

# Information sheet for participants

## **Language Spoken:**

The official language spoken is Farsi or Persian. However, a good portion of the youth and shopkeepers can understand and speak some English.

## **Climate:**

The climate in Mashhad is semi-arid. In the summer the average temperature is around 30°C, with clear sunny skies. In the winter the average temperature is about 12°C, with a few snow showers. Spring and autumn is quite mild, with rain and very cold nights.

## **Time:**

The local time in Mashhad is GMT +3:30 hours. Iran observes daylight savings time and the majority of the country is one time zone, with the exception in the far west of the country.

## **Business Hours:**

The official work hours in Mashhad are from 7:30 am to 2 pm, from Saturday to Wednesday and on Thursday from 7:30 am to 1:00 pm. Banking hours are 7:30 am to 2 pm; some banks are open in the afternoon. Shops are usually open at 10 am and close around 2:00 pm for lunch. They reopen around 5 pm to about 10 pm. Stores around the Holy Shrine generally open earlier – about 8 am – and remain open all day until 11 pm. Most stores are closed on Friday mornings, with a few exceptions around the Holy Shrine. However, nowadays some are open in the afternoon. Restaurants and fast foods normally open for lunch at 12 pm until 3 pm. They reopen again for dinner around 8 pm until 11 pm. Most sandwich shops remain open all day, starting at 11 am.

## **How to pay:**

Iran presently cannot process credit cards and everything must be paid with Iranian currency. Bargaining for lower prices is common, especially around the Holy Shrine; however, in chain stores prices are fixed.

## **Iranian Currency:**

The currency of Iran is called the Rial and approximately 38,000 Rial is equivalent to about \$1 US. Upon arriving in all international airports it is fairly easy to exchange major foreign currency, such as the US Dollar, Euro, and British Pound. In fact there is a bank right after passport control and it is open 24/7. Otherwise, throughout all Iranian metropolitans there are plenty of banks and authorized exchange



centers which can easily convert your currency. The paper money of Iran is printed in small increments and you may find it a bit awkward to carry. As an alternative, you can request travelers' checks from banks/exchange centers - also known as Iran Checks – in increments of 1,000,000 Rial (approximately \$26.3 US).

Other travelers' checks are issued from individual banks, such as Melli Bank, Saderat Bank and Mellat bank, etc... and are also printed in 500,000 Rial (about \$13 US), as well. Please note that the official name of Iran's currency is the Rial, however in the streets it is referred to as the Toman and the last digit of the Rial is dropped. For example, 1,000,000 Rial is 100,000 Toman or 10,000 Rial is 1,000 Toman.

### **Hotels:**

Mashhad has a large variety of hotels including 5-star hotels, inns and motels. However, during peak tourist season booking a hotel must be done well in advance. It is common for 4 and 5-star hotels have wireless Internet, coffee and ice cream shops, handicraft stores, ticket agencies, and restaurants.

### **Restaurants:**

Mashhad has an array of restaurants to suit everyone's taste. They range from western fast food to top quality international buffets and traditional garden restaurants. The portions are usually generous and the prices are fair, compared to the rest of the country.

### **Tipping:**

It is not customary in fast food restaurants or sandwich shops to leave a tip. However, in larger and more formal restaurants it is common to leave a 10 to 15% tip, provided there is no automatic service charge. Water: Tap water is safe to drink. Take care to only drink from public fountains designated for human consumption. Moreover, domestic and foreign bottled water is readily available in all grocery stores and restaurants for a nominal fee.

### **In the Airport:**

As mentioned before, foreign currency can be easily exchanged 24/7. Porters are available for assistance and expect a tip for services rendered. Official airport taxis are always on hand to transport travelers; although be sure to only use official airport taxis. They can be easily identified by TAXI or TAKSI signs on their cars. See section on getting around Mashhad for more information. Custom laws prohibit the transfer of precious carpets and other objects which have historical and cultural value. Only one carpet or short-napped coarse carpet, not more than 6 m<sup>2</sup>, is allowed to be taken out of the country. You should check with your own country's custom laws to see what you are not allowed to take back; as some countries prohibit pistachios and other types of nuts and dried fruits.

## **Getting around Mashhad:**

**Buses:** Using public transportation in Mashhad is relatively cheap compared to other parts of the world due to the government's subsidization program. There are modern CNG buses for a nominal fee per trip and are easily accessible at all bus stops and run every 15 minutes. Bus tickets cost 2000 Rial (200 Tomans) and can be purchased in kiosks near busy bus stops. **Taxis:** The city also has semi-private and private taxi services and shared taxis. The system of shared taxis is such that a passenger must hail a taxi, usually on a street corner or taxi stand and state which street you intend to go. This type of taxi picks up several passengers at a time, unless you state Dar-Bast (meaning you want private service). It is important to know that you should get into taxis only with an official taxi sign on its roof or written on the body of the car. Semi-private taxis have an official taxi sign and emblem on their cars, plus use meters to calculate the cost of each trip. The names of these taxi services are 133, 1829, and 1830 and you can contact these taxis by dialing those numbers. Moreover, in most tourist and pilgrim sites and airports/terminals there are taxi stands that make it much easier to get around. Some hotels also provide taxi and shuttle services for their patrons. Traveling is relatively safe; however, just like in all other parts of the world common sense should be used.

## **Dress Code**

Throughout Iran, everyone is expected to follow the religious law of observing the Islamic modest dress. Males should not wear shorts or sleeveless tops. For females this includes covering one's head with a scarf, and a loose-fitting long-sleeved tunic, and full-length skirt, or pants. Note the fabric should not be see-through and the color of one's clothing is not important. In addition, the wearing of light makeup for women is no problem.

## **Other Points to Know**

Moreover, there are social and religious taboos, which are good to know so as not to give a wrong message. Men and women do not shake hands or physically touch in public and out of marriage relationships are punishable by law. Generally, behavior one would observe in a formal situation is preferred. Picture or video tapping is not allowed in high security locations, as is in other countries. Otherwise, everyone is allowed to take personal pictures and video tape. However, if you want to take pictures of strangers it is preferable as well as polite to ask permission first.

Consuming alcoholic beverages and using illegal drugs are against the law in Iran; as well as public drunkenness and disruptive behavior. Please note that these carry heavy punishments if caught.

In business situations, business cards and other exchanges (email, contact numbers, etc...) are offered only to high-level managers. The situation is very formal. People are addressed solely by titles and last names. Again, handshaking is only reserved for the same genders. During meetings or conferences, a snack is usually offered along with tea and meals are rather heavy, as Iranians are very hospitable.