



LIVING & STUDYING IN QUM

A Comprehensive Guide for
Students in the Holy City

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FIRST EDITION

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PREFACE

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

“All praise is to Allah who has guided us to this and had God not guided us we would never have been guided.” (7:43)

This guidebook was compiled and written by students living in Qum who recognised the need to provide relevant information to those who have responded to the call of Islam by taking on the life of a seminary student. Many individuals have found themselves facing numerous challenges, either because they are unfamiliar with the language, people and culture, or simply because of the lack of information available on such matters.

The book attempts to answer some of the most common questions asked by students, covering both academic matters and the practicalities of living in a new country. Where possible, the most up-to-date information has been provided, but as many who have lived in Iran before will know, procedures and processes change regularly, as do the Rial prices of goods and services. To give readers a better idea of the cost of living, the US Dollar equivalent has been used, but this too, should be used as an estimate only due to fluctuations in exchange rates and inflation. Arabic and Farsi terminology have been used throughout; however, a standard transliteration has not been strictly adhered to for the sake of simplicity.

While every effort has been made to give readers sincere suggestions and recommendations, SIOS does not endorse any of the individuals or services mentioned in this guidebook. Furthermore, the school assumes no responsibility for any interactions or transactions that may occur as a result of this information. Students are advised to exercise due diligence, and any decisions made based on

the content provided are at the discretion of the individual.

We humbly request that readers notify us of any errors, broken links, or other issues by emailing info@sios.ac. In addition, if readers have any recommendations or information that they feel would be beneficial to include in future editions, please do let us know.

Finally, we sincerely thank all those involved in the production of this important work and pray for their every success.



INTRODUCTION

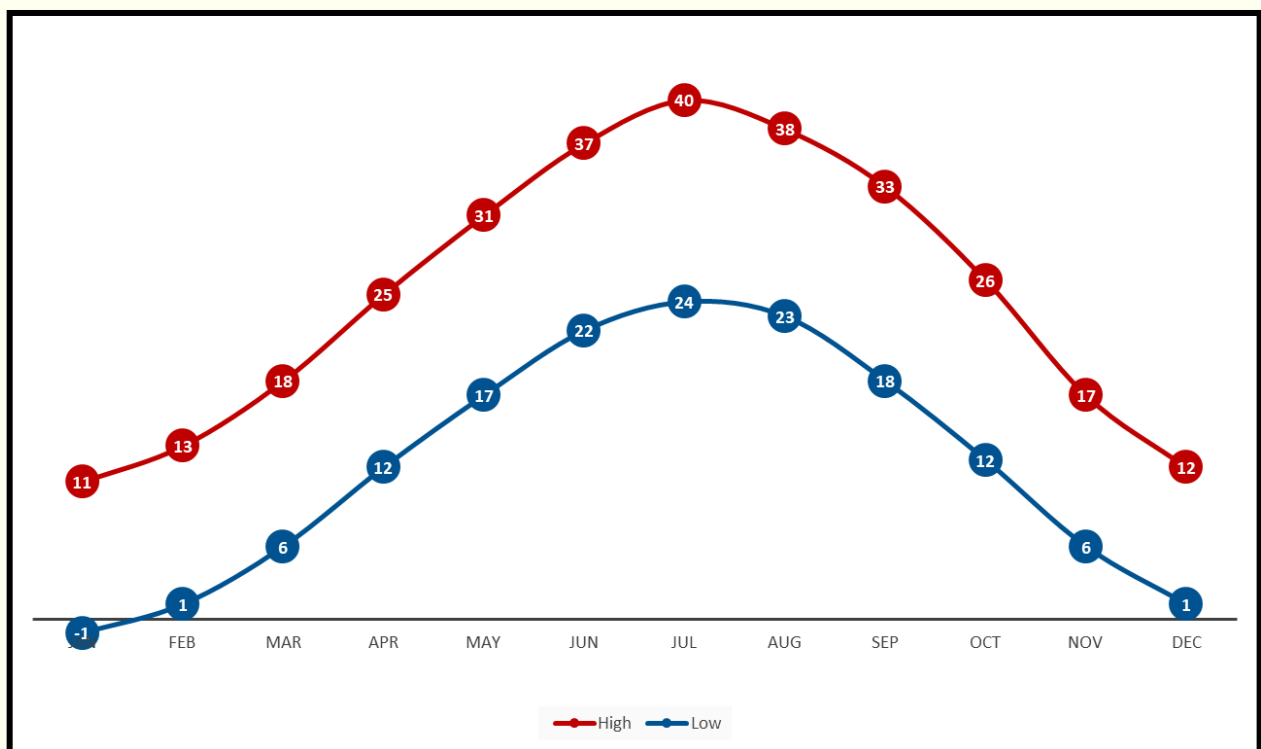
- ◆ Geography & Climate
- ◆ Demographics
- ◆ Language
- ◆ Calendar
- ◆ History
- ◆ School of Islamic and Occidental Studies (SIOS)



GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Iran, the 18th largest country in the world, is located in southwestern Asia and shares borders with seven other countries; Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey in the north-west, Iraq in the west, Turkmenistan in the north-east, Afghanistan in the east and Pakistan in the south-east. To the south of the country lies the Persian Gulf which separates it from its Arab neighbours including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar.

Located 140 km south of the capital Tehran is the holy city of Qum (commonly also spelled as Qom), the seventh largest city in Iran and the capital of Qum province with an area of 11,000 km². Qum is in a dry, arid region and comprises of mountainous areas, foothills, and plains. Due to its location, Qum experiences a dry, desert climate with low humidity and little rainfall. The summers can reach very high temperatures (40-45° Celsius) and the winter temperature can fall below 0° Celsius. Detailed month-by-month climate and weather information can be found [here](#).



Average high and low temperatures in Qum throughout the year

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the latest [consensus](#) carried out in 2016, Qum has a population of 1.2 million with an even male: female ratio. The population is predominantly older with 24% being classified as youth or child (under 25), 50% as an adult (25-64) and 26% as senior (over 65). There are approximately 7,000 foreigners with resident permits and close to 75,000 seminary students and scholars. As expected, the vast majority of Iranians are *Ithna Ashari Shia* which is the state religion but small communities of *Sunnis*, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians can also be found throughout the country.

LANGUAGE

Farsi (Persian) is the primary and official language of Iran; however, a number of Iranians with backgrounds from neighbouring countries speak a second language such as Turkish or Arabic. The Farsi language itself has also been influenced by other languages and one can often find foreign words being used in conversation albeit Persianised. Just like many other countries local dialects also exist within Iran and are normally associated with people of a particular city e.g. the *Qummi* dialect spoken by people of Qum or the *Isfahani* dialect spoken by the people of Isfahan etc...

CALENDAR

The Solar *Hijri* calendar, also known as the *Shamsi Hijri* calendar, is the official calendar of Iran, commencing on the March equinox (*Nowruz*). As it is determined by astronomical factors, the new year may vary from year to year, in contrast to the Gregorian calendar, which is fixed. The Solar *Hijri* calendar

comprises either 365 or 366 days per year.

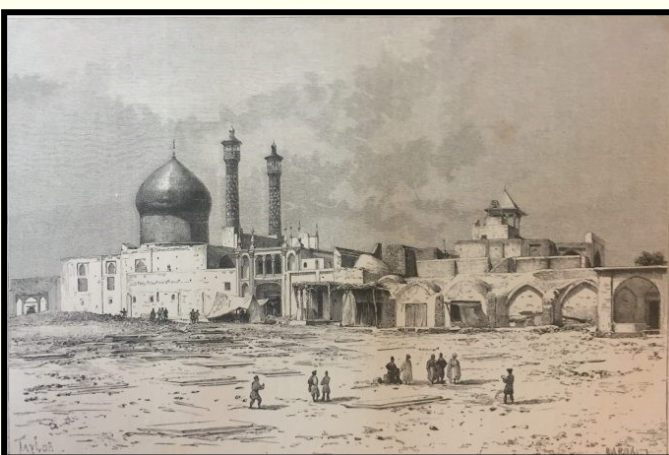
Understanding and managing multiple calendars can be challenging for foreigners, as they must now navigate between the Gregorian, the Islamic Lunar *Hijri*, and the *Shamsi Hijri* calendars. In order to minimise the potential for confusion and errors, it is advisable to download a Persian calendar app on one's mobile device. These apps typically provide access to all three calendars and a conversion tool which easily converts dates from one calendar to the other. Popular apps include [Persian Calendar](#) for Android and [iPersia](#) for iOS.



Screenshot from iPersia Calendar

HISTORY

Although Qum has a rich history even prior to Islam – as archaeological excavations in the area have discovered – greater interest lies in the times after the advent of Islam. Qum has been inhabited by Muslims since the early years of



Early Depiction of the shrine of Lady Fatimah Masumah (a)

Islam when Abu Musa al-Ashari conquered the area in 23 AH/644 AD. Thereafter, Qum became a more permanent settlement for small groups of Shias in 66 AH/685 AD following the uprising of Mukhtar al-Thaqafi in Kufa. The city of Qum remained a *Shia* stronghold for many years but gained significant popularity after the demise of Lady Fatimah Masumah (a) in the city in 201 AH/816 AD) as she headed towards

her brother, Imam Ali al-Ridha (a), in Mashhad. Her shrine (*haram*) has been the focal point of the city up to today with almost 20 million pilgrims from all over the world visiting the city every year. It is commonly accepted that Lady Masumah (a) is the primary reason Qum has gained its reputation as the centre for Shia Islamic scholarship and education since Shia scholars would migrate to Qum in order to be close to her holy shrine and benefit from her presence.

Many great scholars have lived and studied in the *hawzah* of Qum including Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Ali Babawayh Qummi, popularly known as Shaykh Saduq (d. 381 AH/991 AD), Sadr ad-Din Muhammad Shirazi, also called Mulla Sadra (d. 1050 AH/1640 AD) and Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Abd al-Karim Hairi (d. 1355 AH/1936 AD) who is considered to be the founder of the modern-day *hawzah* when he took the reins in 1921.

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC AND OCCIDENTAL STUDIES

Launched with a vision to address the increasing challenges stemming from Western ideological, social, and cultural hegemony, the School of Islamic and Occidental Studies (SIOS) is an Islamic seminary (*hawzah*) for brothers, based in the holy city of Qum.

Founded by Muslim scholars hailing from the West, SIOS aims to ground seminary students in the traditional Islamic sciences while equipping them with the insight and necessary tools to understand and address contemporary issues with precision and foresight. Its international faculty members have been selected for their intellectual depth and traditional breadth, as well as their experience in responding to and dealing with such challenges and issues. Students who join

SIOS also share these same concerns. The coming together of such teachers and students in this unique school provides for an exciting, engaging and enriching learning experience. The founding team and staff of the school, like the teachers and the students, is composed of Muslims from different lands who speak English and who are inspired by the same vision.

VISION

The tradition of knowledge and learning in Islam is primarily an oral tradition. All knowledge (*ilm*) pertains to Allah (the *Alim*, the Knower), Who taught man what he did not know. He taught the first man and His representative (*khalifah*) the Names, all of them, just as he taught the greatest and most perfect of men (s) the Qur'an. Consequently, the Noble Prophet (s) taught his companions in general and his deputy (*wasi*) in particular. They in their turn taught their companions and students. In this way, by a continuous unbroken chain of teachers and students, something of the knowledge taught by Allah and His prophets and guides (a) has come down to us today as priceless heritage. This great heritage is inherited by those who recognise these authentic unbroken channels and who make the efforts to be connected with them in a real way.

The *hawzah ilmiyyah* (Islamic seminary) is the traditional institute in which such connections are made and true knowledge acquired. In line with this, SIOS seeks to, firstly, introduce this luminous tradition of knowledge and learning to those who are seriously in search of it and come from the West or from places that have been Westernised, and secondly, to properly prepare those who have already been introduced to pass on the heritage intelligently and effectively within the context of the modern world.

To facilitate the introduction to this great tradition of knowledge, SIOS offers an Intensive Language and *Ma'arif* (ILM) Program — a ten-month introductory course in Islamic sciences and classical & spoken Farsi. Participants who complete the ILM Program will gain sufficient insight and resources to help them face the challenges of trying to live a holistic Muslim life in the modern world and to continue to seek knowledge alongside their responsibility of making a living.

For those who make the weighty decision to take up the calling and become full-time students of the *hawzah*, SIOS provides a solid grounding in the Islamic sciences. Teachers who have immersed themselves in *hawzah* will seek to initiate the students into the fuller and more substantial aspects of the luminous and living tradition of Islamic knowledge and wisdom. At the same time, the holy city of Qum and the presence of the shrine of Lady Masumah (a) as well as the great scholars, who are the living models of knowledge and spirituality, will nourish the souls of students and seekers during their journey of knowledge.

For those who have already answered the calling and have been engaged in studying the traditional Islamic sciences in the *hawzah*, SIOS aims to provide these serious seekers (*tullab*) access to the deeper and more profound levels of these sciences. This will help foster a better understanding of the times in which we live — times which are marked by the dominance of Western culture and thought. Such an understanding will serve to protect the students from the confusions and deceptions of the modern and postmodern times and will allow them to formulate a response that is firmly based in the intellectual and mystical dimensions of Islam. This profound knowledge will firstly save the soul of the person who realises it, and will also allow for the possibility of the salvation of others. In addition to gaining command of classical Arabic and Farsi, students will hone their English literacy, better equipping them to convey the message of Islam to their people.

CAMPUS

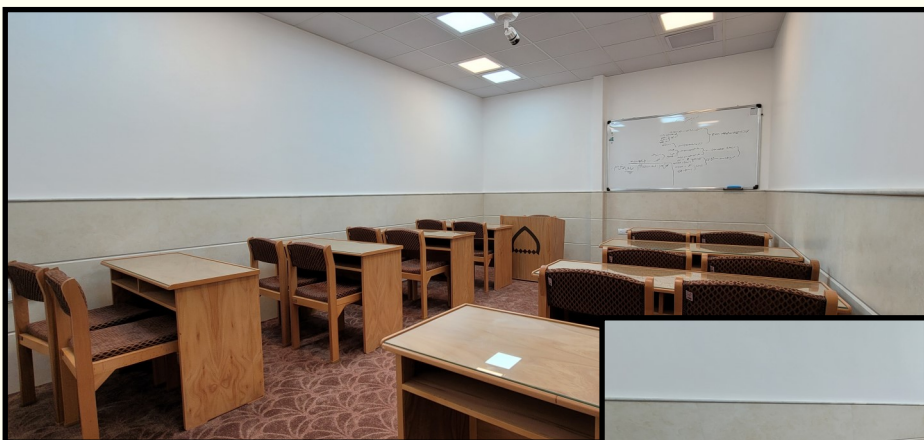
The [main building](#) of the School is situated in a peaceful, central area of Qum, just a short distance from the *haram* and in close proximity to other prominent seminaries and research institutes. It has a range of facilities designed to support students' academic and spiritual needs, including modern and traditionally styled classrooms, a large prayer hall, a well-stocked library, and a handy student kitchenette. Additionally, all administrative offices are conveniently housed within the main building, ensuring easy access for students and staff alike.



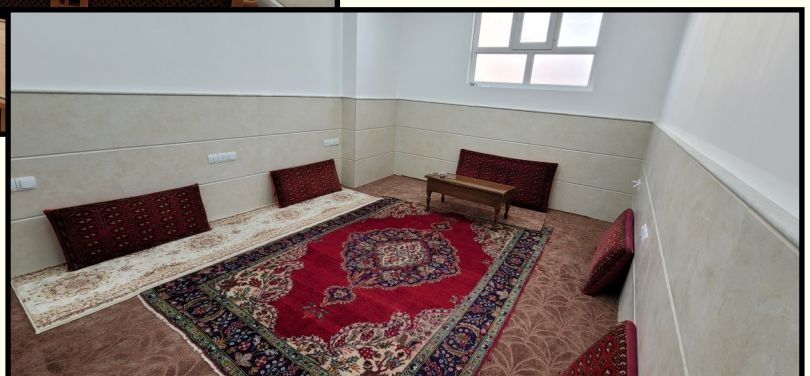
School Front Entrance



Courtyard



Modern Classroom



Traditional Classroom



Library



Prayer Hall



Teachers' Lounge



Conference Room

STUDIES

- ◆ Farsi Language
- ◆ Introductory
Islamic Studies
- ◆ Hawzah Studies
- ◆ Subjects & Topics
- ◆ Mubahatha
- ◆ Private Tuition
- ◆ Libraries
- ◆ Noor Software



FARSI LANGUAGE

The primary language of instruction in Qum is Farsi, though some *hawzahs* offer courses in Arabic, English, and Urdu. The SIOS [Intensive Language and *Ma'arif* \(ILM\) Program](#) aims to provide new students with a solid foundation in Farsi comprehension and conversation within six months, through a proven and effective curriculum.

Classes are conducted five to six days a week, four to five hours a day and are led by experienced local teachers. Using a blend of interactive teaching methods, the program focuses on developing students' communication skills.

INTRODUCTORY ISLAMIC STUDIES

Upon successful completion of the Farsi language course, students will commence an introductory course in Islamic sciences — the *Ma'arif* segment of the ILM Program. This portion of the program is conducted in a combination of English and Farsi enabling students to utilise their newly acquired language skills while simultaneously staying updated on essential English terminology in key subjects.

The course not only provides a comprehensive introduction for *hawzah* studies, but also a good overview of some major subjects that are important for any and all Muslims to know about including Islamic Theology, Law, Ethics and recitation of the holy Qur'an. Similar to the Farsi language course, classes are held at least five days a week for four to five hours per day and will be taught by senior Western students, or scholars from the East that have lived in, or specialise in the West and occidental studies.

Significant time and effort is required at this stage since core principles are learnt

which will enable the student to progress on to the next level of *hawzah* studies. Great emphasis is placed on reviewing lessons and participating in *mubahatha* sessions to help reinforce the knowledge gained.

HAWZAH STUDIES

Students who successfully complete the ILM Program, exhibiting both academic excellence and integrity of character, will have the option to proceed to the *Hawzah* Program - a comprehensive thirteen-year program divided into three phases:

PHASE ONE

Phase One is an exhaustive foundational course in basic *hawzah* studies where students build upon the introductory material learnt in the ILM Program and go on to establish firm bases in the traditional (*naqli*) and intellectual (*aqli*) sciences of Islam. Starting with instrumental sciences such as classical Arabic and Logic, students proceed to cover the tripartite areas of Law (*ahkam*), Ethics (*akhlaq*), and Theology (*aqaid*) on multiple levels. Qur'anic studies are present in all parts and stages of the course and are the constant refrain that enrich and substantiate all the other studies. Throughout the course, a guided reading component where contemporary books in English are read and discussed helps students to acquire an overview of how their *hawzah* studies are relevant to the critical situation of Islam in the modern world.

PHASE TWO

Phase Two is an extensive integral course in intermediate *hawzah* studies where students build upon the foundational material learnt in the Phase One Program

and go on to develop a good knowledge of the *naqli* and *aqli* sciences of Islam. By focusing on the level of principles and by acquiring the tools necessary for understanding and responding to the challenges they face in the modern world, students become better prepared to defend and propagate Islam in our times. Consequently, there is an emphasis on the extension (*imtidad*) of principles to apply to newly appearing situations. Throughout the course, some modules are taught in English and many research projects, including a thesis, are done in English, so as to increase the proficiency and preparedness of the students. The Qur'an, through a regular study of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), provides the mainstay and the ultimate point of reference for all other intermediate studies in this phase.

PHASE THREE

Phase Three is a consolidative final course in advanced *hawzah* studies where students build upon the integral material learnt in the Phase Two Program and go on to acquire an expertise in one or more facets of the *naqli* and *aqli* sciences of Islam. By delving deep into their area of expertise, the students, who are now scholars in their own right, aim to realise their profound knowledge of Islam by making it applicable in our time. Their concentrated efforts in this regard are informed by the balanced fusion of all their learnt-sciences under the supremacy of the Qur'an. Having been mentored for many years by those who were also mentored in a contiguous and continuous manner going back to the Holy Prophet (s) of Islam, gives them an authentic education in the Book of Allah and Wisdom, and a viable edification at the hands of such inspired mentors. All of this allows the participants of this course to tread on the path of the Holy Prophet (s) and his Purified Progeny (a), and thereby to become authorities and leaders who, if Allah should desire, can help others find the luminous way of Islam in the darkness of the latter days.

SUBJECTS & TOPICS

The *hawzah* offers a diverse and profound array of subjects that students are not only introduced to, but should aspire to master during their tenure in Qum. Just as in any scholarly discipline, the foundations and prerequisites of these subjects are studied in the early years, paving the way for a gradual immersion into deeper and more intricate content. A glimpse into some of the principal subjects taught in the *hawzah* is presented below to provide students with a preliminary introduction to their significance and depth.

ARABIC GRAMMAR

Arabic grammar is considered to be the cornerstone of seminary education due to its pivotal role in understanding and interpreting the Holy Qur'an, *hadith*, and other Islamic texts. Some would argue that a seminary student's academic success can be gauged by his proficiency in this area alone and therefore, great emphasis and time is dedicated to this subject, especially in the early years. Arabic grammar, as taught in the *hawzah*, can be divided into three categories:

Morphology (*Sarf*): Generally speaking, all words in Arabic are derived from a set of root letters. Morphology is the science which analyses the structure of words, how they are formed and their relationship with other words. For example, the words كِتَابٌ ، مَكْتَبَةٌ ، تَكْتُبُ all have different meanings but share a common theme as identified by the root letters، ك ، ت ، ب. Students will learn the process of vowelizing Arabic words, recognise different patterns, understand meanings behind word variations and conjugate verbs and nouns.

