasting thousands of red and white lights with the neon green of the bridge, creatively creating the ripple image of the Iranian flag.

As we opened our blinds every morning, we were greeted by the splendour of the snowy mountain range of Alborz and its remarkable ski resort located just twenty miles outside of Tehran.

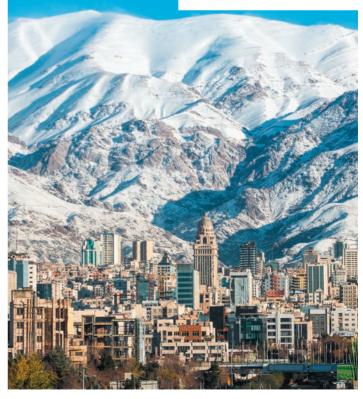




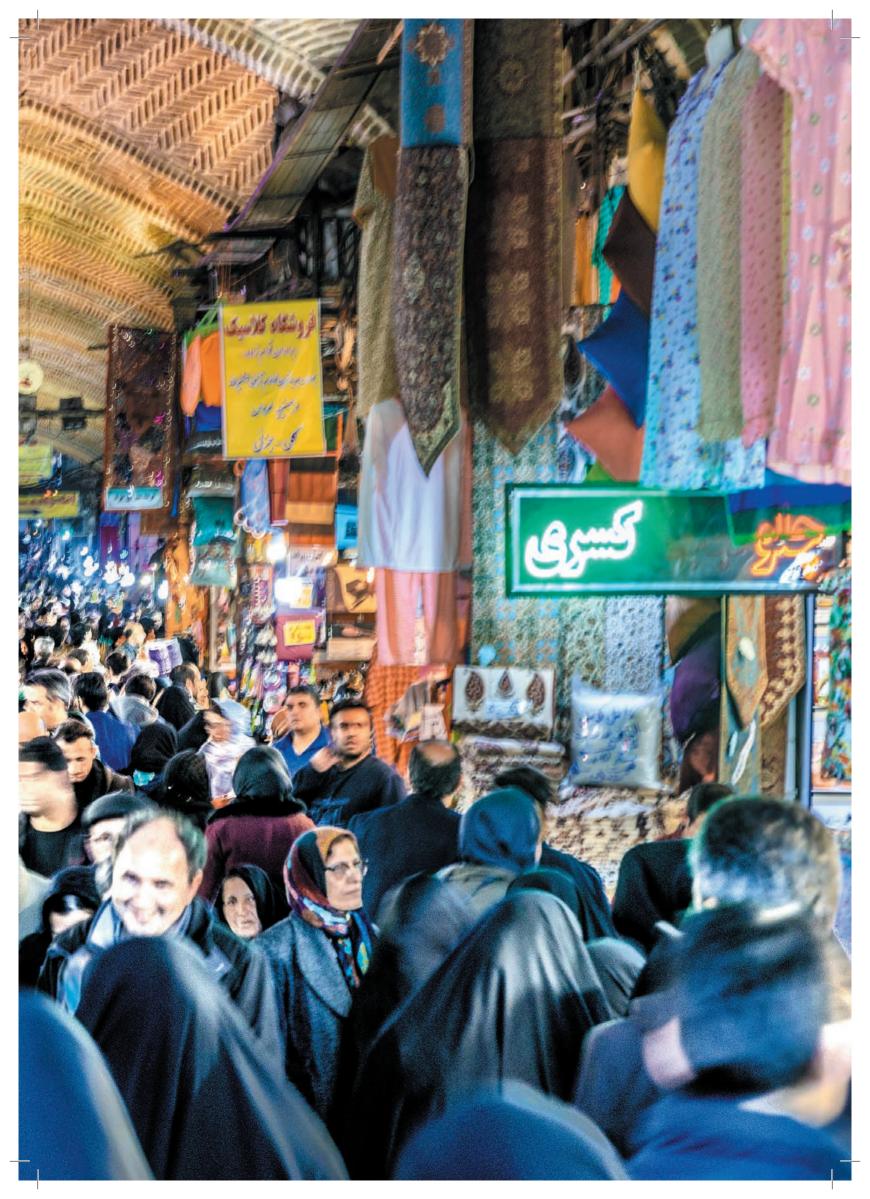


The Tochal Telecabin & Entertainment Complex project, now under the management of the Poma Corporation of France and originally built by Doppelmayr, an Austrian firm, began operation in 1974 and opened to the public in 1978, offering visitors skiing, archery, zip-lining and climbing throughout the year.

Tochal Telecabin is also home to one of the world's longest gondola lifts, stretching 7,500 metres in length. Beginning in the Velenjak Valley in the north of Tehran at an altitude of 1,900 metres and ending at 3,740 metres near the main ridge of Mount Tochal, this gondola lift provides access to the area's ski resorts and recreational centres. The beautiful landscape, fresh mountain air and various water springs add to the area's unique draw, attracting families and sports fanatics from all over the globe. Our morning visit to the mountain gave us a new and exhilarating vista of Tehran.