Syntax (*Nahw*): While morphology deals with the structure of individual words, syntax is the study of sentence structure and more particularly, inflection (*i'rab*) –

the process of assigning or modifying word case endings and diacritical marks to express different grammatical categories such as tense, state, gender or mood. Proficiency in Arabic syntax enables students to grammatically analyse text accurately in various contexts, thus, enhancing their understanding of the Holy Qur'an and other sources by preserving the integrity of their original meanings.

Rhetoric (*Balaghah*): This field explores techniques and strategies used in the art of eloquent expression in the Arabic language. It covers three broad areas:

- a) Semantic Syntax (*ilm al-Ma'ani*), which discusses how to effectively convey intended meanings based on one's situation, circumstances, context and audience by understanding the nuances of word choices, grammatical structures, and contextual implications.
- b) Figures of Speech (*ilm al-Bayan*), the branch which explores the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, allegory and more.
- c) Embellishments (*ilm al-Badi*), which demonstrates how one can adorn lexical and semantic features through the use of unconventional word order, linguistic playfulness, puns, and other techniques.

LOGIC

One of the first subjects to be taught in the *hawzah* is logic (*mantiq*) – the study of correct reasoning or, as al-Farabi defines it, “an instrumental, rule-based science aimed at directing the intellect towards the truth and safeguarding it from error in its acts of reasoning”. Since logic is a tool to discern valid inferences from invalid ones, a student's mastery over the subject is essential in order to comprehend the Islamic intellectual sciences, construct well-founded conclusions, correctly verify arguments and identify logical fallacies.

The subject's foundation is rooted in the integration of Greek logic, primarily influenced by Aristotle, with works by Islamic scholars such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina who contributed greatly to its development and its application in philosophy.

In essence, logic studies the nature of propositions and investigates the structure and validity of arguments primarily using the syllogistic method — a powerful tool for drawing logical conclusions from given premises. Moreover, logic probes into the intricacies of language and semantics that underlie effective communication and precise argumentation.

THEOLOGY

Theology is the study of fundamental doctrines and beliefs and involves discussions concerning the nature of God, prophethood and the resurrection. Primarily a rational and discursive discipline, theology also references the transmitted and traditional sources as confirmation of rational judgements and in issues subordinate to doctrines proven rationally.

Students learn about the history of the subject, analyse theological arguments such as the proofs for the existence of God, and tackle key questions concerning all the articles of faith. Although studies are centred around *Shia* doctrines, students are taught about the different theological schools of thought and undertake comparative studies equipping them with the tools necessary to engage in dialogues with followers of other sects and religions.

ISLAMIC ETHICS

Islamic ethics (*akhlaq*) encompasses the study of moral values, virtues, and ethical principles derived from Islamic teachings with a view to adorn oneself with the

moral virtues such as righteousness, honesty, sincerity, chastity, generosity & justice and rid oneself of vices such as arrogance, cowardice, miserliness, & vanity. Students learn about the faculties of the soul, the importance of human perfection and engage in discussions regarding treatment strategies for vices and approaches to assimilate virtues.

HISTORY

Islamic history provides an overview of the political, social, and intellectual developments within the Muslim world. Students generally begin by studying the life of Prophet Muhammad (s), examining the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period and the social, moral and intellectual decadence which lead to the appointment of the Last Messenger of Allah (swt). Students also delve into the lives of the Infallible Imams (a), the caliphates, the emergence of various Islamic empires and the intellectual contributions of Muslim scholars.

History can either be passive, by recounting events that occurred in the past, or analytical, where the causes and reasons behind the events are explored. A comprehensive, analytical study of Islamic history provides an important basis to understand all aspects of the religion and can also give delicate insights into future events.

HADITH STUDIES

Hadith, also referred to as traditions or narrations, is a word in Islamic terminology which refers to sayings quoted from the Holy Prophet (s) or one of the Infallible Imams (a). Due to its importance as a major source of religious law and moral and spiritual guidance, hadith studies comes at the forefront of the Islamic sciences and can be divided into two broad disciplines:

Hadith Science (*Dirayat al-Hadith*): This science itself consists of several disciplines to study and evaluate the authenticity of hadith. Students are introduced to essential terminology used in the field, the different types of classifications of hadith and the principles used for analysing the text (*matn*) and chain (*sanad*) of hadith.

Science of Hadith Transmitters (*Ilm al-Rijal*): This discipline centres on the biographies of individuals who transmitted hadith and the methodologies employed to establish the credibility of the narrators, using both historic and religious knowledge, in order to distinguish authentic and reliable hadith from those that are considered unreliable .

ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) are considered to be two of the most central subjects in the *hawzah* and are given a great amount of attention. As a Muslim, one who has believed in Allah, Islam and the divine law and recognised a responsibility to follow His rulings, one is obliged to practically adhere to the Islamic divine law. Therefore, it is a Muslim's duty to determine this practical position and to know how to behave in every situation. Islamic jurisprudence is the discipline charged with determining these practical positions and establishing divine legal rulings derived from the Holy Qur'an, *sunnah* (the words, actions and silent assertions of the Holy Prophet and the Infallible Imams), scholarly consensus and reasoning.

Students learn the methodologies used to deduce Islamic laws by applying expertise in subjects such as Arabic grammar, logic, principles of Islamic jurisprudence, hadith studies and exegesis of the Holy Qur'an. The range of Islamic jurisprudence is extremely wide as it contains all the subjects related to a

Muslim's actions. Traditionally, these subjects have been divided and studied in categories called *kutub* or *abwab* e.g. *kitab al-salah* (the Book of Prayer) which all fall under one of two branches; worship and contracts. Worship includes topics such as cleanliness, prayer, fasting, *khums* and *hajj* whereas contracts covers subjects such as the laws pertaining to buying and selling, hire, loans, wills, marriage and divorce.

In addition to in-depth studies of these subjects, students are also introduced to the various schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence and engage in critical comparative studies. Only those who traverse the meticulous path of *ijtihad* can eventually become experts in this field and can be called a *faqih*, an Islamic jurist.

PRINCIPLES OF ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

The process of deriving a divine legal ruling involves not only a comprehensive study of the four sources of jurisprudence, but also requires knowledge of the common rules and unifying elements which pertain to all of the procedures of derivation. Principles of jurisprudence can be described as “the study of the rules and shared elements in the procedure of derivation of the divine law”. Such a discipline is essential to Islamic jurisprudence since the commands or regulations of Islam have not been explained by the Holy Qur'an or by the Holy Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) in such a way as to deal with each and every particularity. Nor is such a thing possible, for events and situations occur in endlessly different forms. Instead, the general principles have been laid before the Muslims to enable them to deduce their responsibility in any given situation.

Studying the principles of jurisprudence not only equips students with the tools necessary to analyse legal texts and apply them in the process of deriving legal rulings, but also helps develop their intellectual abilities.

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy (*falsafah*) is derived from the Greek word *philosophia* meaning “love of wisdom” and whose coinage is attributed to one of the most famous Greek philosophers, Socrates. In the view of early Muslim scholars, philosophy did not refer to a particular discipline or science; rather, it encompassed all the rational sciences as opposed to transmitted sciences and could be divided into theoretical and practical philosophy.

Theoretical philosophy addresses things as they are and includes metaphysics, mathematics and the natural sciences, whereas practical philosophy addresses human actions as they ought to be and can be divided into ethics, domestic economy and politics. A true philosopher comprehends all of these sciences. In modern times however, Islamic Philosophy has become synonymous with only one of these branches of the rational sciences, namely, metaphysics or first philosophy, and is centred on what is known in Western Philosophy as ontology – the study of being or existence.

Hawzah students not only undertake an in-depth study of the subjects in philosophy such as the concept and reality of existence, cause & effect, the nature of knowledge and the necessary being, but also learn about the different philosophical schools of thought within Islam and engage in critical studies of both ancient and modern Western philosophies.

MYSTICISM

Mysticism (*irfan*) is a discipline with two branches: the theoretical (*irfan nazari*) and the practical (*irfan amali*). Theoretical mysticism is concerned with ontology and can be loosely considered as an extension of Islamic philosophy; however,

whereas philosophy relies on rational principles for its arguments, mysticism bases its deductions on principles discovered through mystical experience (*kashf*) and then uses the language of philosophy and reason to explain them. This allows for much more profound conclusions and perceptions than philosophy can offer.

Practical mysticism describes and explains the relationship and responsibilities of a human being towards himself, the world of creation and God. This practical aspect of mysticism, or “spiritual wayfaring” (*sayr wa suhuk*), is only undertaken with the supervision of a mature mystic (*arif*), one who has successfully traversed the many stages and stations of the path and is aware of the intricate details and prescriptions needed for this spiritual journey. Although theoretical mysticism is officially taught in the *hawzah*, practical mysticism is more personal and normally requires a student to seek out a qualified mentor himself.

EXEGESIS OF THE HOLY QUR’AN

An exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Holy Qur’an is a profound attempt to elucidate and interpret its verses by drawing on various sources such as other Qur’anic verses, *hadith*, historical context, and more. This endeavour is far from simple, and although there are established principles of *tafsir*, the scholar engaging in this interpretation (a *mufassir*) must have achieved mastery in all the Islamic sciences before embarking on the delicate task of elucidating the words of Allah (swt).

Even though the actual practice of interpreting the Qur’an is often reserved for advanced scholars, students can greatly benefit from reading and discussing existing *tafsirs*. This is what is commonly referred to as a "*tafsir* class" within the *hawzah*.

There are two primary styles of tafsirs: sequential (*tartibi*) and topical (*mawzu*). Sequential *tafsir*, as the name implies, involves a systematic verse-by-verse

examination of the Qur'an, following the order in which the verses appear within the chapters. Students typically delve into the sentence structure, vocabulary, word etymology, occasion of revelation, and other pertinent details to grasp the intended meaning behind each verse and the overall message of the chapter. Conversely, in topical (or thematic) exegesis, the *mufassir* aims to shed light on the Qur'anic perspective concerning a specific topic or theme. As a result, the scholar may reference verses from different chapters to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an's stance on that particular subject. This approach can allow for a deeper exploration of Qur'anic teachings and their relevance to various aspects of life and belief.

MUBAHATHA

A long-standing tradition of the *hawzah*, *mubahatha* (literally meaning “discussion”) is a technique developed to encourage students to review and reflect on the material they have learnt in the classroom. Commonly conducted daily between 2-3 students, one of the students will typically take the role of a teacher and explain the lesson to the other students. This is followed by a group discussion to resolve any questions or lack of understanding. To fully benefit from the *mubahatha*, one is required to prepare in advance and refer to sources other than those presented in class so that it is not a mere repetition of the teacher's lesson.

Mubahatha is considered among many scholars to be essential to a student's progression in higher *hawzah* studies, and those who take part in it regularly show a better understanding of the lesson and greater retention of the material covered.

Depending on the program, one may find it difficult to conduct *mubahatha* for every subject. In this case, priority should be given to core subjects and/or topics

of greater relevance. Guidance will be provided by the *hawzah* but one should also consult teachers and senior students for their advice.

PRIVATE TUITION

Hiring private tutors for Islamic studies is not a common practice since the tradition of the *hawzah* promotes the propagation of Islamic education gratuitously. However, if one does arrange private classes, there is a custom of not refusing a gift once offered. Consequently, some students take advantage of this tradition by presenting their tutors with gifts, whether monetary or otherwise.

Conversely, hiring private tutors for learning the Persian language is very common and reasonably priced, typically costing between \$2 and \$4 USD per hour. This method of learning the language can be particularly beneficial for the wives of full-time students who are caring for young children at home and unable to attend scheduled classes, as well as for older children who intend to enter an Iranian school and may need extra help. Private tutors can be found through recommendations from friends and other students, the *hawzah*, schools, or by searching online on websites such as www.divar.ir.

LIBRARIES

Libraries hold immense significance to seminary students as they serve as invaluable resources for their academic and spiritual growth. In fact, a student's second home should be a quiet place to read and study. SIOS, like many other *hawzahs*, has an ever-growing library to provide students and researchers with relevant and up-to-date material that will assist them in their academic endeavours as well as providing a quiet and conducive environment enabling students to

concentrate on their studies and engage in contemplation. In addition to the libraries within each *hawzah*, Qum also has a large selection of public and specialist libraries which offer access to vast collections of classical & contemporary works and dedicated research & study areas. Information about a selection of these libraries has been provided in the table below with a more detailed and complete list [here](#).

	Name	Membership	Loan Facility	Private Study Area	Opening Hours	Address	Telephone No.
General Library	Lady Masumah (a) Public Library	✓	✓	✓	08:00 – 23:00	Jami Fatimi Courtyard, Shrine of Lady Masumah (a)	3784 0751 3784 0753
	Library of Grand Ayatullah Burujurdi (ra)	✓	✗	✓	08:00 – 19:00	Masjid Azam, Shrine of Lady Masumah (a)	3783 7744
	Library of Grand Ayatullah Hairi (ra)	✓	✓	✓	08:00 – 20:00	Madrassah Fayziyyah, besides the Shrine of Lady Masumah (a)	3774 1483 3784 1820
	Library of Grand Ayatullah Marashi Najafi (ra)	✓	✗	✓	08:00 – 19:00	Iram Street, Opposite Passage Quds	3774 1970 3774 1978
	The Office of Propagation's General Library	✓	✓	✓	08:00 – 19:00	Muallim Street, after Bustan Kitab Bookstore	3115 1271
Specialist Library	The History of Islam and Iran Specialist Library	✓	✓	✓	08:00 – Maghrib	No. 8, 11th Alley, Shahid Rajai Street, Sumayyah Street	3773 1355
	The Intellectual Sciences Specialist Library	✓	✓	✓	09:00 – 18:00	No. 5, first left on 10th Alley, 19th Dey Street (Bajek)	3775 7610 3775 7611
	The Iranian Institute of Philosophy Library	✓	✗	✓	08:00 – 15:00	No. 71, 3rd Alley, Danish Street, Saduqi Boulevard	3294 1250
	The Jurisprudence and its Principles Specialist Library	✓	✗	✓	07:00 – 21:00	Muallim Circle, Markaz Fiqhi Aimmah Athar	3774 9494

DIGITAL LIBRARIES

Advancement in technology during the digital era has enabled students to easily access extensive collections of books via digital libraries. With just a few clicks, a student can now find almost any book through websites such as [Narges Library](#) and [Shiabooks](#) which provide PDF books categorised by subject and a search

facility allowing the user to refine their search by book or author. All books are available for free download; however, the PDFs are often scans of the original printed books. This sometimes compromises the quality of the text and reading comfort level and causes a disruption of the search facility within the PDF.

Another popular website among seminary students is [eShia](#) – another freely accessible digital website. Similar to the other two websites, books are categorised by subject and users can search for specific titles or authors using the integrated search engine. eShia can be easier to read as the books have been rendered in text format rather than scans of the printed version. There is also an option to download a range of pages from any book (up to 30 pages) in PDF form.

NOOR SOFTWARE

The Computer Research Centre of Islamic Sciences, CRCIS or commonly referred to as Noor, was established in 1989 with the goal of digitising Islamic sources and texts, facilitating access to this rich heritage and expediting research through information and communication technology. The project, in addition to creating computer software programs, now has several subscription-based subsidiaries and plays a crucial role in supporting the academic journey of any genuine seminary student.

The wide range of services provided by Noor allows students to conduct research and study efficiently by easily accessing a multitude of books, articles, and manuscripts that may otherwise be difficult, or even impossible, to obtain physically. It also offers the advantage of portability, enabling seminary students to access resources from anywhere, at any time, without the need for physical presence in a traditional library. This flexibility is particularly valuable for students

who may have limited time or are unable to visit physical libraries due to travels, etc. Noor has created many advanced search functions that allow students to navigate through extensive collections, journals, and articles, making it easier to find relevant and specific information. In addition, numerous features and tools have been included such as bookmarking, highlighting and note-taking, assisting students to organise their research and create personalised study materials thus enhancing the overall learning experience. Their main services include:



Noorsoft: The original computer software programs were created and sold in DVD format for Windows PCs. Now, with over 400 DVD collections in 20 different categories, these can be purchased online or at the CRCIS main office located on [Jumhuri Islami Boulevard](#). Unfortunately, the programs are still only designed to work on Windows computers, however, unofficial workarounds for other operating systems do exist. DVD prices are extremely affordable, ranging from \$0.50 – \$2 each depending on the collection title. Besides DVDs, Noor also sells a package containing over 100 of their most popular software on a single, external hard drive for approximately \$75 (including the hard drive). Alternatively, the support team can also install individual programs on a student's personal, external hard drive or laptop. Recently, the centre has introduced Android apps, many of which are completely free to install and use.



Abrenoor: Abrenoor, or Noor cloud, is a subscription based, cloud computing application allowing subscribers to access and run over 250 Noor software programs on all operating systems without the need for installation. This is a great alternative to purchasing and installing multiple DVDs, allows access from anywhere and from any computer. Yearly subscriptions start from only \$3. Setting up an account is easy and another advantage is that a single account can be used across all of Noor's online services.



Screenshots from Noor's flagship computer softwares, Jami al-Tafasir and Jami al-Ahadith



Noorlib: An extensive online digital library containing over 90,000 volumes of both classical and contemporary books in a wide range of topics. Interesting features include the ability to add books to a personalised online library, switch between download selected pages from a book, a “research desk” which allows the user to take notes on a particular page of a book, highlight text and add bookmarks. Similar to Narges Library and Shiabooks, the majority of the books in Noorlib are images of the original printed books, however, there is a function to read the book in text format too.



Noormags: Noormags is the largest digital library of academic articles and journals in the fields of Islamic sciences and humanities. With a wide range of scholarly content in multiple languages and from an extensive network of authors and publishers, Noormags provides subscribers access to this wealth of knowledge in one user-friendly and fully searchable online platform.



Noordoc: Noordoc is a digital library featuring theses and dissertations by *hawzah* students and those from various Iranian universities, including Tehran University and Imam Sadiq (a) University. It is dedicated to promoting the creation, use, dissemination, and preservation of electronic theses and dissertations across all levels of higher education, aiming to enhance the sharing of knowledge worldwide.



SPIRITUAL LIFE

- ◆ Lady Masumah (a)
- ◆ Akhlaq Classes
- ◆ Thursday Night Programs
- ◆ Jamkaran Mosque
- ◆ Other Places to Visit



The city of Qum is not only the largest centre of Shia scholarship, but also stands as a beacon of spirituality and guidance. At the heart of Qum lies the revered shrine of Lady Masumah (a), attracting millions of pilgrims seeking solace and upliftment. The city's rich religious heritage and atmosphere provide students, residents and visitors alike ample opportunities to engage in reflection and contemplation, ritual worship and organised programs to purify one's inner being and develop one's relationship with the Almighty (swt).

LADY MASUMAH (A)

BIRTH AND LINEAGE

Fatimah bint Musa ibn Jafar, popularly known as Fatimah al-Masumah (a) or Lady Masumah, is the daughter of the seventh Imam, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a) and Najma Khatun. She is also the sister of the eighth Imam, Imam al-Ridha (a). There is no specific mention of Lady Masumah's (a) birth date in early sources; however, later history books state that she was born on 1st of Dhul-Qada 173 AH/ 22nd March 790 AD, in Medina.

KNOWLEDGE

One of the qualities of Lady Masumah (a) was her considerable knowledge of the various Islamic sciences and the teachings and merits of the family of the Holy Prophet (s). It is reported that once a group of Shia entered Medina seeking answers from Imam al-Kadhim; however, the Imam was away from the city at the time. In his absence, Lady Masumah (a) wrote down the responses to their questions on a piece of paper and gave it to them. On their journey back, they unexpectedly encountered the Imam. When Imam al-Kadhim (a) saw the questions and the replies provided by Lady Masumah (a), he exclaimed, "May her

father be her sacrifice” repeating it three times. Even today, scholars frequently visit her shrine, seeking inspiration and guidance, and beseeching her to help them find solutions to their problems and questions.

NARRATIONS

As a narrator, Lady Masumah (a) has quoted several Hadith from previous Infallible Imams (a), most notably of which are: *Hadith al-Ghadir*, *Hadith al-Manzila*, and *hadith* concerning the love for Prophet Muhammad's Progeny (a), and the position of Imam Ali (a) and his followers.

IMMIGRATION TO IRAN AND ARRIVAL TO QUM

According to the author of the book ‘The History of Qum’, in the year 200 AH/ 815 AD, the Abbasid caliph, Mamun, summoned Imam al-Ridha (a) from Medina to Merv with the intention of appointing him as his successor. In 201 AH/ 816 AD, Lady Masumah (a) left Medina to join her brother in response to a letter she received from him. She prepared herself for the long journey and headed for Iran in a caravan with her relatives. However, upon their arrival in Saveh, a city near Qum, they were met with a bloody confrontation with enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt (a), resulting in the martyrdom of all her brothers and nephews. Witnessing this tragic scene, Lady Masumah (a) fell ill and ordered her servant to take her to the city of Qum.

Another historical account suggests that upon hearing of Lady Masumah's (a) illness, the people of Banu Sa'd decided to visit her and request her to come to Qum. Musa ibn Khazraj, a companion to Imam al-Ridha (a), was the first to do so. He went to her caravan and invited her to his house. According to some later history books, she arrived in Qum on 23rd Rabi' al-Awal 200 AH/23rd October

816 AD. Lady Masumah (a) stayed in Musa ibn Khazraj's house for seventeen days, devoting her time to worship and prayer. Today, the sanctuary where she prayed in Musa ibn Khazraj's house in Qum is a renowned site known as *Bayt al-Nur* (the house of light).

DEMISE

There is no explicit mention of the exact date of Lady Masumah's (a) demise in early sources; however, later historical accounts indicate that she passed away on 10th Rabi' al-Thani 201 AH/5th November 816 AD, at the age of 28. Some records also suggest the 12th of the same month (7th November). Following her passing, the *Shia* community organised an honourable funeral procession, during which her body was taken to a garden owned by Musa ibn Khazraj, known as Babilan, where the current shrine is now. Musa ibn Khazraj constructed a canopy over the grave, which remained until 256 AH/870 AD, when Zaynab, the daughter of Imam al-Jawad (a), visited her aunt's shrine and built the first dome over it.

HER MERITS & TITLE AL-MASUMAH

In traditional texts, it has been narrated that except for Imam al-Ridha (a), none of Imam al-Kadhim's children were at the spiritual level of Lady Masumah (a). Shaykh Abbas al-Qummi has expressed the opinion that Lady Masumah (a) holds the highest virtue and respect among the daughters of Imam Musa ibn Jafar (a). Other scholars, such as Imam Khumayni, have likened Lady Masumah's (a) position to that of Lady Fatimah al-Zahra (a) in a forty-four line poem.

Her most renowned title is al-Masumah, derived from a narration of Imam al-Ridha (a) which states, "Whoever visits the shrine of al-Masumah in Qum, it is as

if they have visited me.” Additionally, in another narration, she referred to herself as ‘al-Masumah, the sister of Imam al-Ridha (a)’.

According to certain narrations, Lady Masumah (s) has the power to intercede for people before Allah (swt) and Shia Muslims will enter heaven through her intercession. For instance, it is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a) that: “There will pass away in Qum a lady of my descendants known as Fatimah, by whose intercession our Shia followers will enter heaven.” Furthermore, her exalted position and proximity to Allah (swt) are mentioned in her *ziyarah* (visitation) text, where believers ask for her intercession.

MERITS OF VISITING LADY MASUMAH (A)

There are narrations from the Infallible Imams (a) indicating the merits of visiting the shrine of Lady Masumah (a). Imam al-Sadiq (a) is reported to have said: “Allah has a holy site which is Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad (s) has a holy site which is Medina, Imam Ali (a) has a holy site which is Kufa (Najaf) and we, the Ahl al-Bayt (a), have a holy site which is Qum.”

In another narration Imam al-Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying: “There will pass away in Qum a lady of my descendants known as Fatimah, by whose intercession our Shias will enter paradise.”

According to another narration, entering Paradise has been promised as the reward for visiting the shrine of Lady Masumah (a).

Imam al-Ridha (a) is reported to have said, “Whoever visits her, it is as if he has visited me” or in another account: “Whoever visits her will enter Paradise.” Imam al-Jawad (a) said: “Whoever visits the shrine of my aunt, Lady

Fatimah al-Masumah (a) in Qum, with the love and knowledge of her true position, will be among the inhabitants of the Paradise.”

OTHER FEATURES OF THE SHRINE

Some of the other key features of the *haram* include:

- **Graves of Scholars:** Many well known scholars are buried in the *haram*. This includes Ayatullah Burjerdi, Allamah Tabatabai, Shahid Mutahhari, Ayatullah Behjat, Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi and many more.
- **Classes:** The basement area hosts numerous classes for men, women, and children. These classes encompass Qur'an recitation, *hawzah* courses, Qur'an memorisation, and more. They are offered at various times throughout the week and cater to different levels of learning. Registration for these classes is normally done during specific times during the year at the main office also located in the basement. For more details and to register for classes, one can visit ghkarimeh.ir.
- **Functions:** Daily congregational prayers are conducted, as well as various religious programs throughout the week and on special occasions. This includes weekly programs on Tuesdays for *Dua Tawassul*, Thursdays for *Dua Kumayl* and *Ziyarah Jamia Kabeera*, and Fridays for *Dua Nudbah*. More information regarding programs and news can be obtained by visiting the *haram's* official website, <https://amfm.ir/>.
- **Banquet Hall:** The *haram* has a banquet hall in the basement which serves pilgrims lunch and dinner. Pilgrims can normally obtain tickets for this blessed food by making a donation at one of the donation offices.
- **Access:** The *haram* is open everyday, 24 hours a day.

Friday (Jumma) prayers are not held at the shrine, rather, they are performed at [Musallah Quds Mosque](#).

AKHLAQ CLASSES

One of the beautiful and prominent features of the *hawzah* is the tradition of attending lessons on ethics (*dars akhlaq*). These lessons are integral to the curriculum of every seminary student and are also open to the public. Led by knowledgeable and experienced scholars, *dars akhlaq* sessions delve into the teachings of Islam regarding moral conduct, character refinement, spiritual wayfaring and purification of the soul with emphasis on practical applications of ethical principles in daily life. These sessions cultivate a deeper understanding of Islamic ethics and encourage individuals to embody virtues such as honesty, kindness, humility, and compassion and to struggle on the path of attaining proximity to Allah (swt) through self-purification. Some of the commonly attended classes by renowned teachers are listed below:

Teacher	Location	Day	Time
Ustad Ali Ashraf Moayyadi	Ali Murtadha Mosque, Tawheed Boulevard, Alley 3	Saturdays & Sundays	After <i>dhuhr</i> <i>salaah</i>
Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Tahriri	Madrasah Imam Khumayni (ra), 15 Khordad Boulevard	Wednesdays	After <i>maghrib</i> <i>salaah</i>
Ustad Muhammad Ali Mujahidi	Burhan Institute, Safaiyyeh, Alley Mumtaz, Alley 3, Building No. 41	Tuesdays & Wednesdays	After <i>dhuhr</i> <i>salaah</i>
Ustad Muhammad Ridha Abidini*	Madrasah Thamin al-Aimmah, Somayyeh, Alley 11, Building No. 1	Wednesdays	After <i>maghrib</i> <i>salaah</i>
Ayatullah Ghulam Ridha Fayyazi	Imam Khumayni Hussainiyyah, Safaiyyeh	Wednesdays	After <i>maghrib</i> <i>salaah</i>

* Open for sisters to attend also

Those wishing to attend should confirm days and timings as these may change at short notice. Updated information can usually be found on the teacher's individual Eitaa channels.

THURSDAY NIGHT PROGRAMS

Initiated by some of the senior Western students during the 1990s, the Thursday Night Programs have become a beloved fixture, providing an opportunity for families to come together and build connections within the Western student community. These weekly gatherings typically include the recitation of *Dua Kumayl*, *museebah* (lamentations/eulogies), and an English lecture. At the end of the program, attendees enjoy dinner or light refreshments together. These programs are usually hosted in students' homes, but due to the growing number of participants, SIOS has become one of the main venues, with brothers gathering upstairs in the prayer hall and sisters downstairs in the library. Children are also welcome and have the freedom to play in the middle floor, although supervision may be limited. These Thursday Night Programs serve as a valuable platform for spiritual enrichment, community bonding, and intellectual exchange.

JAMKARAN MOSQUE

Jamkaran Mosque lies on the edge of the city of Qum, and was built by Hasan ibn Mathleh Jamakarani after reporting a unique encounter with the Twelfth Imam (a) on a Tuesday night. The mosque's architecture features a very large courtyard, prayer halls, and the famous well where pilgrims used to be able to drop written letters to Imam al-Mahdi (a).



Night view of Jamkaran Mosque

Throughout the year, thousands of Muslims visit the mosque to perform prayers and supplications, especially on special occasions such as the 15th

of Shaban and *Eid al-Ghadeer* where various celebrations take place including firework displays, distribution of food and drink and activities for children. On Tuesday nights (the busiest night of the week), programs normally begin after the *maghrib* and *isha* prayers commencing with a lecture and *Dua Tawassul*. In the mosque, it is recommended to recite a two-unit prayer for entering the mosque (as recommended for all mosques), and many recite a prayer known as the prayer of the Twelfth Imam (a), details of which can be found in the books of supplications. The mosque is also a popular destination for the recitation of *Dua Nudbah* after sunrise on Friday mornings.

More details about the Jamkaran can be found in a pamphlet published by the mosque which has been translated into English [here](#) and the official website, www.jamkaran.ir, can also be visited to find updated program details.

OTHER PLACES TO VISIT

★ Bayt al-Nur

[Bayt al-Nur](#), located about 10-15 mins walking distance from the holy shrine, was the house of Musa ibn Khazraj where Lady Masumah (a) stayed before her demise. Her place of prayer (mihrab) within the house is a frequent pilgrimage site and is known for the fulfilment of prayers and hajat.

★ Gulzar Shuhada

[Gulzar Shuhada](#) is a cemetery in which over 3000 martyrs are buried from the Iran-Iraq war fought between 1980 and 1988. It is a common visiting place for many locals and tourists to pay their respects, seek blessings and listen to some of the amazing life stories of these martyrs.

★ Khizr Mountain

[Khizr Mountain](#) (Kuh Khizr) is located 6km from the city centre. On top of the mountain is a mosque which houses the cave in which Prophet Khizr is believed to have prayed. It is a peaceful place to pray and to admire the panoramic views of the city.



View of Khizr Mountain overlooking surrounding areas

Ascending the mountain normally takes approx. 20 mins. Since the path leading to the top of the mountain has been recently upgraded and widened, even children and the elderly can safely and easily climb up .

★ Shaykhan Cemetery

[Shaykhan Cemetery](#) is an ancient cemetery located near the holy shrine of Lady Masumah (a). It memorialises the lives of six notable scholars of different historical periods. Currently, over six hundred grand religious figures and scholars are buried there including al-Mirza al-Qummi, Mirza Jawad Maliki Tabrizi and Ayatullah Fadil al-Tuni. A number of companions of the holy Imams are also buried there, including Zakariyya ibn Adam al-Ashari and Zakariyya ibn Idris who were companions of Imam al-Sadiq (a), Imam al-Kadhim (a), Imam al-Ridha (a) and Imam al-Jawad (a).

★ Imam Zadehs

There are many shrines throughout Iran, most of which house the graves of the revered children or descendants of the infallible Imams. These holy individuals are referred to as Imam Zadehs - literally, offspring of an Imam, and their

sanctuaries serve as important centres of pilgrimage and spiritual devotion. Within Qum itself, there are over twenty Imam Zadehs, some being more famous than others, including: 1) [Ahmed bin Qasim](#), grandson of Imam Sadiq (a), 2) [Musa al-Mubarqa'](#), the son of Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a) and 3) [Hamzah](#), grandson of Imam al-Kadhim (a). A detailed list of Imam Zadehs and their burial sites can be found [here](#).

FINANCE

- ◆ Currency
- ◆ Foreign Exchange
- ◆ Banking
- ◆ Expenses
- ◆ Income



CURRENCY

The official currency of Iran is the Iranian Rial (IRR). Whilst prices of goods are virtually always written in Rials, there is considerable confusion amongst those new to the country due to the widespread usage of an alternative called the Toman. Since the value of the Iranian Rial is so weak, and to avoid using so many zeros, locals will commonly drop a zero from the Rial figure and refer to it as the Toman. Therefore, 100,000 IRR = 10,000 Tomans. It becomes even more confusing when this same amount is also referred to as 10 Tomans! Ultimately, the context of the transaction and one's experience will help to understand what amount is intended.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Due to international sanctions and their impact on the economy, the Iranian currency is amongst the most volatile in the world. It has suffered from great bouts of devaluation since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and for this reason, many students prefer to exchange their foreign currency as and when needed rather than exchanging lump sums.

There are several currency exchange shops (*sarrafi*) near the *haram* of Lady Masumah (a) which are open during normal trading hours. Although there isn't much difference between the rates the different shops offer, it's worth looking around, especially if larger amounts are being exchanged. New regulations have meant that identification may be required before exchanging money in addition to restrictions on the amount which can be exchanged at any one time.

Exchange rates can vary from city to city with rates in Tehran tending to be better than the rates in Qum whereas the rates in Mashhad are usually slightly lower.

Tehran exchange rates can be checked online via websites such as www.bonbast.com or www.tgju.org. Latest rates in Qum can be obtained by directly calling the currency exchange shops or checking their social media channels where the daily rates are normally posted. Some *sarrafi*s will even provide a convenient home service, where they will visit the customer's residence to carry out the transaction. A short list of some of the most popular and reliable currency exchange rate shops in Qum is provided below.

Name	Address	Telephone Number	Social Media Channel
Markazi Exchange	Amin Boulevard	3293 5060	https://t.me/MARKAZIEX2
MTC Exchange	Summayeh, Corner of Shaheed Rajaei Street	3774 9095	https://t.me/mtcexchange
Amjadi Exchange	Eram Street, Opposite Gate 5 of the Haram of Lady Masumah (a)	0912 754 5316	—
Azimi Exchange	Eram Street, Opposite Gate 5 of the Haram of Lady Masumah (a)	0912 151 7220	—
		0912 151 7350	—

Newcomers should be aware that foreign currency in lower denominations or notes with visible defects will either be exchanged at a lower rate or may not be accepted at all. It is advisable for those intending to move to Iran to bring higher denomination notes, such as 50s and 100s, to avoid these issues.

Due to international sanctions, foreign credit and debit cards will not be accepted in Iran!

Another important point to consider is the difference between official government exchange rates and free-market exchange rates. The official exchange rates are typically significantly lower and primarily used for imports and exports, whereas the free-market rates are those offered by money exchangers in shops and streets.

BANKING

As with any country, Iran has a banking industry to handle customers' cash and offers various financial services. There are approximately 30 banks and 5 credit institutions, each having numerous branches. Due to the depreciation of the Iranian Rial, using cash is becoming increasingly uncommon so opening a bank account is more or less a necessity. Foreigners with a valid residence permit are able to open accounts but are limited in the services they can receive. Services typically available to most customers include:

- Current/Checking Accounts
- Savings/Term Deposit Accounts
- Debit Cards
- Internet Banking
- Mobile Banking
- Telephone Banking

The following will be needed when opening a bank account:

1. Passport with residence permit
2. Mobile phone with registered SIM card
3. Full address including postcode
4. Faragir Code (Fida Code)

The current account will allow instant access to the funds in the account and a debit card is normally issued to make purchases at shops and online. Since the banking system of the Islamic Republic is supposed to be shariah compliant, interest is not applicable, however, a 'provisional profit' rate (*sood*) is applied instead. Banks typically use deposits to invest in a variety of assets, businesses and joint-ventures and part of the profits from these investments are then passed to customers in the form of a provisional profit rate.

Savings accounts offer higher provisional profit rates but the principal deposit is locked for the term of the account and will incur fees in order to access it earlier. The profit from these accounts is normally paid on a monthly basis and deposited into a different current account. Terms for savings accounts vary from 6-months

to 5-years with the longer terms yielding the highest profits. Caution should be exercised however – especially when considering investing in the long-term savings accounts – since the Iranian currency can fluctuate and one’s principal deposit may end up being worth less at the end of the term than what one invested. There is a difference of opinion amongst the scholars regarding the validity of such a system so individuals are advised to refer to their own *marja’s* rulings for further clarification.

Name of Bank	Website	Ownership (State/Non-State)	Internet Banking	Mobile Banking
Melli	www.bmi.ir	State	✗	✗
Saderat	www.bsi.ir	Non-State	✓	✓
Mellat	www.bankmellat.ir	Non-State	✓	✓
Tejarat	www.tejaratbank.ir	Non-State	✓	✓
Sepah	www.banksepah.ir	State	✓	✓
Parsian	www.parsian-bank.ir	Non-State	✗	✗
EN Bank	www.enbank.ir	Non-State	✓	✓
Shahr	www.shahr-bank.ir	Non-State	✓	✗
Ayandeh	www.ba24.ir	Non-State	✗	✗
Day	www.bank-day.ir	Non-State	✓	✓

Internet and mobile banking are very common in Iran, providing users with convenient access to a wide range of banking services, including balance inquiries, fund transfers, and various transactions, without the need to physically visit a bank

branch. To set up these services, users typically require a mobile telephone number, although it is worth noting that not all banks offer these services to foreigners. Branches of these banks are scattered throughout the city, with the majority having their main branch located on [Amin Boulevard](#).

Foreign currency accounts are also available in some Iranian banks. There are both advantages and disadvantages for foreigners to open such accounts. On the positive side, these accounts are a safe way of holding funds in foreign currencies hence providing a hedge against local currency fluctuations. However, there are some drawbacks to consider. One disadvantage is the limited availability of foreign currency ATMs in Iran, which may make accessing funds more challenging. Although rare, it may not be possible to withdraw the full amount one requires even within the branch due to economic or political circumstances.

EXPENSES

Living and studying in Qum naturally involves various expenses, including accommodation, daily necessities, transport and recreational activities. Given the importance of this aspect for potential students and the concerns they have, this topic will be dealt with in some depth; however, it goes without saying that the figures quoted here heavily depend on individual circumstances and lifestyle choices. Similarly, as *hawzah* students, it is important to remember that we do not see ourselves as solely responsible for meeting these expenses; rather it is Allah (swt) who is the ultimate Provider and Sustainer and He (swt) opens the doors of blessings and sustenance for those who sincerely strive for Him. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide general ideas of living costs so students can budget accordingly, rather than to discourage them from pursuing the path of knowledge in the holy city.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation constitutes a significant portion of a married student's budget whereas single students are normally provided free accommodation in the *hawzah* dormitory. More detailed information regarding accommodation can be found in the next chapter; however, as a summary, there are three main expenses one should be aware of: the monthly rent, the security deposit and the setting-up costs. As for the monthly rent and security deposit, the table gives some average prices.

Size (m ²)	No. of Bedrooms	Av. Monthly Rent (\$)	Av. Security Deposit (\$)
75 - 80	1	100 - 120	5,000
100 - 110	2	120 - 150	6,000
150 - 160	3	220 - 250	12,000

Utilities such as electricity, water, and gas are usually additional expenses and will vary based on the season but would average around \$5 to \$10 per month.

In terms of initial setup expenses, as most properties are unfurnished, the student will need to purchase various items to make the property habitable, although again, the items required will differ greatly depending on individual circumstances.

In addition to these items, naturally, there will be numerous other lower value essentials that may need to be purchased such as kitchenware and linen etc.

ITEM	AVERAGE PRICE (\$)		
	Second-Hand	New (Budget Range)	New (High-End)
Fridge/Freezer	100	350	700
Stove/Oven	75	200	400
Washing Machine	80	225	350
Double Mattress	20	50	300
Single Mattress	15	30	200
Carpet (per m ²)	-	1.50	5
Persian Rug (12m ²)	40	80	250
Vacuum Cleaner	40	75	175
Television (43")	100	150	225
Sofa Set	50	250	1000

A List of Commonly Purchased Items to Furnish a Property

TRANSPORT

Transportation in Qum primarily consists of taxis, buses, and private vehicles. Overall, taxi and bus fares are relatively affordable, making it convenient for students to navigate the city and access various amenities, religious sites and *hawzahs*.

The fare for private taxis within the city varies depending on the distance travelled and the time of day. To give a general idea, the cost of a taxi from the *haram* of Lady Masumah (a) to Jamkaran mosque (approx. 7km) would cost between \$0.60 - \$1 in mid-morning but may be 20 - 25% more expensive in the evening where traffic is greater.

Shared cabs and buses are much cheaper with a single journey costing up to a maximum of \$0.30 and \$0.10 respectively.

Primary expenses for those with personal vehicles include maintenance, which can vary significantly depending on the work required, and petrol, which is extremely cheap at \$0.05 per litre.

RECREATION

A variety of recreational activities are available in Qum to suit different budgets and readers can refer to the chapter on fitness and recreation for more details.

The cost of sports and fitness activities varies depending on the type of activity but typically ranges from \$0.50 to \$3 per session per person.

Dining out at restaurants and cafes with friends and family is a popular pastime, although it can become expensive with frequent visits with the average cost of a meal ranging from \$4 to \$6 per person.

For those looking to engage in activities without significant financial burden, options include leisurely strolls through parks and gardens, picnics, visiting historical sites such as mosques, Imam Zadehs, Khizr mountain, and exploring the numerous libraries available in the city.

GROCERIES & HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Grocery expenses will vary depending on the size of the family, cooking & eating habits, personal preferences and budget. A conservative estimate for monthly groceries ranges from \$150 to \$200 for a family of four. A price list of common items is provided below.

Item	Price (\$)	Item	Price (\$)	Item	Price (\$)
Meat (1kg)	8.50	Lentils (900g)	1.50	Frozen Burger (x4)	3.00
Mince Meat (1kg)	6.75	Red Beans (900g)	2.10	Chicken Schnitzel (500g)	3.00
Whole Chicken (1.5kg)	2.00	Split Pea (900g)	1.70	Chicken Nuggets (300g)	1.50
Chicken Breast (900g)	2.25	Chick Pea (900g)	1.70	Pizza (450g)	2.50
Fish Filet (500g)	5.00	Apples (1kg)	1.10	Frozen Sweetcorn (400g)	1.00
Canned Tuna (180g)	1.40	Oranges (1kg)	0.75	Frozen Peas (400g)	0.75
White Sliced Bread (560g)	0.75	Bananas (1kg)	1.50	Water (6 x 1.5 Litre)	0.75
Indian Rice (1kg)	0.80	Cucumber (1kg)	0.75	Soft Drink (1.5 Litre)	0.50
White Flour (1kg)	0.60	Tomatoes (1kg)	0.75	Tea (100 bags)	2.00
Spaghetti (500g)	0.45	Potatoes (1kg)	0.50	Instant Coffee (100g)	3.00
Pasta (500g)	0.45	Onions (1kg)	0.75	Toilet Roll (x8)	1.60
Instant Noodles (77g)	0.20	Carrots (1kg)	0.50	Facial Tissue (250 Sheets)	0.75
Eggs (x15)	1.00	Jam (310g)	1.00	Bleach (1 Litre)	0.30
Sunflower Oil (1.5 Litre)	1.45	Chocolate Spread (330g)	2.00	Toilet Cleaner (1 Litre)	0.70
Sugar (1kg)	0.8	Peanut Butter (450g)	2.50	Dishwashing Liquid (1kg)	0.70
Tomato Paste (800g)	0.8	Cereal (300g)	1.25	Laundry Powder (4kg)	3.50
Milk (1 Litre)	0.50	Crisps (60g)	0.30	Cleaning Spray (750ml)	0.75
Yoghurt (900g)	0.70	Cake (50g)	0.20	Shampoo (750ml)	1.20
Butter (100g)	0.50	Digestive Biscuits (100g)	0.20	Soap Bar (90g)	0.25
Cream (200g)	0.40	Chocolate Bar (40g)	0.35	Toothpaste (75ml)	0.90
Cream Cheese (350g)	1.00	Jelly Sweets (90g)	0.60	Dental Floss (50m)	0.75
Sliced Cheese (x10)	1.25	Peanuts (15g)	0.25	Deodorant Spray (150ml)	1.20

TUITION FEES

SIOS, similar to almost all other *hawzahs* in Qum, upholds the noble Islamic tradition of providing education gratis (free of charge) for full-time registered students. This means there are no tuition fees for the entire duration of study. However, students will likely incur related expenses such as textbooks, other course material, stationary etc.