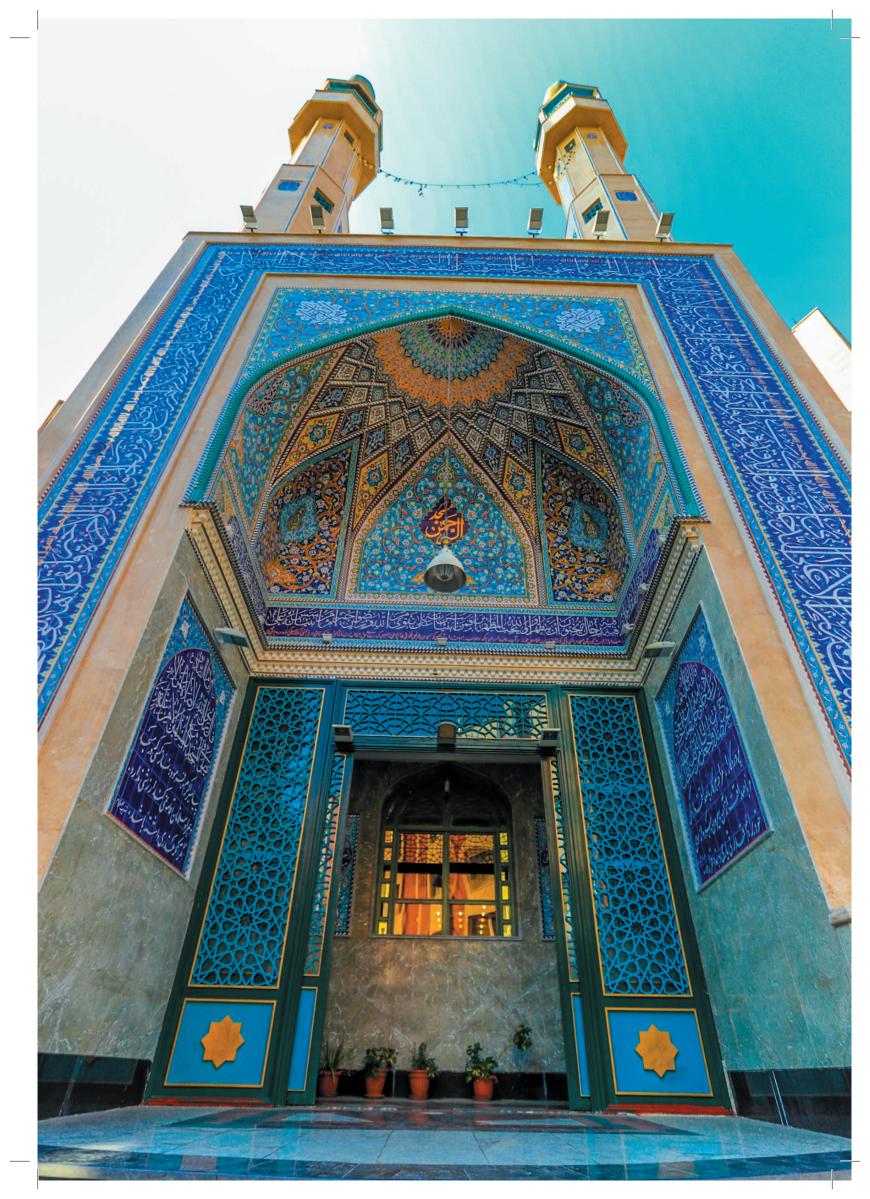


While five days were certainly not sufficient to explore all of Tehran, we did manage to climb the Milad Tower (also known as the Tehran Tower, a multi-use commercial enterprise that is the world's sixth tallest tower), sample local Valentine's Day chocolates from Ilio Artisan Chocolatier, and devour delicious kebabs and endless sangak bread at obscure holes in the wall throughout the city. We also visited the renowned Tavazo Fruit and Nut shop, where we purchased fifteen kilos of mouthwatering dried fruits and nuts.

It is difficult to imagine how this thriving metropolis—with its tantalising cuisine, its amazingly hospitable people, and its palpable desire to engage globally - has been kept from the world.

For decades, Iran has been a questionable tourism destination, given its political and social circumstances. Slowly, however, as the country re-enters the world community with the lifting of sanctions, tourism will inevitably increase.





FAST FACTS

MUST VISIT: THE TOCHAL SKI FIELDS

MUST EAT: YAS RESTAURANT ON VALIASR STREET
DIZI SARA RESTAURANT
ILIO RESTAURANT AT MELAL SHOPPING COMPLEX
DIVAN RESTAURANT AT SAM CENTER ON FERESHTEH
STREET

CURRENCY: IRANIAN RIAL

MAIN LANGUAGE: FARSI

FLIGHTS: BA

HOTEL: NILOO, SEPEHR HOTEL IN ELAHIEH

VISIT: GRAND BAZAAR TAJRISH BAZAAR TABIAT BRIDGE

TAVAZO ASL NUTS AND FRUITERY ON ASR STREET

BEWARE: THE AMAZING HOT SANGAK BREAD

In my estimation, Iran is the most eyeopening and amazing find of 2017 for foreign travelers.

Australians are eligible for visas upon arrival. The airport experience is fairly straightforward. We recommend booking private transport with a local guide who will enrich your experience and help navigate the tremendous traffic. The price for this service is very reasonable.

Women travelling to Iran must wear hair scarves and dress modestly in pants. Men should leave their shorts and singlets at home.

British Airways flies daily from London's Heathrow Airport, departing at 9:30 p.m. and arriving in Tehran at 6:30 a.m.





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