There are some other *hawzahs* and institutes which provide part-time courses that may involve paying fees.

SCHOOLING

Students coming to Qum with their families may face the additional expense of their children's school fees.

Primary, secondary, and high schools in Iran are categorised as either governmental or non-governmental (private). Governmental schools are free, but they often have drawbacks such as large class sizes, less experienced teachers, limited facilities, and a lack of extracurricular activities. As a result, many parents opt for non-governmental schools, which claim to address these disadvantages, albeit at a financial cost. Yearly school fees vary based on the school, location, and grade, but average as follows:

School Grade	Yearly Fees (\$)/child
1 - 6	200 - 300
7 - 9	300 - 500
10 - 12	500 - 1000

In addition to these fees, one should also take into account the cost of transport to and from the school. This is usually arranged by the school and costs from \$20 - \$40 per month per child.

SUMMARY

The items discussed above represent only some of the major expenses a student may encounter. It is important to note that there will be other miscellaneous expenses, such as medical fees, house maintenance etc... which should also be taken into consideration.

Overall, considering the above estimates, the total monthly expenses for a family of four (excluding initial set-up costs, security deposit and school fees) can range from \$400 to \$600 or more, depending on individual circumstances and lifestyle choices. While *hawzah* students should plan ahead and budget carefully to manage their finances, being constantly mindful of the verse from the holy Qur'an: "... and put your trust in Allah, for Allah suffices as trustee" (4:81), can bring peace in knowing that their sustenance is ultimately in Allah's hands.

INCOME

Hawzah students potentially face unique financial challenges as they dedicate their time to studies and spiritual growth. The primary goal of a seminary student is to immerse himself in the pursuit of knowledge, so highly esteemed in Islamic tradition; however, the question of how students support themselves financially often arises.

While it may be tempting for students to seek employment or continue their previous occupation in some form or another, this is not encouraged at all as it is crucial for them to prioritise their education above all else. Working while studying can detract from the time and energy needed to excel in one's studies and spiritual growth. Moreover, since a student's time in the holy city of Qum is usually limited, one should take advantage of the numerous opportunities the

seminary environment provides to focus solely on their education and self-development.

Various sources of financial support may be available to seminary students rather than relying on employment as a primary means of income, such as:

Stipends (*shahriah*): A stipend is a fixed, regular sum paid to seminary students to help them meet their cost of living. They are usually provided by *hawzahs*, *marja's* offices, institutions, or individual benefactors. These stipends are typically very modest (\$20 - \$50/month) and will vary depending on the institution and the student's level of study.

Sponsorships: Sponsorships are a common source of income for seminary students. These sponsorships can be from individuals, families, or community organisations who support the student's education financially and may cover living expenses or provide additional support for books, study materials, and other educational needs. Students should ideally aim to seek sponsors from their home countries before travelling to Qum but should be aware that some sponsorships come with certain expectations, either academically or in terms of future commitments and service.

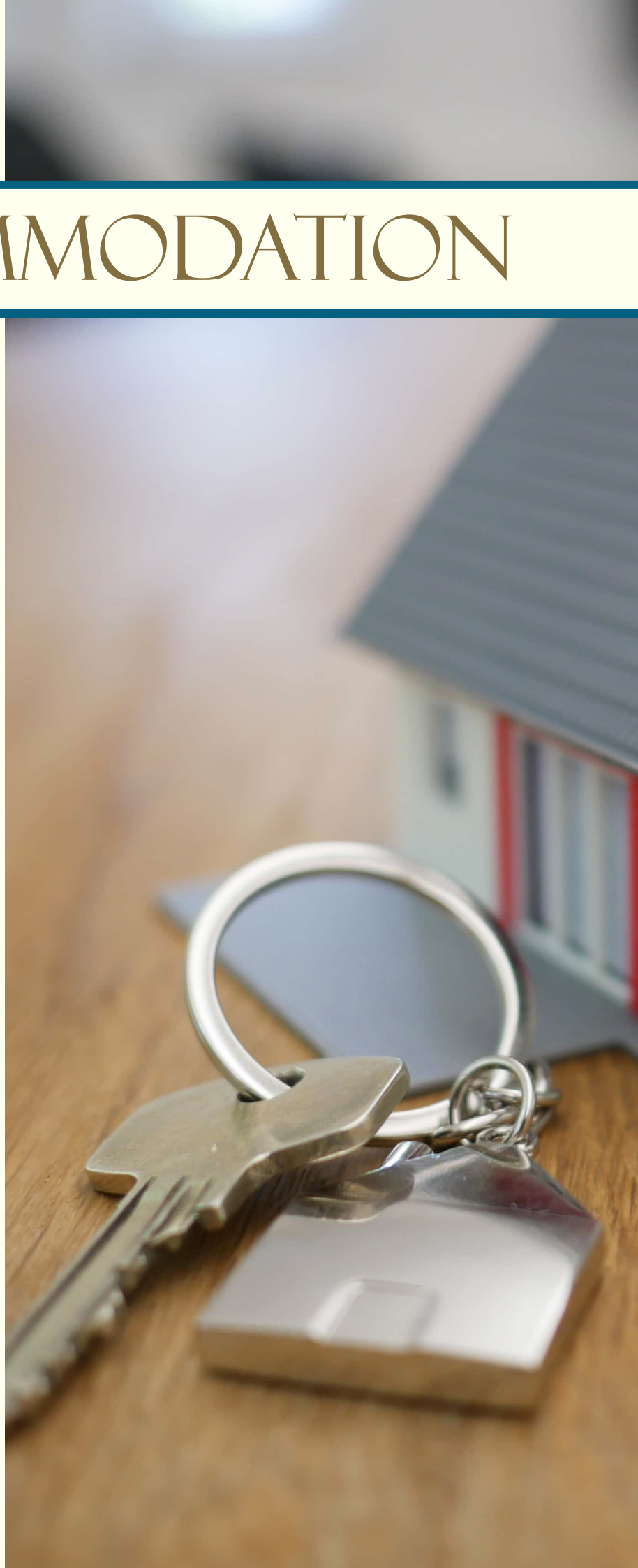
Grants and Scholarships: Some seminary students may receive grants and scholarships to support their education. These financial aids normally come from religious foundations, governmental organisations, charities or individuals. They are awarded based on academic merit, financial need, or both; however, they may not be a stable source of funding and are often received as one-off payments.

In conclusion, while the financial situation of seminary students may be challenging, there are several sources of income available to support their

education. Stipends, sponsorships, grants, and scholarships play an important role in alleviating financial burdens and allow students to focus on their studies. However, in cases where these resources are limited or insufficient to cover living expenses, students may need to explore other avenues of income to support themselves, preferably in areas which would facilitate a student's academic growth or projects related to learning, such as translation work, editing or teaching. Additionally, many students utilise their summer breaks to return to their home countries to seek employment in order to earn enough to cover their expenses for the following academic year.

ACCOMMODATION

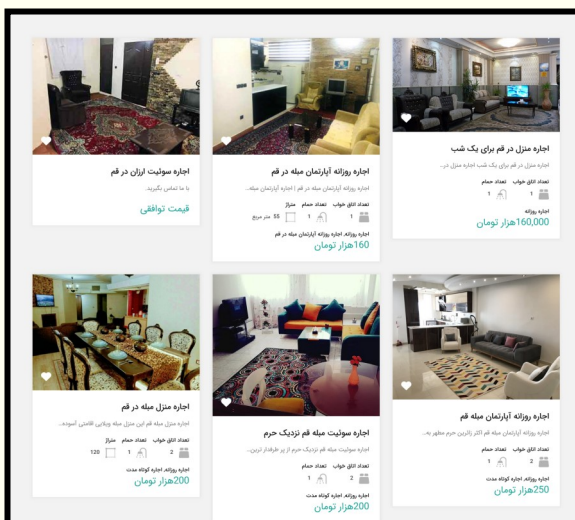
- ◆ Initial Stay
- ◆ Dormitories
- ◆ Renting
- ◆ Purchasing
- ◆ Utility Bills
- ◆ House-Hunting
- ◆ Repairs and Maintenance



INITIAL STAY

While single students will usually have the option to stay in the dormitory upon arrival, students arriving with their families should plan ahead for a smoother transition.

Staying at a hotel is often considered one of the most hassle-free options when arriving in Qum. However, it is important to note that this convenience comes with a higher price tag, especially since it can take several weeks to find a longer-term accommodation solution and settle down. Qum has a range of hotels with varying ratings and qualities, most of which are conveniently located near the *haram*. Generally, the check-in time for hotels is 2pm, and check-out is at 12pm. Hotel prices fluctuate depending on the season and can range from \$15 – \$40 per person, per night. Some popular hotels include: [Qum International](#), [Karimeh](#), [Az-Zahraa](#), [Mahsan](#), [Khorshid](#) and [Sana](#).



Sample of hostel listings on qomsuite.com

An affordable alternative to hotels is staying in a hostel (*musafir khane*) that offer more basic amenities. While these hostels provide private rooms, it is important to note that the showers and washrooms may be shared with other guests. Qum has numerous hostels scattered throughout the area, with prices starting from around \$3 per person, per night.

Additionally, suites can be hired for very reasonable prices using websites such as [qomsuite.com](#).

Another very useful option, especially during the summer months, is to rent out an already furnished house of another student who has returned to their home

country for the holidays. Many students are willing to sublet their homes for temporary accommodation, both to assist newcomers and for security reasons, ensuring that their houses are not left unoccupied for an extended period of time.

DORMITORIES

Most seminaries will have a furnished dormitory with basic amenities for single students and is normally provided free of charge. The dormitories are usually located on or near the seminary premises to allow easy access to classes, libraries, and other facilities.

Rooms will typically be shared by two to four students, each with their own bed and wardrobe to store their personal belongings. The dormitories also have kitchen facilities for students to prepare their own food, although lunch and dinner are normally provided by the seminary on weekdays.



Photos from the SIOS Dormitory

RENTING

Although some seminaries provide housing for married couples and families, many students will need to find their own accommodation. Renting a place is the most common option for families staying in Qum.

TYPES OF HOUSING

There are various housing options available in Qum; however, they would typically fall into one of four categories:

★ Villas

A traditional two-three storey house with each floor normally designed into a separate apartment. These apartments normally have one or two bedrooms and a large living room. The main entrance usually leads to a tiled front garden normally reserved for use by those living on the ground floor but may also be used for parking or storing bikes, strollers etc... by other residents too depending on the terms of the contract.



A Typical Villa Style House

★ Apartment

A typical, modern apartment is usually in a block of three or more floors. Most apartment blocks will have allocated parking for each apartment and sometimes even a private storage room. Apartments tend to be more expensive than renting a villa as they are generally newer builds and more sought after.

★ Duplex

A home with two floors, usually a ground floor and another one above it, designed as one unit. The living room, kitchen and washroom are located on the lower floor with the bedrooms in the upper floor. Unfortunately, these larger houses are very rare and, if found, can be extremely expensive.

★ Dar Bast

For those with larger families, one option is to rent out a whole villa (referred to as *dar bast*). This isn't always ideal since each floor is designed to be a separate unit, however, it is sometimes the only choice since landlords are often reluctant to rent out single apartments to families of greater than 3-4 people.

FURNISHED VS UNFURNISHED

Almost without exception, long-term rental properties are provided unfurnished. This means the property will be handed over to the tenant completely bare - no furniture, appliances or carpets and, quite often, even lighting fixtures and curtains aren't included. Furnished properties are available, however, they are normally for very short-term (ranging from a few days up to one month), smaller and considerably more expensive than unfurnished properties.

COST

Renting a house or apartment in Iran can be quite different from what one might be accustomed to in western countries. Understanding the system of rental payments (*ijareh*) and security deposits (*rahn*) is important to get a good idea of the cost of accommodation as rental listings will almost certainly mention both figures.

Security deposits in the west are typically the same amount as the monthly rent and are intended to be used to pay for damages or loss of property that may have occurred during the tenancy period. In Iran, however, the security deposit amount can vary significantly, ranging from twice the annual rent to a staggering 1/5th of the property's total value! Landlords commonly utilise these security deposits to invest in businesses, properties or profit-gaining bank accounts to boost their own income.

It is also important to be aware of the inversely proportional relationship between the monthly rent and the security deposit as these can be negotiated at the beginning of the tenancy. Roughly speaking, for every \$20 increase in monthly rent, the security deposit amount would decrease by \$1000, and vice versa. For example, if a rental listing was seen for \$200 per month and \$5,000 security deposit, this would be equivalent to the variations in the table. It is worth noting however, that not all landlords may be willing to negotiate these amounts, especially if significant changes are requested.

Monthly Rent	Security Deposit
\$200	\$5000
\$220 →	\$4000
\$240 →	\$3000
\$180 →	\$6000
\$160 →	\$7000

While it is possible to find properties that can be rented solely by paying a large security deposit without any monthly rent (referred to as *rahn kaamil* literally ‘full security deposit’), the concept of renting without any security deposit at all is virtually unheard of in Iran. Although the ‘full security deposit’ option may sound attractive, one should be aware of the following:

- 1) The security deposit must be paid in local currency only and will be returned likewise. Since the Iranian currency is prone to fluctuation (normally devaluation), one's deposit may end up being worth less at the end of the tenancy than it was at the beginning.

- 2) Since landlords regularly use security deposits for investment purposes, it is often more difficult to recoup the full amount immediately, especially when large sums are involved. Landlords generally rely on the next tenant to pay their deposit before refunding the previous tenant. This sounds good in theory but practically a new tenant isn't always found before the end of the previous tenancy causing delays in retrieving the money.
- 3) There is a difference of opinion amongst the scholars regarding the validity of such a rental contract where there is no (or minimal) monthly rent. Those interested are advised to refer to their own *marja* for further clarification.

Rent prices are influenced by several variables such as the type of housing, property size, number of bedrooms, and location. Due to these numerous factors, providing precise and detailed cost estimates can be challenging. However, to obtain a general understanding of average prices, the following table can be helpful.

Size (m ²)	Number of Bedrooms	Average Monthly Rent (\$)	Average Security Deposit (\$)
75 - 80	1	100 - 120	5,000
100 - 110	2	120 - 150	6,000
150 - 160	3	220 - 250	12,000

Although there are laws and regulations governing the maximum amount a landlord can legitimately raise rental prices upon renewal (capped at 20%), practically, they are not adhered to and many landlords increase the rent by far more, sometimes even over 100%. However, these increases are in local currency and are rarely reflected as much in the equivalent foreign currency.

PURCHASING

With the average price per square meter for an apartment ranging from \$800-\$1000, purchasing a property in Qum can be a good investment for those looking to stay long-term. However, such a significant decision should be discussed exhaustively with friends, family, teachers and fellow students as it is not a suitable option for many students.

There are a number of financial and legal regulations foreigners need to be aware of before considering buying property in Iran and such discussions are best had face-to-face with experienced professionals. Some useful English-speaking contacts who can provide assistance in this field are listed below.

Name	Phone Number	E-Mail Address
Seyed Amir Bassam	+98 912 435 3931	seyedamirbassam@gmail.com
Mujahid Noorani	+98 933 073 4785	mmujahid.n@gmail.com
Farman Ali	+98 902 372 6082	ali.realtor110@gmail.com

UTILITY BILLS

Common utility services in Iran include electricity, gas, and water. Many homes also have a landline connection which can be used for making calls and ADSL or fibre optic internet subscriptions. Bills are not included in the rental payments and the tenant is required to pay these separately.

The billing frequency is not fixed, but generally does not exceed two or three months. Unlike in many other countries, if the bill is not paid immediately, the balance will be automatically transferred to the following bill and only when the amount due is deemed too high are warnings sent and the supply cut off.

Recent changes in the system have eliminated paper bills. Instead, occupants are now notified of their dues through SMS text messages. To ensure receipt of these notifications, it is essential to register one's mobile number with the relevant utility provider, which can usually be done through their website, SMS, telephone, or by visiting a local 'Government Counter Office' (*daftar peeshkhan dawlat*) which are located throughout the city and provide various utility and postal services. Bills can be paid easily using banking apps or third party payment platforms such as Digipay or Asan Pardakht (see Miscellaneous chapter for more details on Apps). If these methods are not possible, one can pay at an ATM or by cash at one of the government counter offices.

Meter readings are typically conducted by utility provider representatives who visit the building and request access to obtain accurate readings. As the meters are usually situated in a shared area of the building or the front garden, it is uncommon for them to need entry into private residences. In the event a meter reader cannot access the meter for any reason, the occupant may need to provide meter readings to the utility provider themselves, either by telephone or SMS.

SHARED BILLS

Apartments in an apartment building will have separate meters for each of the utility services, however, in older buildings such as villas, the meter for any one utility may be shared between all or some of the residents. In such a situation, the bill is divided equally, either between: a) the number of floors consisting of separate units, or b) the number of residents. For example, if a villa consisted of three floors (each with a separate unit) and the electricity bill was \$15, the bills could be divided as:

Division by Floors		Division by Residents	
Floor 1	\$5.00	Floor 1 (2 residents)	$(\$15 \div 10 \text{ residents}) \times 2 = \3.00
Floor 2	\$5.00	Floor 2 (5 residents)	$(\$15 \div 10 \text{ residents}) \times 5 = \7.50
Floor 3	\$5.00	Floor 3 (3 residents)	$(\$15 \div 10 \text{ residents}) \times 3 = \4.50
3 Floors	\$15.00	10 residents	\$15.00

HOUSE-HUNTING

Finding suitable accommodation is a laborious, time-consuming and often a very frustrating process. One effective way to begin the search is through referrals from contacts one may already have in Qum, even before arriving. These contacts can often recommend suitable housing or assist in finding a home based on individual requirements.

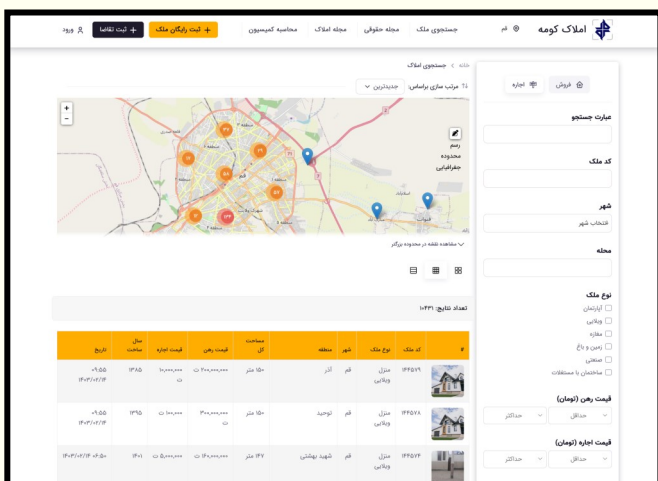
Estate agents, commonly referred to as *bunghas*, are prevalent in most neighbourhoods. They maintain records of properties available for sale or rent in the local area and facilitate connections between buyers and sellers or landlords and tenants, ultimately finalising contracts between the two parties. However, these records are typically kept manually and may not always be up-to-date. The information provided about available properties is often minimal, only including the monthly rent, security deposit amount, number of bedrooms, and location. Further details are usually only provided upon visiting the property itself.

Most estate agents do not allow individuals to browse through all available properties themselves. Instead, they prefer to be informed of the individual's requirements and budget, after which they will select what they believe is a suitable match. Additionally, estate agents typically schedule viewings for one property at a time rather than providing a selection of properties to view all

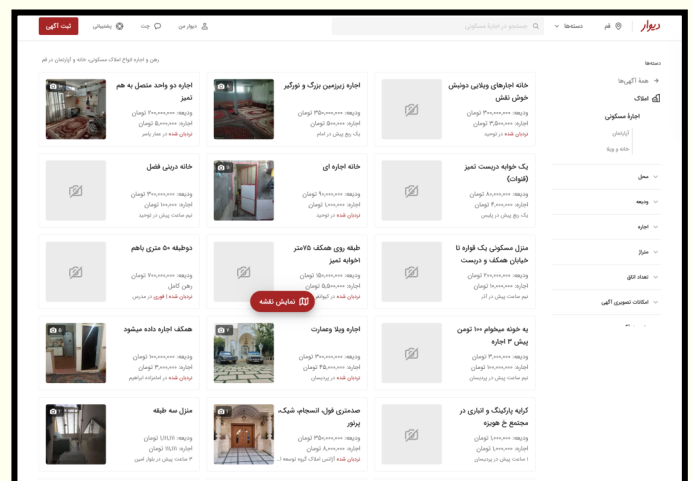
together. This approach can consume significant time and energy and requires a great deal of patience.

When inquiring about rental properties, one of the first questions estate agents often ask is, “how many people are in your family?” Unfortunately, there is a prevailing culture among Iranian landlords to limit the number of occupants, possibly due to concerns about noise levels or the risk of property damage. This attitude makes it challenging for families of four or more to find suitable rental properties, and they are often turned away by estate agents, leaving them disappointed.

To avoid the hassle of visiting individual estate agents in different areas, people are increasingly turning to the internet to find rental properties. The online option offers advanced search functions, greater property details and often even photos for viewing, making the online option much easier and faster to find the right accommodation. Since online estate agents are relatively new, there are limited options available. Two main online estate agents include [Kolbeh](#) and [Koomeh](#).



Sample of rental listings on Koomeh



Sample of classifieds on Divar

Alternatively, individuals can use online classifieds to find properties, such as those listed on [Divar](#) or [Sheypoor](#). With online classifieds, individuals need to contact the landlord directly and arrange viewings themselves.

No matter which of the above options is chosen to find housing, it is essential to have a tenancy agreement drafted and signed by both parties. Typically, this process takes place at an estate agent's office, where a fee of \$25 - \$50 is charged (which should be divided between both parties).

While some landlords may offer to draft the agreement themselves to avoid the agent fee, it is advisable to use the services of a professional to prevent potential complications in the event of a dispute. Particularly for newcomers, it is recommended to bring along someone experienced and fluent in the local language to negotiate the terms of the tenancy.

While standard tenancy agreements do not vary significantly, there is an option to include special clauses if necessary. Tenants should thoroughly review the agreement to understand their rights and responsibilities before signing any documents.

REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

Once suitable accommodation has been secured and the family has settled in, it is likely there will be situations where items get damaged, stop working properly or break down altogether. Unlike in many western countries where the landlord is responsible for most home repairs, in Iran, it is the tenant who is primarily responsible. This means that even assets belonging to the property are expected to be repaired and maintained by the tenant. Common issues that arise include: gas boiler problems, water cooler servicing, kitchen appliance repair, malfunctional water pump, leaking toilets and pest infestations. The good news, however, is that there is no shortage of plumbers, electricians and handymen ready to take on most jobs. To help in this regard, a list of some professionals who have been recommended by fellow students is provided below.

Name	Telephone Number	Type of Work
Agha Wahidy	0912 552 0360	Handyman
Agha Muradi	0912 748 3495	Handyman
Agha Ali Khudabande Loo	0919 359 1282	Handyman
Agha Hussein Muradi	0910 204 0042	Handyman/Appliance Repair
Agha Amir Khoram	0912 451 6881	Handyman/Plumbing
Agha Ali	0919 666 5824	Plumbing
Agha Hadi Shahmir Zaloo	0919 250 7835	Plumbing
Agha Muhammad Ibrahim	0912 252 0174	Plumbing
Agha Asani	0919 154 9645	Water Pump
Agha Kirmani	0919 252 1311	Water Pump/Electrical
Agha Taqawi	0912 553 4381	Central Heating
Agha Abulfazl Yahyai	0912 853 9183	Central Heating
Agha Ibrahim	0912 553 1466	Air Conditioning
Agha Hussein Khalaj	0912 552 1913	Electrical
Agha Mahdi	0912 748 0197	Electrical
Agha Murtaza Pourrajabali	0919 198 6273	Appliance Repair
Agha Sanaei	0912 078 0986	Pest Control

Alongside this directory of local tradesmen, there are home service apps available which connect users with various professionals or providers offering domestic services, repairs and maintenance. These apps typically allow users to request and schedule services, browse through service providers, and facilitate transactions.

One such popular, multi-city app is called [Sanjak](#) which covers a broad spectrum of services, including cleaning, plumbing, IT services, removals, and many more. Users select the desired service from the listed categories and enter some basic details. Once their service requirements have been submitted, they receive quotes from multiple professionals allowing them to compare prices and choose the best fit for their needs. Another similar app is called [Amyar 24](#), which – while not as streamlined and user-friendly as Sanjak – is specific to the city of Qum only.



LOCAL TRANSPORT

- ◆ Taxis
- ◆ Buses
- ◆ Motorbikes
- ◆ Driving in Iran



TAXIS

Taxis play a vital role in the transportation system of Qum, offering convenient and affordable travel options for residents and visitors alike. As one of the largest cities in Iran, Qum experiences a high volume of traffic, making taxis a popular choice for getting around the city easily. There are two main types of taxis; private (*dar bast*, literally ‘closed door’) or shared, which, as the name suggests, is a cab one shares with other people, much like carpooling.

PRIVATE TAXIS

★ Yellow Cabs

These taxis stand out for their distinctive yellow colour and are commonly found near the shrine. They are generally considered reliable as they must be registered to operate, although they tend to be pricier compared to other options. One significant advantage of yellow cabs is their license to access restricted roads, allowing them to transport passengers closer to their destination or within a shorter timeframe. Additionally, drivers of these cabs typically possess good knowledge of the city's roads and can navigate to the destination competently.

Taxi fares in Qum are generally affordable, especially when compared to Western countries. However, it's essential for passengers to familiarise themselves with the local pricing system to avoid overpaying. Unlike in some cities where taxis use meters, fares in Qum are typically negotiated upfront. It's customary to agree on a price with the driver before starting the journey, and passengers should be prepared to haggle to ensure a fair rate.



A Typical Yellow Radio Taxi

★ Radio Taxis

Similar to yellow cabs, these taxis are registered and can be summoned by dialling 133 from any landline or mobile. The operator will request the pickup and destination addresses and provide an approximate waiting time. Upon arrival, the driver typically signals by honking the horn. With these taxis however, the driver will inform the passenger of the fare upon arrival at the destination. Women have the option of calling an all-women radio taxi by dialling 321 000. The operator and the driver of the taxi will both be female, although the waiting times are usually longer.

★ Local Telephone Taxis

Every area in Qum has several taxi agencies, each operating between two and four private cars. Residents can register with these agencies by providing their address and telephone number, after which a customer number (*ishtirak*) is assigned. Similar to Radio Taxis, the operator will request the destination addresses (default pickup address would be the one registered) and provide an approximate waiting time. However, during peak hours, it can be challenging to secure a cab and one may experience longer waiting times.

★ Taxi Apps

One of the most common and convenient ways to secure a more affordable cab nowadays is through ride-hailing services. Several apps similar to Uber are available, with [Snapp](#) and [Tapsi](#) being the most common. The advantages of these apps include the ability to know the price in advance and thereby, avoid haggling with the driver. Additionally, users have several additional options such as adding second destinations or arranging return journeys. However, it's important to input the origin and destination accurately to ensure the driver knows where to go. Credit can be added to the app account in advance through a bank card, allowing users to pay the driver without the need for cash on hand.

★ Unmarked Vehicles

In addition to the above options, some individuals may offer rides in unmarked cars. However, these options are generally less reliable and potentially less safe — especially for women traveling alone — as they may not be licensed or regulated. Additionally, some drivers may offer rides as ‘*salawati*’ which means free with a request to recite *salawat* or other prayers for the driver. This is often done with the intention of performing a good deed, and since the driver is likely heading in the general direction of the destination anyway.

SHARED TAXIS

Shared taxis, known locally as *taxi khutoot* (route taxis), are a popular mode of transportation in Qum. These taxis typically consist of small cars and operate on fixed or semi-fixed routes without timetables, but instead departing when all or most seats are filled. Passengers share the taxi with others who are traveling in the same direction, making it a cost-effective option for short to medium distance travel.

The process of using a shared taxi is straightforward. Passengers can wait at designated taxi stands, usually located near busy intersections or transportation hubs, where shared taxis regularly pass by. Alternatively, they can flag down a passing shared taxi along its route as the driver can stop anywhere along the way to drop off or pick up additional passengers. Shared taxis operate on fixed fares, which are lower than those of private taxis but higher than public buses (around 20 cents per single journey). Payment is normally made in cash directly to the driver any time before reaching, or at the destination.

Shared taxis offer several advantages. They provide a relatively quick and convenient means of transportation, as they follow certain routes and can pick up

and drop off passengers at any location along the way. They also tend to be faster than public buses since they do not make frequent stops.

However, there are also some drawbacks to consider. Shared taxis can become full, especially during peak hours, which may not be suitable for passengers who prefer more personal space. They are also used by all members of society which means men and women may end up sitting beside each other. Additionally, the fixed routes may not always align perfectly with passengers' destinations, requiring some walking or additional transportation to reach final destinations. Despite these limitations, shared taxis remain a popular choice for many students due to their affordability, convenience, and accessibility.

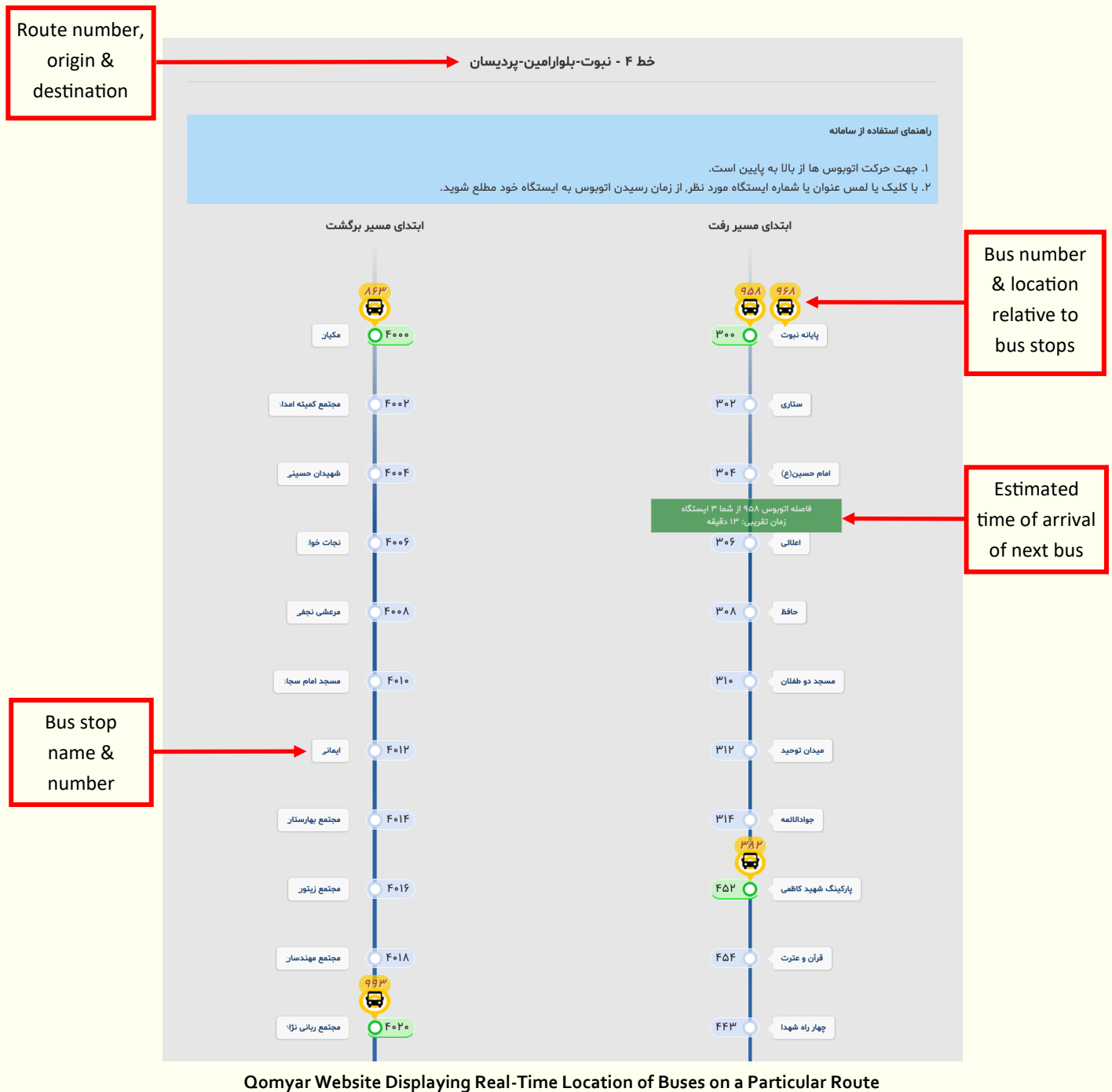
To avoid sitting next to the opposite gender, one can take the front passenger seat if it's available.

BUSES

Qum, being one of the largest cities in Iran, has an affordable public bus service that covers over 20 routes connecting different neighbourhoods, landmarks, and transportation hubs and boasts a fleet of over 300 buses.

Unlike in Tehran, where bus routes are clearly mapped and displayed at bus stops, passengers in Qum must rely on other methods to navigate the bus system. These include reading the destination displayed at the front of the bus, asking the driver about the route, or using a recently developed bus tracking system. Each bus stop in Qum features a QR code that, when scanned, directs users to the [Qomyar website](#) displaying the real-time location of the bus serving that stop and provides an estimated time of arrival. The bus stops are shown on a topological map rather than being marked on a physical city map, making it more challenging for those unfamiliar with the area. However, another [website](#) is available that displays each bus route on a city map. By clicking on the bus icon in the top left

corner and selecting the desired route, users can view the entire route and the bus stops served by that particular route.



Qomyar Website Displaying Real-Time Location of Buses on a Particular Route

Inside the buses, passengers can expect segregated seating arrangements, with women at the back and men at the front, and ventilation systems to ensure passenger comfort.

One of the key advantages of using buses is their very low fares compared to other modes of transportation, making them accessible to a wide range of people. All

buses are now cashless so fare payments can only be made by bank cards or the ‘Qum Card’, a contactless smartcard used for public transport payments which is available to purchase and top-up at [kiosks](#) near certain bus stations. A single fare is less than \$0.10 reducing further to around half of that if the Qum Card is used to pay.



The Qum Card - A Contactless Smartcard

Like any public transportation system, there are also challenges associated when using buses. During peak hours, buses can become overcrowded, leading to discomfort for passengers. Additionally, traffic congestion and delays may affect bus schedules, requiring passengers to plan their journeys accordingly.

MOTORBIKES

Motorbikes are a common sight on the streets of Qum, offering a convenient and agile mode of transportation. These two-wheeled vehicles are extremely popular due to their ability to navigate through narrow streets and crowded areas with ease. This makes them particularly well-suited for urban commuting, allowing riders to bypass traffic jams and reach their destinations more quickly. Parking for motorbikes is also relatively easy to find on the street, even if there are no designated parking areas. However, theft can be a concern, so riders are advised to use secure locks when leaving their bikes unattended. In terms of affordability, motorbikes offer a cost-effective transportation option, with lower fuel consumption and maintenance costs compared to cars.

Despite their advantages, motorbikes also present certain safety risks. Riders are more vulnerable to accidents and injuries particularly given the driving culture in

Iran and lack of traffic law enforcement. Overall, motorbikes are a practical and efficient means of getting around Qum quickly, albeit with a greater risk of injury.

DRIVING IN IRAN

Driving in Iran presents numerous challenges compared to driving in Western countries. Road conditions vary widely, from well-maintained highways to rough and potholed roads, especially in rural areas. In cities like Tehran and Qum, traffic congestion is common, particularly during peak hours.

The driving culture in Iran may seem chaotic to Westerners, with drivers often using their horns liberally and showing a higher tolerance for close calls and manoeuvres. Lane discipline is not strictly observed and drivers may frequently change lanes without signalling.

Although traffic laws in Iran are similar to those in Western countries, enforcement can vary with many drivers blatantly flouting road traffic rules and regulations. They will often be seen speeding, driving through red lights, disregarding crossing pedestrians and double parking.

Roundabouts are common in Iran and are designed to function similarly to those in Western countries; however, drivers should be prepared for aggressive merging and yielding. Intersections can also be chaotic with drivers struggling by every means possible to get ahead of other cars and ignoring right-of-way rules. Driving in rural areas can be particularly challenging due to narrower roads, sudden appearance of unexpected obstacles, including potholes, unmarked hazards and even careless pedestrians. It is customary to use the horn as a form of communication, such as to signal passing or alert other drivers to one's presence rather than using it as a means to display anger and frustration.

Overall, driving in Iran requires patience, vigilance, and adaptability to local customs and conditions. While some aspects may seem outrageous and shocking to drivers from Western countries, understanding the local driving culture and following basic safety precautions can help ensure a safer experience on the road.

LICENCE REQUIREMENTS

In order to drive legally in Iran, one must hold a valid driving licence. Driving without a valid licence poses significant legal risks, and – although law enforcement officers are laid back and do not conduct checks frequently – in the event of an accident, failure to produce a valid licence can lead to severe and immediate legal action and penalties including hefty fines, vehicle impoundment, and potential imprisonment. For foreigners planning to drive in Iran, the following four options are available:

★ Using a Foreign Driver's Licence

Students can drive in Iran if they hold a foreign driver's licence for up to 180 days upon entering the country (after this period, one is required to obtain an Iranian driver's licence if they wish to continue driving), provided they have the following documents:

- Original, valid driver's licence. The license must be valid for the type of vehicle being driven in Iran (e.g. car, motorcycle).
- Translation of the driver's licence by the embassy of the issuing country and endorsed with the embassy stamp.
- Copy of the first page of the passport and the entry stamp page.
- Copy of Article 22 of the [driving licence issuance regulation](#) endorsed with the stamp of the Traffic Police.

★ Using an International Driving Permit (IDP):

An IDP is a document that translates the details of a driver's license into several languages and normally includes Persian. Only foreign nationals with an IDP are allowed to drive for a period of 180 days from the date of entry into the country (after this period, one is required to obtain an Iranian driver's licence if they wish to continue driving) provided that the IDP is valid and it is accompanied by the driver's original foreign licence.

★ Converting a of Foreign Driver's Licence to Iranian Driver's Licence

Iranian law permits the conversion of foreign driving licences from certain countries. Depending on the country of origin, applicants may need to pass written and/or practical driving tests, however, this requirement may be waived for some countries with reciprocal agreements with Iran. At present, driving licences from the following countries can be converted:

Algeria	France	Malaysia	Somalia
Argentina	Germany	Mauritania	South Korea
Armenia	Greece	Mexico	Spain
Australia	Guinea	New Zealand	Sri Lanka
Austria	Hungary	Nicaragua	Sudan
Azerbaijan	India	Niger	Sweden
Bangladesh	Indonesia	Nigeria	Switzerland
Belgium	Italy	Norway	Syria
Bosnia	Ivory Coast	Oman	Tanzania
Bulgaria	Japan	Philippines	Tunisia
China	Kazakhstan	Poland	Turkey
Croatia	Kenya	Portugal	Turkmenistan
Czech Republic	Kyrgyzstan	Romania	Uzbekistan
Egypt	Lebanon	Russia	Yemen
Finland	Libiya	Slovenia	Zimbabwe

To convert a foreign driving licence from one of the listed countries, one should follow the steps below:

- **Obtain a Letter from Immigration Police:** Visit the Immigration Police located [here](#) to obtain a letter for the Traffic Police. The original passport, including a valid residence permit, and a 3cm x 4cm passport-sized photo are required.
- **Attestation of Foreign Driver's Licence:** Obtain an attestation of the foreign driver's licence from the embassy of the issuing country in Iran.
- **Official Translation:** Secure an official translation of the foreign driver's license and the approved request by the embassy from the translation office in Qum located [here](#).
- **Pay Fees at Police +10:** Pay the necessary fees (approx. \$2) at any one of the multiple 'Police +10' office located around Qum.
- **Proof of Address:** Acquire proof of address by going to the [Post Office](#) in Pardisan. Provide the counter clerk with one's postal code to receive a written certificate of address.
- **Submit Documents to Traffic Police:** Visit the Traffic Police with the following documents:
 - ◊ Original passport (with a valid residence permit)
 - ◊ Two 3cm x 4cm passport sized photos
 - ◊ Payment receipts from Police +10
 - ◊ Proof of address from the Post Office

Mobile phones and electronic devices are not permitted inside the Immigration Police or Traffic Police buildings and must be handed in for safekeeping. Taking a notepad and pen is very handy!

★ Get an Iranian Driver's Licence

In the case where the options above are not available, or the period of using a foreign licence or IDP has expired, one can apply to get an Iranian driver's licence. To get an Iranian licence, individuals need to follow the following steps:

- **Visit the Immigration Police:** The applicant must go to the Immigration Police located [here](#) to obtain a letter for the Traffic Police. They will need to bring their original passport with a valid residence permit and a 3cm x 4cm passport-sized photo. Digital fingerprints will be taken and printed.
- **Background Check at General Security Police:** The applicant must take the printed fingerprints to the General Security Police [here](#) for background checks. The results are usually ready within two days and must be collected and returned to the Immigration Police.
- **Electronic Submission to Tehran:** The Immigration Police will send the applicant's information electronically to Tehran for further checks and authorisation. If no issues arise, a letter authorising the Traffic Police to proceed will be automatically sent to the them.
- **Register at Traffic Police:** Approximately two weeks later, the applicant should visit the Traffic Police [here](#) to request a driving licence. The Traffic Police will register the applicant and provide a unique code.
- **Register with a Driving School:** On the same day, the applicant should go to a chosen driving school and register using the code from the Traffic Police. They must provide the necessary fees and receive instructions to get a medical check from one of the listed doctors before starting lessons.
- **Medical Check:** The applicant must complete the medical check and return to the driving school to begin lessons, both theory and practical.

There are normally long waiting times at doctor's clinics and police offices. Taking a book to read helps pass the time!

Driving School	Location	Telephone No.
Shahid	45 Metri Sadoogi	3291 9294
Karimi	Amin Boulevard	3291 2126
Taha	Firdowsi Boulevard	3294 6118
Nasima	Tawheed Road	3880 0011
Yegahneh	45 Metri Ammar Yasir	3775 5321
Sadeqi	15 Khordad Boulevard	3777 0666
Parsa	16 Metri Wali Asr	3886 0001

- **Book the Theory Test:** After completing the lessons, the applicant needs to pick up their file from the Traffic Police and bring it to the driving school to book the theory test. The test will be conducted at the Traffic Police.
- **Book the Practical Exam:** Upon passing the theory test, the applicant should return to the driving school after 10 days to book the practical exam. The driving school will provide details on where the practical exam will be held.
- **Final Paperwork and Licence Issuance:** After passing the practical exam, the applicant must go back to the driving school to complete additional paperwork. The driving licence will then be posted to the address provided. Note that the driving licence for foreigners is only valid for one year.

LICENCE RENEWAL

The process of renewing a driving licence is similar to first application and may require several visits to government offices. The following steps should be observed:

- **Visit the Immigration Police:** The applicant must visit the Immigration Police located [here](#) with the original passport (including a valid residence permit), Iranian driving licence, and a 3cm x 4cm passport-sized photo. The Immigration Police will print off previously taken fingerprints, which need to be stamped by an officer at another desk before being taken to the General Security Police.
- **Background Check at General Security Police:** The applicant must take the printed fingerprints to the General Security Police [here](#) for background checks. The results are usually ready within two days and must be collected and returned to the Immigration Police.
- **Electronic Submission to Tehran:** The Immigration Police will send the applicant's information electronically to Tehran for further checks and authorisation. If no issues arise, an electronic letter will be automatically sent to the Traffic Police authorising them to proceed with the renewal. This normally takes about one week.
- **Visit the Traffic Police:** The applicant will receive a letter from the Traffic Police to be taken to an authorised physician for a medical examination. They will also inform the applicant of the renewal fees which need to be paid at Police +10.
- **Medical Check:** Visit one of the listed doctors for a basic medical examination, which assesses vision, hearing, and mobility. The doctor will electronically send the results to the Traffic Police, and the remaining steps can normally be carried out the following day.
- **Pay Fees at Police +10:** Pay the necessary fees (approx. \$2) at any one of the multiple 'Police +10' office located around Qum.

There is no official queue system or ticket dispenser at the Traffic Police. Rather, people write their names in order of arrival on a piece of paper at the front of the room near the counter.

- **Proof of Address:** Acquire proof of address by going to the [Post Office](#) in Pardisan. Provide the counter clerk with one's postal code to receive a written certificate of address.
- **Submit Documents to Traffic Police:** Visit the Traffic Police for the final submission of documents. A folder should be purchased from the kiosk outside the Police building and the following documents placed inside:
 - ◊ Original passport (with a valid residence permit)
 - ◊ Original Iranian driving licence
 - ◊ Photocopy of Passport and residence permit (copies can be made at the same kiosk where the folder was purchased)
 - ◊ Two recent 3cm x 4cm passport sized photos (the same photos as the previous driving licence will not be accepted)
 - ◊ Payment receipts from Police +10
 - ◊ Proof of address from the Post Office

Upon submitting all the required documents, a receipt will be issued. This receipt serves as a temporary driving permit and should be kept safely until the new licence is delivered by post.

SHOPPING

- ◆ Malls & Markets
- ◆ Online Shopping
- ◆ Books
- ◆ Clothes
- ◆ Groceries
- ◆ Household Goods
- ◆ Second-Hand Goods



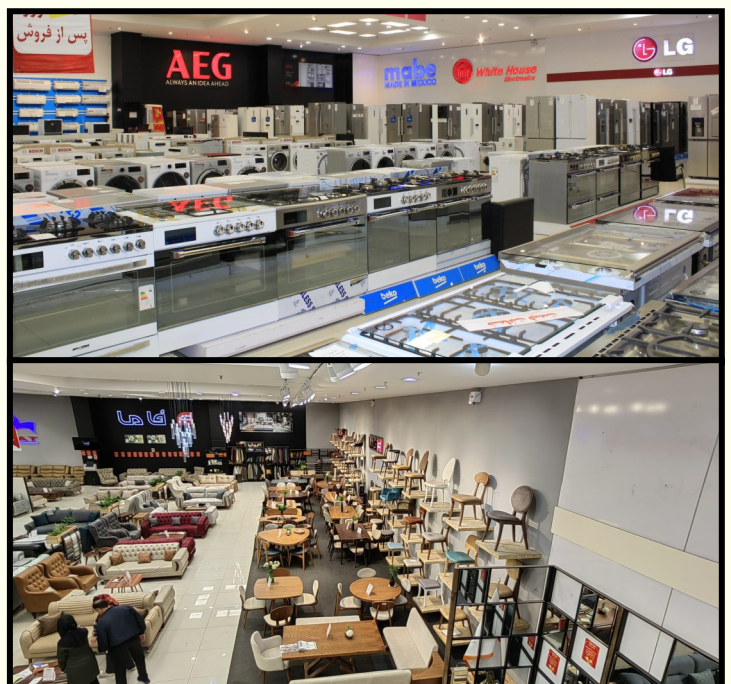
MALLS & MARKETS

Despite Iran's rich history and traditions, the country has been significantly influenced by Western culture and modernity, particularly in terms of consumerism and convenience. This influence is evident in many of the shopping centres, which often mimic Western malls in their structure, design, and environment. These malls typically feature enclosed, climate-controlled structures, escalators, and large parking areas with standardised layouts that include wide, clean walkways and clearly demarcated store spaces. They also have services such as washrooms, ATMs, and other amenities, focusing on the overall 'retail experience'. Although many malls in Qum do not entirely fit this description, there is a noticeable trend towards this 'ideal', particularly in Tehran and some newly built malls in Qum such as [Bazar Shahr Mall](#).

Some useful shopping centres in Qum include:

★ Saraye Irani

[Saraye Irani](#), established in 2015, is a massive store that specialises in a wide array of home furnishings and essentials. It has become a popular destination for those looking to furnish their homes quickly, without the need to shop at multiple locations. The store offers an extensive selection of furniture, carpets, household appliances, bedding, digital goods, and more, all at competitive prices and under one roof. Additionally, Saraye Irani provides the added convenience of free delivery.



Some of the Displays at Saraye Irani

★ Musa ibn Jafar Shopping Centre

The [Musa ibn Jafar Shopping Centre](#) is conveniently located a short walking distance from the shrine of Lady Masumah (a). Being one of the older shopping centres in Qum, it has gained a reputation as a popular shopping destination and is considered one of Qum's tourist attractions. The centre has a diverse array of shops and services, catering to a variety of needs from clothing and electronics to fabrics and personal accessories. A number of tailors are located on the second and third floors who can create custom-made garments, make alterations or repair damaged clothes at reasonable prices.

★ Al-Ghadir Commercial Centre

The [Al-Ghadir Commercial Centre](#) is one of the largest shopping centres in Qum, spanning five stories. This extensive complex features a variety of shops, including numerous gold and silver stores specialising in rings and Islamic jewellery, as well as a wide array of clothing, bags, and shoe retailers. Many of the jewelers here offer custom handmade rings with stones recommended in Islamic literature, such as *aqiq* (agate) and *firozah* (turquoise). At the heart of the mall lies the grave and shrine of Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, the renowned transmitter of *hadith* and author of *Tafsir al-Qummi*, one of the earliest *hadith*-based commentaries on the Holy Qur'an.

★ Passage Zahra

[Passage Zahra \(Zahra Arcade\)](#) is a highly popular destination for electronic devices, SIM cards, mobile phones, and related accessories. This fairly old building spans four floors and houses over 100 active units dedicated to the sale and repair of mobile phones, accessories, and software installation. Close to Passage Zahra is the newly opened [Bazar Salam](#), which provides a similar range of goods and services within a more modern and contemporary setting.

Contrary to modern malls, traditional Eastern markets (bazaars) are characterised by open-air or semi-covered spaces with narrow, winding alleyways and stalls reflecting local cultural and historical aesthetics. These bazaars typically have concentrations of vendors selling similar goods, such as spices, textiles, jewellery, or handicrafts, with a strong emphasis on local products and traditional items with many shopkeepers themselves designing and producing the items they sell. These markets are common throughout the Middle East and still thrive in Iran where they remain central to the country's commerce and attract numerous customers and visitors. Unlike malls, which are more standardised and rigid with labelled and fixed prices, these bazaars focus on traditional commerce and personal interaction, where haggling is common and in-fact, quite expected.

Some of the most well-known bazaars in Qum include:



View of the Ceiling over the Carpet Bazaar in *Bazaar Buzurg*

★ Bazaar Buzurg

[Qum Grand Bazaar](#), or Bazaar Buzurg, is a historical and cultural landmark in Qum, showcasing the city's rich heritage and traditional commerce. This ancient market has sections which were built and extended during various eras, including the Qajar, Seljuk, Safavid, and Ilkhanid periods. The architecture blends traditional Persian design with practical functionality, featuring intricately carved domed ceilings and semi-covered archways that provide shade and protection.

Bazaar Buzurg offers a diverse range of goods, from spices, textiles, and bedding to handicrafts, carpets, and household items, often at more affordable prices than

modern shops and outlets. Due to urban development around the bazaar, a number of malls, such as [Hujjat Mall](#), are also connected to this traditional marketplace and can be accessed from there. Additionally, the bazaar houses one of the few remaining [traditional public bathhouses](#) in Iran, where men can bathe, socialise, drink tea, and receive massages, preserving a unique aspect of Iranian culture.

★ Bazaar Qadeem

The [Old Bazaar of Qum](#), called Bazaar Qadeem or Bazaar Kohneh, is one of the major traditional markets in Iran and a historical and tourist attraction. This market, with over 600 years of history, dates back to the Safavid and Qajar periods, is about one kilometre in length, and houses numerous workshops of traditional crafts such as dyeing, knife making, woodturning, carpentry, blacksmithery and inlay work. It also features shops offering a unique array of traditional and cultural items not easily found elsewhere. The bazaar leads to an open rectangular area known as [Kohneh Square](#) surrounded by more shops with a large, bustling fruit and vegetable market in the centre.

Recognised as a national cultural heritage site since late 1997, the bazaar offers visitors a glimpse into Iranian tradition and culture. While it may not hold significant retail appeal for foreigners residing here, it remains a worthwhile destination to explore and appreciate the local craftsmanship and heritage.

★ Weekly Bazaar

Temporary markets, known locally as weekly bazaars (*bazaar hafteh*) or daily bazaars (*bazaar rooz*), are held at different locations on different days of the week (excluding Wednesdays). These markets are very popular as they offer a wide array of goods, including fresh, seasonal produce, clothing and household items at

lower prices compared to regular shops. A table listing the location of these markets on different days of the week is provided below.

Day	Location
Saturday	Tehrani Muqaddam Boulevard
Sunday	Shahr Qaim, End of 17th Kabiri Street
Monday	Jumhuri Islami Boulevard
Tuesday	1. Abu Talib Boulevard, Pardisan 2. Himat Boulevard, Sorustan Road
Thursday	Ta'awon Boulevard
Friday	1. Javan Park 2. Zohoor Road, Jamkaran

ONLINE SHOPPING

Online shopping has surged in popularity in Iran, offering a convenient alternative to traditional in-store shopping. Many Iranians and residents now turn to online platforms to purchase a wide variety of goods, from clothing and electronics to household items and groceries. The largest and most popular online retailer by far is [Digikala](#), which provides an extensive range of products, home delivery, and a reliable returns policy. However, their prices tend to be higher due to their market dominance. Other notable sites include [Basalam](#), [Emalls](#) and [Torob](#), a price comparison engine that allows users to find their desired products from various online retailers.

The advantages of online shopping include the ability to compare prices, read customer reviews, and access a broader selection of products that may not be available locally. Additionally, many online retailers' prices are significantly cheaper than in local shops and sometimes even offer promotions and discounts.

Despite these advantages, there are important considerations to bear in mind. Ensuring the security of online transactions is paramount, so it is advisable to shop from reputable sites, use secure payment methods, and check for the eTrust Seal ([eNAMAD](http://eNAMAD.ir)). In Iran, the e-Commerce Development Center is responsible for creating security infrastructure and granting e-Commerce seals to online businesses, thereby regulating and standardising their activities. The e-Commerce



eNAMAD Logo

seal is displayed as a symbol at the top or bottom of approved websites and links to the eNAMAD website, where buyers can verify the certification and check company details. This certification assures customers that they are purchasing from a website that will honour its commitments and respect consumer rights. Additionally, buyers should be aware that delivery times can vary, and should check the return and refund policies, as many websites do not accept refunds.

BOOKS

Qum is renowned for its vast collection of religious texts and academic literature, specialising in Islamic theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and other religious studies. In addition to these religious texts, Qum features several general bookstores that offer a diverse selection of books, including literature, history, science, and children's books. Most of the books published and sold in Iran are in Farsi and Arabic, with only a few bookshops catering to English readers. Students often need to visit these bookshops to purchase textbooks, reference materials, or books on various topics of interest. The city offers an abundance of bookshops, ensuring that students can find the resources they need. Listing all the bookshops would be beyond the scope of this guide, but some notable places to visit include:

★ Publishers' Complex

The Publishers' Complex (*Mujtameh Nasheran*), located conveniently near the shrine of Lady Masumah (a) on [Moallem Street](#), opened in 2013 as the first and only commercial and administrative complex for publishers and booksellers in Iran. This complex houses a variety of publishers and bookshops specialising in a range of fields, particularly Islamic studies. Many renowned publishers, such as Dar al-Hadith, have offices here, offering a wide array of religious texts and scholarly works. These publishers sell newly published works and older, hard-to-find texts, directly to the public. A notable feature of the complex is the 'Find a



Outside View of the Seven Storey Publishers' Complex Building

Book' service located on the ground floor. Here, visitors can inquire about specific books, and the assistant will guide them to the appropriate unit and publisher. This

service is also available on their [website](#), which provides information on the latest cultural and educational events being held at the complex.

★ Passage Quds

[Passage Quds \(Quds Arcade\)](#) is a bustling shopping centre located in a prime area of the city, just a 5-minute walk from the shrine of Lady Masuma (a). This small shopping centre, characterised by its narrow aisles, is renowned for its numerous bookstores that cater to a diverse range of literary needs. Here, one can find many of the classical religious texts, textbooks used in most of the *hawzahs*,

commentaries and translations. Additionally, university books and children's school textbooks and study aids are readily available.

Walking through this arcade, one will notice that many of the bookshops are compact, with stacks of books piled up in every available space. This can make browsing somewhat challenging; however, despite the apparent disorder, the shopkeepers have phenomenal memories and can quickly inform customers about the availability of any book they inquire about and locate it immediately without the need of computer systems.

The arcade, one of the oldest shopping centres in Qum, also features a variety of other shops. On the ground floor, there are several stationery shops, while the first and second floors house computer accessories and repair shops. In the basement, visitors will find charming souvenir and religious decoration shops offering items such as frames, banners, and keychains.

★ Kitabestan Razavi

[Kitabestan Razavi](#) is a spacious bookstore spread over two floors in a prominent, central location. It primarily stocks books published by Astan Quds Razavi, the charitable foundation responsible for the administration of Imam al-Ridha's (a) shrine. In addition to an impressive selection of books on religion, history, philosophy, social sciences, it sells various items such as frames, banners, ornaments and stationary.

★ Bustan Kitab

[Bustan Kitab](#), located a few minutes walk away from Passage Quds, is a renowned bookstore and publishing house specialising in religious and academic literature. It is a well-organised and well-stocked bookshop which serves as a vital resource for students, scholars, and researchers, offering a comprehensive collection of

Islamic texts. Known for its high-quality publications, Bustan Kitab frequently updates its inventory to include the latest scholarly works.

★ Shahr Kitab

[Shahr Kitab](#), or 'Bookcity', is a prominent chain of bookstores in Tehran with one branch located in Qum. Renowned for its extensive collection, Shahr Kitab offers a diverse range of books covering various genres, including literature, science, history, and children's books. In addition to its comprehensive selection of Farsi titles, the store also stocks a variety of international publications, catering to a broad audience of readers. However, some of the books in Farsi are direct translations from English originals, which often contain concepts and ideas which are not always in-line with the Islamic perspective or suitable for Muslims to read.

★ Dunya Kitab

[Dunya Kitab \(World of Books\)](#), is a well-organised bookshop located inside a shopping centre in Qum. Sections are clearly marked and books neatly displayed, making it easy for customers to browse and find what they are looking for. Like Shahr Kitab, it caters to a wide array of interests, offering titles in various fields including Islamic studies, literature, history, science, and more.

★ Ansariyan Publishers

Located in a small alley about a 10-minute walk from the shrine of Lady Masumah (a), [Ansariyan Publishers](#) was established in 1974 by the late author and translator, Muhammad Taqi Ansariyan. The publisher focuses on disseminating the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (a) through publication, distribution and sale of Islamic books in multiple languages. Their commitment to translating classical and contemporary Islamic texts into English, Urdu, French, Turkish, Russian, and Spanish has made these works accessible to a global audience. Many

foreigners will already be familiar with Ansariyan and likely have at least one of their publications in their personal library. While these books are invaluable for those unfamiliar with the Farsi and Arabic languages, the quality of translation could be improved. Additionally, the books sold here are significantly more expensive than the Farsi or Arabic originals.

DIGITAL BOOKSHOPS

With the rise of digital technology, many bookstores in Qum now offer online shopping options. Websites like www.bookroom.ir and www.ketab.ir allow customers to browse and purchase books from the comfort of their homes, with delivery services available to various locations. The aforementioned bookshops ([Kitabestan Razavi](#), [Bustan Kitab](#), [Shahr Kitab](#) and [Dunya Kitab](#)) and most publishers, will also have their own websites for direct online orders.

CLOTHES

Clothing is widely available in Qum, with quality having improved significantly over time. While some students prefer bringing clothes from their home countries due to differences in quality, price, and design, there are many good options for purchase locally. Bazar Buzurg and other shopping centres previously mentioned are great places to find affordable clothing, as is the area around the shrine of Lady Masumah (a), which has a wide variety of shops and choices. Stores in more modern malls and on streets like [Safayeh](#) and [Salariah](#) offer higher quality clothing, though at higher prices, not only because of the superior quality, but also due to the location.

Hawzah students can find appropriate attire at the [Saheb al-Zaman Shopping Mall](#), which specialises in such clothing. For ladies, numerous *chador* shops and

tailors can be found on the second floor of the Musa ibn Jafar Shopping Centre. [The Kuwaiti Arcade \(Passage Kuwaiti\)](#), located opposite the shrine of Lady Masumah (a), is a three-storey shopping mall with many stores on the first floor dedicated to sports clothing and equipment. As for shoes, many shops are situated around the shrine, but for a larger variety and higher quality shoes, the basement level of the [Hujjat Shopping Mall](#) is highly recommended.

GROCERIES

LOCAL STORES

Many residential areas in Iran are located near a main road or high street that serves as the focal point for local shopping. These roads typically feature a mix of goods and services, including grocery stores, clothing shops, butchers, bakeries, greengrocers, banks, barbers, and more. Although many of these shops are modest and offer less variety than larger stores, supporting local businesses and building relationships with store owners is always a good idea. Some speciality stores often seen on Iranian streets include:

- ***Shirinee***: Literally translated to ‘sweets’, *shirinee* shops sell a wide variety of cakes, pastries, and both traditional and modern sweets. Customers often visit these shops to purchase sweets for gatherings, gifts, or simply to enjoy with tea, which is a prevalent practice in Iranian culture.
- ***Labaniyyat***: *Labaniyyats* are shops dedicated to selling fresh, high-quality dairy products. These stores typically offer a wide range of dairy goods, including yoghurt, milk, cheese, butter, cream, and traditional products such as *doogh* (a savoury yoghurt-based drink) and *kashk* (a type of fermented whey). *Labaniyyats* often source their products from local

farms, ensuring freshness and supporting local agriculture. While there may be health benefits to consuming raw, unpasteurised milk and dairy products, most foreigners should exercise caution. Boiling the milk before consumption can help eliminate harmful bacteria. These products also have a shorter shelf-life due to the absence of preservatives.

- ***Attari:*** *Attaris* are traditional shops specialising in herbal medicines, natural remedies, and health products. They offer a variety of dried herbs, natural products like honey, vinegars, distillates, oils, and traditional remedies for common ailments. Nutritional supplements from organic sources are also available. These shops hold cultural significance, representing a link to Iranian traditional medicine and remain popular for their natural treatments and fewer side effects compared to modern medicines.

SUPERMARKETS

Contemporary supermarkets offer the convenience of bringing most, if not all, of one's grocery and household shopping under one roof. There are three major supermarkets in Qum: [Kowsar](#) and [Janbazan](#) and [Hyperstar](#). These supermarkets are spread over a large space and sometimes over multiple floors. Like supermarkets in the west, they typically have sections for different groups of products, larger aisles, and signage that make it easier to find items. Kowasr and Janbazan, being fairly centrally located, are easy to access but can get very congested at peak times.

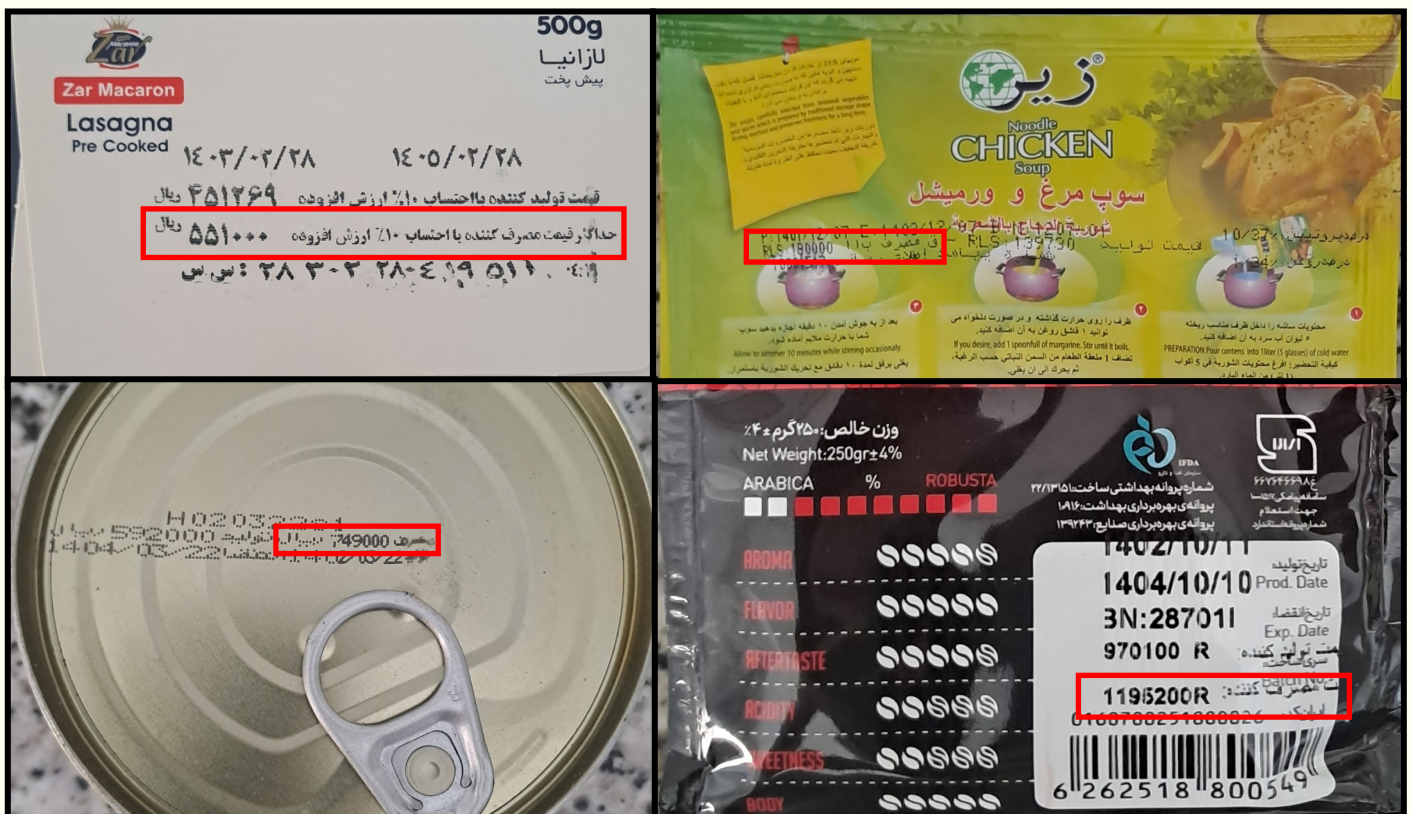
Kowsar provides an online service called [KowsarPlaza](#) where people can shop from the comfort of their own

Hyperstar is an Iranian subsidiary of French multinational retailer Carrefour, which has been accused of supporting the Israeli regime. Students should conduct their own research and make informed decisions before buying goods.

homes. However, there are normally fewer choices compared to physically going to the supermarket and there is also a delivery charge. Hyperstar also has an online service which is provided for via [Snapp! Market](#).

In addition to these large supermarkets, there are multiple mini-supermarket chains spread throughout the city. The most prominent of these are the [Ofog Kourosh](#) and [Canbo](#) chains. They provide a larger variety of products compared to local grocery stores and sometimes have very good promotional offers.

According to the Consumer and Producer Protection laws, all goods must be labelled with the price by the producer. This makes it easier for consumers to ensure they pay the right price at checkout, especially new foreigners who may be a target of overpricing. In addition to the production date and expiry date, the consumer (*masraf konandeh*) price is labelled on the goods as shown below.



A Selection of Groceries Showing the Consumer Price

HOUSEHOLD GOODS

FURNITURE

One of the distinctive features of traditional Middle Eastern retail is the clustering of similar shops within a specific area, a practice that remains prevalent today. Historically, Middle Eastern markets have been organised by trade or craft, with different sections or streets dedicated to specific goods such as textiles, spices, jewellery, or carpets. This system benefits both customers and vendors. For customers, grouping similar shops together facilitates easy comparison of prices and quality. For vendors, proximity to other specialists in their trade creates a hub of expertise that attracts customers seeking specific items and also fosters a competitive and knowledgeable market environment.

[Kalhori Street](#) is a lengthy road renowned for its extensive range of furniture stores, including sofas, beds, dining tables, and office furniture. The street is lined with independent businesses and suppliers from larger companies, providing a diverse selection of items. Many shops offer both ready-to-purchase stock items and customisable options, allowing customers to tailor their furniture to specific preferences in terms of colour, fabric/material, and size. Once an order is placed, the furniture is crafted and delivered upon completion. It is important to provide clear instructions when buying custom-made furniture and agree on timelines and prices to avoid any misunderstandings. Another such road specialising in furniture (particularly sofas) is [Kasegeran](#).

[Bolej](#) is an online furniture store that has been recommended by students for its reliability and high-quality furniture. It offers a wide range of well-designed products and also offers free delivery with purchases over a certain value.

ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

[Keyvanfar Boulevard](#) is one of the go-to destinations for electronics and household appliances in Qum. This bustling street is lined with stores offering a wide range of appliances, including refrigerators, washing machines, ovens, and smaller electronic items. Unlike other markets in Iran, the electrical and digital markets here feature greater representation of foreign brands, such as Samsung, Bosch, LG, and Daewoo. However, these brands tend to be more expensive than their Iranian counterparts and are also pricier than similar products in Western countries. Notable Iranian brands include [Snowa](#), [Pakshoma](#), [G Plus](#), [Electrosteel](#), [Pars Khazar](#) and [X-Vision](#), which offer quality alternatives at more competitive prices.

Unfortunately, the market for electrical appliances in Qum, like many other places, has seen an influx of counterfeit products that mimic well-known brands but lack the quality and durability of genuine items. Additionally, there are numerous smuggled products on the market, which customers may unknowingly purchase, automatically invalidating any warranty. To combat this issue, relevant organisations have mandated that importers and manufacturers affix authenticity labels or identifiers on their products. Various protocols have been established for different product groups to help consumers verify the authenticity of their purchased items. For example, the Food and Drug Administration requires all manufacturers and importers of health-related products, such as food, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics, to affix a yellow authenticity label. Similarly, manufacturers and sellers of household appliances must register their products and obtain a product authenticity identifier, which is affixed to the appliance.

Customers can verify the authenticity of their appliance by dialling *4*7777# from a mobile phone and following the instructions. The product's Global Trade Item Number (GTIN), printed under the barcode, will be required to complete the verification process.

Like electrical appliances sold in other parts of the world, those available in Qum typically come with a manufacturers warranty. The exact details and warranty periods vary based on the product and manufacturer. However, unlike in many other countries, most appliances must be installed by an official manufacturer's representative or technician in order to maintain the warranty. This requirement even applies to appliances that are straightforward and simple to install, such as plugging in a TV or microwave. Self-installation would invalidate the warranty and any manufacturer services. To avoid this, customers should strictly follow the installation instructions provided by the retailer or manufacturer. This usually involves contacting the manufacturing company to arrange a visit by a technician, who will install the product and sign the warranty card, thereby validating the guarantee and authorising any future manufacturer support.

KITCHENWARE

Kitchenware such as plates, cutlery, pots, pans, and other home essentials can be purchased from various local shops in Qum. In particular, Bazar Buzurg and Saraye Irani offer a wide selection of these items. Another notable store is the [Home Goods Store](#), located on Jumhuri Boulevard. This large and organised shop spans two floors and sells almost everything needed for a kitchen at reasonable prices.

Despite the availability of kitchenware in Qum, some students and families opt to bring better-quality items from their home countries. This can often be more cost-effective and ensure longer-lasting products so it's an option worth considering for those planning to move to Qum.

CARPETS

When Western audiences think of carpets, they typically envision soft, comfortable, wall-to-wall floor coverings. However, in Iran, the term ‘carpet’ encompasses two distinct categories: Persian rugs (*farsh*) and wall-to-wall fitted carpet (*moket*).

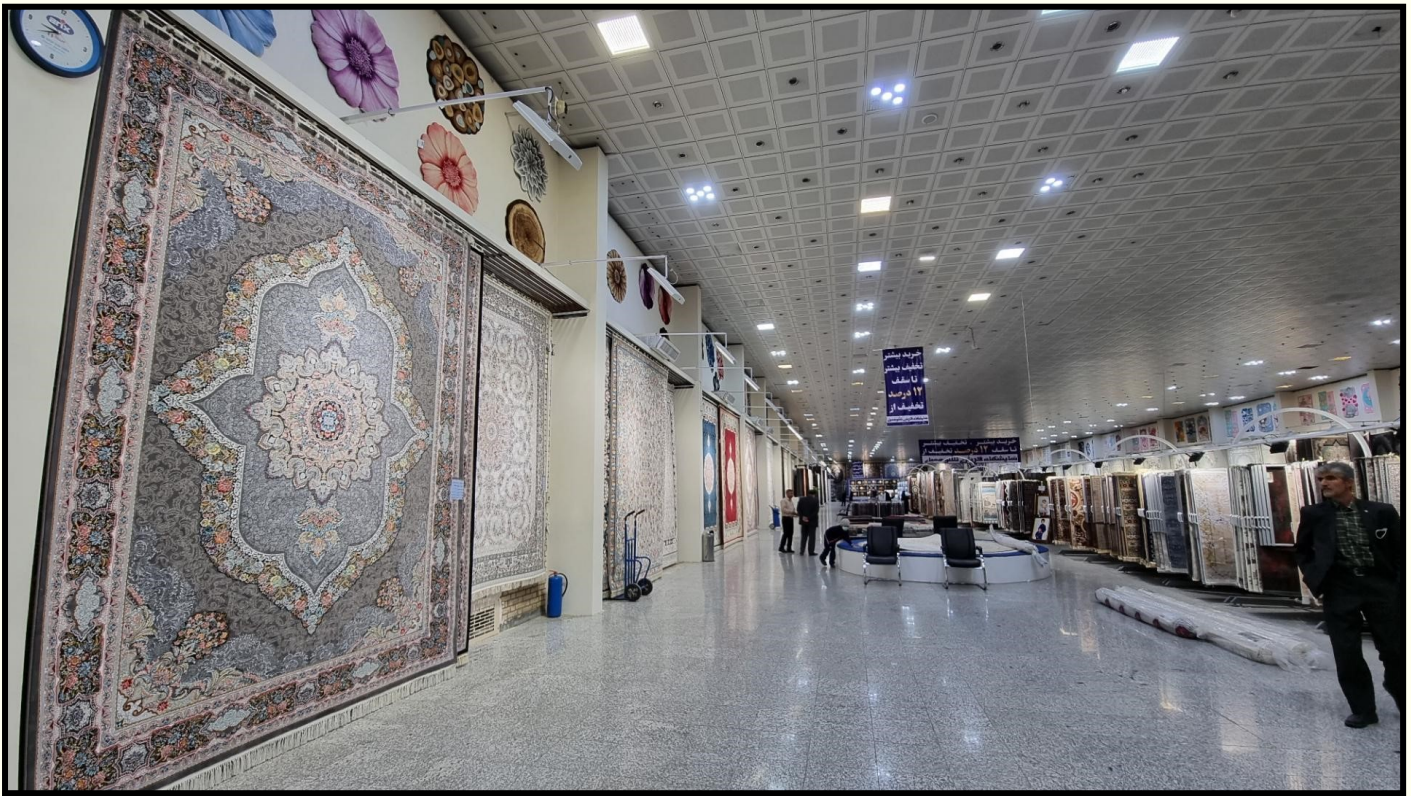
Persian rugs are integral to Iranian culture and craftsmanship, serving as both functional household items and works of art. These rugs are highly sought after, both domestically and internationally, for their intricate designs, superior materials, and the skilled labour involved in their creation, making them valuable

Persian rugs are manufactured in three standard sizes: 6m² (2mx3m), 9m² (2.5mx3.5m) and 12m² (3mx4m).

investments. Qum offers an extensive selection of carpets, with prices varying based on size, patterns, colour schemes, materials, knotting density, and manufacturing type.

Buyers can find Persian rugs in traditional bazaars and specialised carpet shops throughout the city. [Teemche](#), a part of Bazaar Buzurg, is a traditional Persian rug market where new and used carpets are available. Sellers in these bazaars often have extensive knowledge about the history and quality of the carpets, providing valuable insights into each piece’s origin and craftsmanship.

Modern carpet stores like [Talaelo Jamil](#) and Saraye Irani offer a more structured shopping experience, with Persian rugs displayed in well-organised showrooms. Customers can browse collections ranging from affordable machine-made options to luxurious handmade masterpieces. These stores also offer a wide range of *pooshtis*, traditional Iranian floor cushions or backrests used for seating. These rectangular cushions are typically placed against walls or furniture to provide back support while sitting on the floor, a common practice during social gatherings or dining, and are normally sold in pairs.



Talaelo Jamil Persian Carpet and *Moket* Showroom

Moket refers to wall-to-wall floor coverings, similar to what Westerners typically call carpets. These come in various colours and thicknesses. Thicker *moket* serves as a standalone carpet, while the thinner variety is often placed under Persian rugs to prevent slipping. The best places to buy *moket* are local carpet shops or larger stores like those mentioned above, where they are usually displayed in rolls and can be purchased immediately. Although *moket* is much cheaper than Persian rugs, it does not hold the same resale value or versatility when moving homes but may be better for awkward room sizes.

CURTAINS

Besides regulating light and temperature within the home, curtains are a key element in Iranian interior design, chosen with great care to complement the overall decor of a room. Many Iranian homes feature elaborate and beautifully designed curtains, often made from luxurious fabrics such as silk or velvet, and adorned with intricate patterns and embroidery. These curtains are not only

decorative but also signify the homeowner's taste and social status. This context explains why curtain shops display their products so prominently. For most students, however, these luxurious styles and extravagances are unnecessary, so it's important to focus on what is required without being distracted by these options.

For curtain shopping, [Raeis Karami Street \(20 Metri Zaad\)](#) has a concentration of around 10-15 curtain shops. Bazar Buzurg is also a popular destination, featuring numerous curtain sellers and specialist tailors who often provide more affordable options. Ready-made curtains are not common, so it is essential to bring measurements of one's windows and ceiling height to get accurate quotes and compare prices.

SECOND-HAND ITEMS

Buying second-hand goods is a practical and economical choice for residents and students seeking to furnish their homes and acquire essential items. This option is particularly beneficial for those planning a short-term stay in Qum, such as participants in the ILM program. With a wide range of items available second-hand, it is an ideal solution for budget-conscious individuals. Several methods are available to search for and purchase second-hand items, as discussed below.

[Kashani Boulevard](#) is a road lined with shops offering a variety of second-hand items, from carpets and furniture to electrical appliances and home décor. While browsing through these shops can be time-consuming, and shopkeepers may become frustrated if people leave without making a purchase, it's important not to feel pressured into buying anything one is not comfortable with. When buying second-hand items, one should inspect them thoroughly, test appliances to ensure they are in working condition, and negotiate prices to get the best deal. It is also

useful to compare the prices of similar new products to ensure the second-hand item is reasonably priced and assess its overall value.

Online classified platforms like [Divar](#) offer a convenient way to browse and purchase second-hand goods. The search function allows users to quickly find desired items, while filters help narrow results based on various factors, including location. Registration is free and only requires a mobile number, enabling users to access sellers' contact details and arrange viewings and transactions.

Buying items from other students is an excellent way to acquire necessary goods while also supporting the student community. Items are typically listed in student groups, detailing the item, price, and contact information. Students completing their studies and leaving Iran permanently often sell or give away all their belongings, including books, furniture, and appliances. These opportunities allow new students to furnish their entire home at a fraction of the cost of new items. Students will normally be informed about these student chat groups once they arrive in Qum and can request to join them by contacting the group admins.

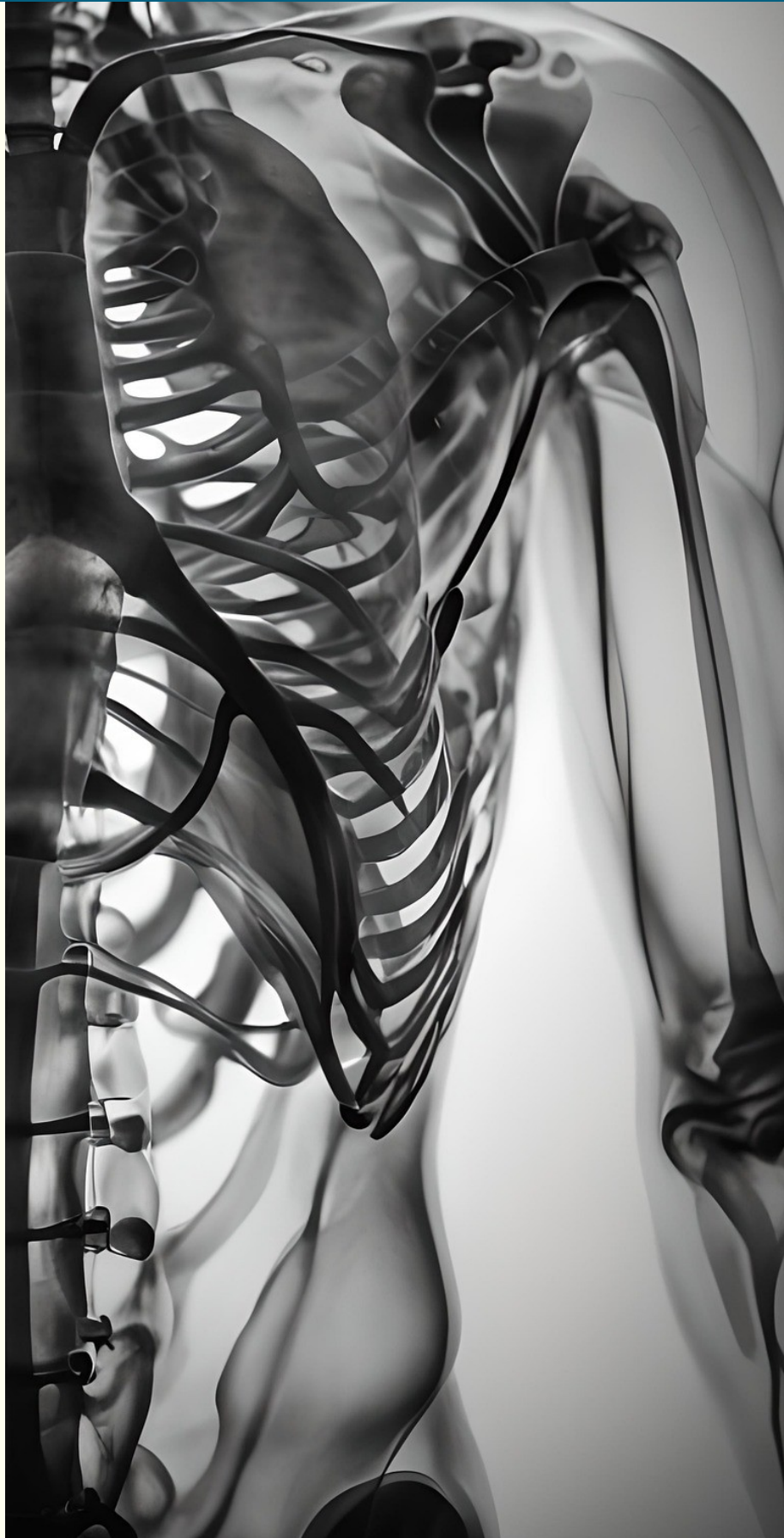
Sisters in Qum can request to join TalEbay, an Eitaa group run by some of the wives of foreign *hawzah* students, designed as a platform to connect students wishing to buy and sell second-hand items.

Regarding items that no longer function properly, Western students might be accustomed to discarding them and purchasing replacements. In contrast, Iranians excel in repairing and extending the life of such items. Repair costs are very reasonable, especially for electronic appliances, making repairs much cheaper than buying new replacements. This approach not only reduces waste and benefits the environment but also helps cut down expenses. There are numerous repair shops scattered throughout the city, and one should check their local shops to see what services they provide.



HEALTHCARE

- ◆ Doctors
- ◆ Dentists
- ◆ Pharmacies
- ◆ Hospitals & Clinics
- ◆ Alternative Medicine
- ◆ Medical Insurance



DOCTORS

Healthcare in Iran is generally good with no shortage of professional medical staff. In-fact, some may even argue the facilities offered in Iran are better than those in many Western countries.

Medical doctors are readily available in Qum, practising either in their own small offices or in larger clinics and hospitals. One of the notable advantages of the medical system in Iran is that patients can directly consult with a specialist (*takhasusi* doctor) without needing a referral from a general practitioner (*umumi* doctor). This direct access is particularly beneficial if the patient is already aware of the specific type of specialist they need to see. However, for those uncertain about which specialist to consult, it is advisable to visit a general practitioner first.

Another significant advantage is the prompt access to a wide range of diagnostic tests, which in other countries might require weeks or even months to schedule. In Iran, examinations such as X-rays, CT scans, MRI scans, and ultrasounds can typically be arranged within a day or two, with results often available immediately after the test. This efficiency greatly enhances the overall patient experience and expedites the diagnostic process.

The availability of female doctors in almost all specialist areas is yet another benefit of the Iranian medical system, allowing sisters to discuss their medical problems comfortably and without hesitation.

Unfortunately, despite the abundance of doctors in Qum, many students have reported challenges in finding a “good” physician. A major criticism is that doctors pay very little attention to patient care. Common issues include failing to examine the patient sufficiently, rushed diagnoses, and minimal involvement of

patients in healthcare decisions. Additionally, doctors rarely provide detailed information about prescribed medications. Patient privacy is another concern; it is not uncommon for two or three other patients to be present in the room during a consultation! While not all doctors exhibit these shortcomings, these experiences have prompted the compilation of a list of doctors known for their professional skills and patient care. For those proficient in Farsi, an extensive database of medical professionals is available at www.nobat.ir and www.salamati24.com.

Name	Speciality	Telephone Number	Address
Dr. Hussein Jahanbini	Dermatologist	3293 1020	45 Metri Sadoogi, between Alley 9 and 13, beginning of Jahanbini Boulevard
Dr Saeed Abdullahi	ENT	3783 9217	Dawr Shahr, Alley 10, Saakhteman Baharan
Dr. Muhammad Khalil Nawiy	General Practitioner	3288 0188	Yazdanshahr, Corner of Alley 11
Dr. Zahra Ashrafi	Gynaecologist	3261 5959	Muhammad Amin Boulevard, Alley 7, next to Saakhteman Fayz
Dr. Syed Ahmad Janabaan	Ophthalmologist	3294 3454	Saalariyah, Golzari Road, Golzari Complex, 3rd Floor
Dr. Hasan Meeladipoor	Orthopaedic Specialist	3293 9433	Muhammad Amin Boulevard, Alley 5, Saakhteman Sidra
Dr. Zahra Muwahidi	Paediatrician	3873 3063	Niyayish Boulevard, above Dr. Kaviani Pharmacy
Dr. Syed Hasan Adeli	Pulmonary Specialist	3740 0981	Dawr Shahr, Alley 31, Saakhteman Burj Safeed, 4th Floor

In contrast to the typical time-slot scheduling system prevalent in many Western countries, Iran predominantly employs an open-booking system for

appointments. Under this arrangement, patients are not assigned specific appointment times; instead, they are instructed to arrive within a designated time window and are attended to on a first-come, first-serve basis. Consequently, waiting times can be quite lengthy, occasionally extending to several hours. with waiting areas often becoming crowded during peak times.

Doctor’s fees can vary greatly depending on the service being provided, however, to give a rough idea, a consultation with a general practitioner would cost around \$2-3 and a with a specialist around \$5.

DENTISTS

Similar to the situation with doctors, Qum has no shortage of dentists or dental clinics; however, finding a suitable one remains a significant challenge. To assist new students, a list of dentists recommended by foreign students has been compiled. This resource aims to ease the search process and ensure access to quality dental care.

Name	Speciality	Telephone Number	Address
Dr Ali Tashkiri	General	3292 7819	<u>45 Metri Sadoqi, Alley 53, Building No 10</u>
Dr. Minoo Nayebyzadeh	General	3294 0600	<u>Attaran Boulevard, Ghadeer Building, First Floor, Unit 2</u>
Dr. Muhammad Mahdi Sokuti	Root Canal	3355 1632	<u>Zanbilabad, Alley 4, Tisaa Building, Floor 3</u>
Dr Ghader Amin Abadi	Paediatric	3783 0505	<u>Sepah Roundabout, Jumhuri Islami Boulevard</u>
Dr Farzad Piroozmand	Orthodontist	3772 6950	<u>19 Dey Street (Bajak), Alley 67, Building No 1</u>

In addition to dentists who run their own private practices, there are numerous larger dental clinics which normally provide a greater variety of services including 24 hr emergency care. A few of these clinics are listed below.

Name	Telephone Number	Address
Hakim Dentistry Clinic	3773 3634	Shuhada St (Safaiyeh), between Alley 30 and 32
Salamat Dentistry Clinic	3771 7331	19 Dey Street (Bajak), Alley 41
Sina Central Clinic	3774 5646	Niyayish Boulevard

When selecting a dentist or dental clinic in Qum, it is important to consider whether they have x-ray imaging facilities, as patients will most likely be required to get an x-ray before and after any treatment. If the clinic does not provide such facilities, patients will need to get the x-ray done at another location, which can be both time-consuming and costly. A popular and organised clinic for dental x-ray imaging is the [Dr M Bagheri](#) clinic located on [Alley 10 of Shahid Fatemi Street](#).

Dental treatment in Qum can be quite expensive; however, in comparison to many Western countries, it is considered very reasonable. For instance, a cavity filling is approximately \$25, a root canal is around \$50, a tooth extraction is approximately \$15, and a tooth implant starts at around \$200.

PHARMACIES

Pharmacies in Qum, as in any city, are an essential part of the community and serve a crucial role by providing access to necessary medication and health products. Qum has numerous pharmacies scattered around the city, many of which operate 24 hours a day.

Medicines are generally affordable in Iran, especially those that are locally manufactured. To save money, individuals can request Iranian brands instead of foreign ones when purchasing medication. An interesting point to note is that many drugs that would typically require a prescription in Western countries are available over-the-counter in Iran, allowing for easier and quicker access to necessary medications.

In addition to selling medicines, most pharmacies will also have a retail section providing various healthcare products and cosmetics. Two popular 24-hour pharmacies are Dr. Kaviani Pharmacy located on [Niyayish Boulevard](#) and Imam Reza Pharmacy on [Shahid Saduqi Street](#). A full list of pharmacies can be found [here](#).

HOSPITALS & CLINICS

Qum currently has 14 hospitals (*bimarestan*) and over 60 clinics (*darmangah*). Hospitals primarily handle inpatient care and emergency services, while clinics focus on outpatient care and diagnostics.

Unfortunately, the hospitals in Qum are often criticised for poor patient care and unprofessional, ill-mannered staff who lack compassion and respect. Much of the nursing work typically falls to the patient's family members, which can be both stressful and frustrating. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for navigating these challenges.

It is customary for a family member or friend, known as the *hamrah*, to accompany the patient throughout their hospital stay. The *hamrah* is responsible for the patient's paperwork, procurement of necessary materials, administration of medication, and other such tasks. To avoid these difficulties, some individuals

choose to receive hospital treatment in Tehran, where facilities are more advanced and medical staff are better trained.

Clinics in Qum are typically large buildings offering a wide range of services, including general and specialist doctor appointments, dental care, laboratory testing, pharmacy services, diagnostic medical imaging, and other non-emergency outpatient care. Most clinics operate on a ‘walk-in’ basis, eliminating the need for advance appointments. They generally have extended operating hours, opening early and closing late, with many providing 24-hour services to accommodate various patient needs.

Some hospitals and clinics are listed below, with a more comprehensive list provided [here](#).

Type	Name	Telephone Number	Address
Hospital	Hazrat Wali al-Asr	3288 4310	Jumhuri Islami Boulevard
Hospital	Shahid Beheshti	3612 2000	Shahid Beheshti Boulevard
Hospital	Kamkar	3771 3511	Beginning of 19th Dey Road
Hospital	Hazrat Masumah (s) Children’s Hospital	3665 1801	Imam Khumayni Road, besides Imam Hasan Mosque
Hospital	Jawad al-Aimmah Eye Hospital	3662 6001	Kargar Boulevard
Clinic	Baqiatullah	3783 0500	Alley 7, Shahid Fatmi Street
Clinic	Hazrat Masumah (s)	3717 5290	Besides Door 1 of Lady Masumah (s) shrine
Clinic	Qur’an & Itrat	3774 1525	Corner of Hujjatiyyah Road
Clinic	Musallah	3774 2694	Amin Boulevard, Besides Musallah Mosque

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

IRANIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE (ITM)

The use of alternative medicine among Iranians far outweighs its usage in the West, partly because of the culture and partly because of the availability of such alternatives.

Iranian traditional medicine or *Tibb Sunnati* is based on the four humors and temperament theory adopted by ancient Greek & Roman physicians and developed by one of the Fathers of Medicine – Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the great Iranian polymath and philosopher of the 10th century. This theory suggests that a person's temperament, health and personality are governed by the balance or imbalance of the four humors (the vital bodily fluids); phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile. A person normally has one of these fluids dominating the others. Accordingly, there are 4 fundamental temperaments: phlegmatic (*balghami*), sanguine (*damwi*), choleric (*safrawi*) and melancholic (*saudawi*). Other less common temperaments include hot, cold, moist, dry and balanced.

ITM focuses on accurately identifying a person's temperament followed by a treatment plan to rectify any imbalances through dietary & lifestyle changes and herbal medication. Since ITM prioritises health maintenance and disease prevention over treatment, even healthy individuals will often visit an ITM specialist for advice and guidance.

[Dr. Romella Haider](#) and [Dr. Mojdeh Pourhoseini](#) are two recommended specialists in this area, both located in the same clinic on [Shahid Karimi Boulevard, Alley 20](#).

ISLAMIC MEDICINE

In contrast to ITM, Islamic medicine (*Tibb Islami*) uses the traditions and narrations of the Holy Prophet (s) and the Ahlul Bayt (a) as a basis to treat illness and disease. Although there is some controversy over the reliability of such practices, proponents of Islamic medicine do exist and offer advice & treatment options for various medical issues.

HIJAMAH

Hijamah, or wet cupping, is a process where blood is drawn out of the body by vacuum from small skin incisions applied on the back or other areas. It is one of the oldest and most effective methods of releasing toxins from the body's tissues and organs and is a technique practiced by the Holy Prophet (s) and the Ahlul Bayt (a).

Imam al-Baqir (a) is reported to have said: "The Messenger of Allah (s) never complained of any pain except that he sought refuge in *hijamah*." (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 17, pg. 33). The Holy Prophet (s) is also reported to have said: "On the night when I was transported to the Heavens (i.e. during *miraj*), I did not pass by any crowd of angels, save that they said to me 'O Muhammad, command your ummah to do *hijamah*.'" (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 59, pg. 300).

This form of alternative medicine is very popular in Iran and people of all ages, including children, can be seen having *hijamah* performed for a variety of ailments or as prophylactic therapy.

While *hijamah* has been highly recommended, it may not be suitable for everybody at all times, and one should ideally consult with a qualified physician prior to engaging in this procedure.

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Medical insurance in Iran covers the entirety or a portion of an individual's medical expenses. Most residents possess some form of medical insurance, whether provided by an employer, educational institution, or acquired independently. *Hawzah* students are generally eligible for free medical insurance for themselves and their immediate family members (spouse and children). However, students should consult their respective schools for specific details.

Each insured family member receives an insurance booklet (*daftarche bimeh*) containing the insured person's details. This booklet must be presented for all medical examinations as it verifies insurance coverage and is used for writing prescriptions and requests for further tests. Generally, presenting the insurance booklet entitles the holder to subsidised rates for medical visits and tests. It is advisable to ask for a receipt, as additional costs may be recoverable from the insurance company, depending on the coverage.

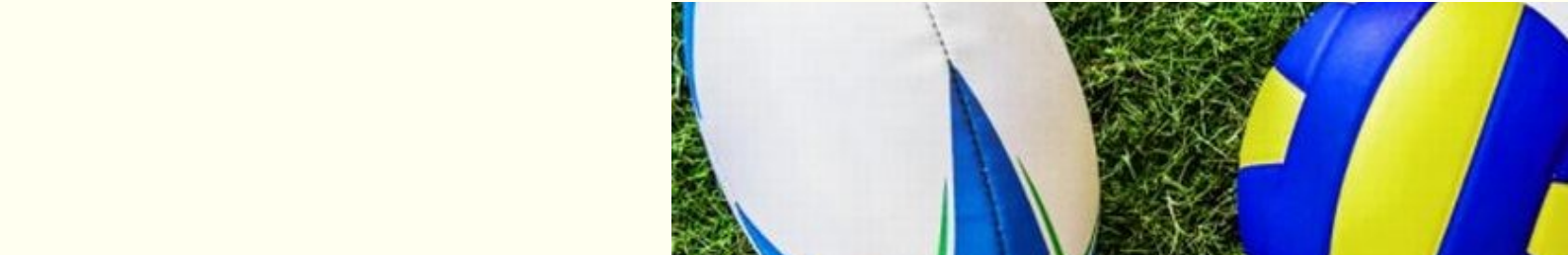
It is important to note that not all clinics and hospitals accept the insurance booklet, so students might need to seek services from another clinic or opt to pay as private patients. Medical insurance usually requires annual renewal.

TYPES OF MEDICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE

Medical insurance in Iran is divided into two categories: basic and supplementary. Basic insurance covers essential medical services, including general practitioner visits, emergency care, and certain hospital treatments. Supplementary insurance provides broader coverage, encompassing specialist consultations, advanced diagnostic tests, dental care, and surgery.

Basic insurance is typically applied at the point of receiving medical treatment.

When a person visits a clinic or hospital, the cashier will inquire about insurance coverage and request the insurance booklet to apply the discount. Those with supplementary insurance can also make a claim to recoup cost incurred beyond the basic insurance discount. This process involves making a claim directly with the insurance company by filling out the necessary forms and providing documentation such as receipts detailing the services provided and their costs, medical reports, and prescriptions. Once the claim is submitted and approved, the insurer will issue a reimbursement.



FITNESS & RECREATION

- ◆ Sports Facilities
- ◆ Parks
- ◆ Amusement Parks
- ◆ Museums
- ◆ Other Activities



SPORTS FACILITIES

Qum is blessed to have a diverse array of sports facilities, including gyms, indoor and outdoor courts, swimming pools, stadiums, paintball grounds, and horse-riding sites. While this variety may sound exciting, a number of these facilities are dated and fall short of expected standards of care and hygiene.

SWIMMING POOLS

Qum boasts 25 swimming pools — a reflection of how popular this pastime is for both males and females alike. A list of some of the most frequented swimming pools can be found below while a more comprehensive list is provided [here](#).

Name of Pool	Address	Telephone
Isar	Jumhuri Islami Boulevard, Karamat Road, Isar Complex	3242 4767
Firdows	Jumhuri Islami Boulevard, intersection with Mahmmod Nejad, Firdows Complex	3261 1111
Kawther	Sadoogi Boulevard, Haydariyan Stadium	3292 5850 3294 0702
Takhti	Shahid Fatemi Street, Alley No. 8, Takhti Stadium	3774 2177
Yaran	Inqilab Street, Shahid Seqayati Road	3720 8884 3720 8885
Daryaa	Khaleej Fars Boulevard	3720 1300
Velayat	Ghadeer Boulevard, Alley No. 17, Velayat Complex	3112 3674
Hejab	Jawad al-Aimmah Street, Opposite the Fire Station	3891 2024
Shahidah Sayyari (women only)	Al-Zahrah University, Yasaman Road	3211 2373

Sessions for ladies are normally scheduled in the mornings, while those for men are in the afternoons and evenings. Prices vary from pool to pool but average around \$1.50 for a typical 1.5-hour session. Tickets can usually be purchased on

the day at the swimming pool or online through third-party websites, which often offer discounted rates. Three reputable websites for online ticket purchases are www.poolticket.org, www.qomticket.com and www.takhfifan.com. When buying online, the ticket is typically sent as an SMS to one's mobile number, which should then be presented to the cashier at the swimming pool.

Swimming lessons can also be arranged with the management, either privately or in larger groups. Most swimming pools also have a shop for swim gear and accessories, as well as a small cafeteria for snacks and beverages.

In addition to the swimming pools listed above, Qum has a water park located in the large Ghadeer Park. Opened in 2016, the [Abotab complex](#), spread over 3 hectares, features seven water slides, a lazy river, a water playground, a wave pool, and other facilities such as restaurants, shops, and a massage service. Tickets can be purchased at the complex, but greater discounts can often be found through online retailers. The water park is typically open from 10am until midnight, with alternate days designated for males and females.



Ariel View of Abotab Complex

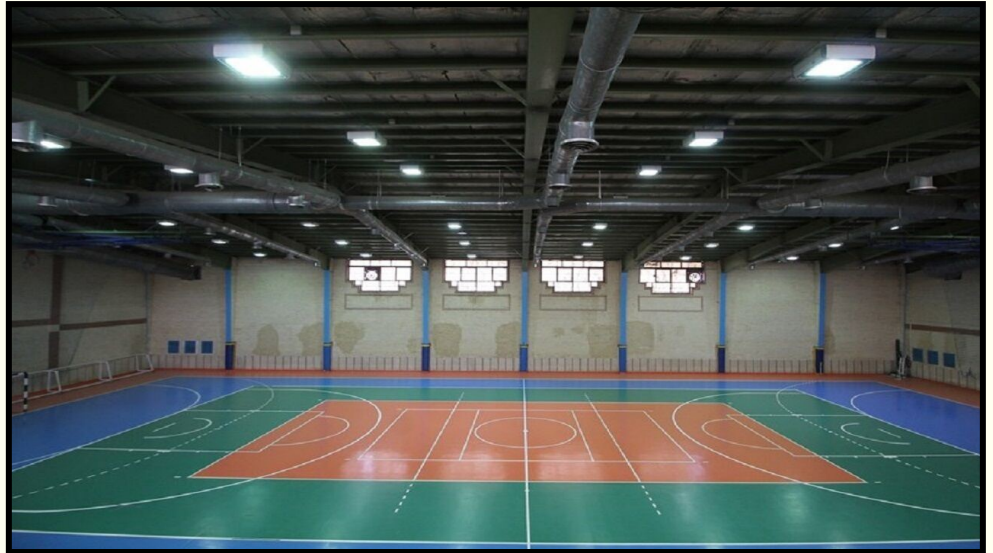
View from inside the waterpark



INDOOR GYMNASIUMS

The versatile nature of indoor gymnasiums allows for a variety of sports to be played. While futsal (indoor football) is perhaps the most popular, other sports such as badminton, basketball, and volleyball are also common. Gymnasiums can typically be hired for 1.5-hour slots at a cost of approximately \$3 per session.

With numerous gymnasiums scattered throughout the city, finding a free time slot is usually easy, and it's even possible to make block bookings in advance.



A Typical Indoor Gymnasium in Qum

FITNESS AND BODYBUILDING GYMS

Another popular option for sports and exercise are fitness and bodybuilding gyms. These gyms usually offer a combination of free weights, resistance machines, and cardiovascular equipment. However, due to the high costs associated with purchase and maintenance, some gyms focus exclusively on free weights. Similar to swimming pools, many gyms operate a split-timing system between men and women, with women generally using the facilities in the mornings and men in the evenings. Additionally, some gyms are exclusive to either men or women.

A common issue in many of these gyms is the background music, which, more often than not, would be considered *haram* by the majority of *ulema*. To address this, individuals can use headphones to drown out the music. Alternatively, they

may request the management to turn off the music, which they may do, especially during quieter times.

The SIOS gym, located in the dormitory, is available for all SIOS students to use everyday between 5am and 11pm. It includes free weights, a couple of multi-function workout stations, a power rack, a treadmill and other smaller equipment.



The SIOS Gym, Located on the Ground Floor of the Dormitory

OTHER SPORTS

There is no shortage of sports activities available for both men and women. In addition to the above there are facilities for boxing, karate, wrestling, bowling, tennis, table-tennis, archery, skating and horse-riding. Further details can be found [here](#).

PARKS

Despite being located in a desert environment, Qum has made considerable efforts to create and maintain ‘green’ areas or parks for locals and visitors to enjoy. Details of a few of the main parks are listed below.

★ Alavi

[Alavi Park](#) is one of the oldest and most well-known parks in Qum. This park, with its large area and green spaces, is one of the most important camping and



Photos from Alavi Park

BBQ sites in Qum and has all the essential facilities needed such as bathrooms, a prayer room, gazebos, public BBQ grills and parking. There are also spaces for playing football, a skating and bike park,

and a children’s playground. Additionally, there is a two-person chairlift service providing beautiful views of the park and surrounding areas, and an adjacent amusement park.

★ Javan

Despite being located on the outskirts of the city, [Javan Park](#) is worth visiting as it has a large, 15m deep man-made lake with pedal boats available to rent and a mountainous track for climbing.



The Lake at Javan Park

★ Narges

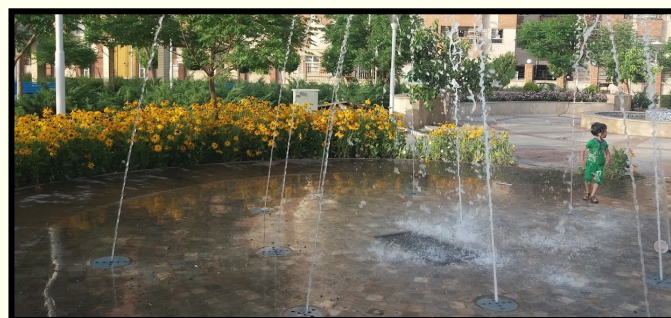
[Narges Park](#) is one of the women-only parks in Qum and is often used to hold women's sports competitions such as running and cycling. There are numerous facilities available including a cycling and skating track (bicycles can also be hired for a small fee), children's playground, a ball pit, trampolines and a bouncy castle. In addition to these, there is a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a library and various art and handicraft exhibitions.

★ Ghadeer

[Ghadeer Park](#) - the largest park in Qum with an area of approx. 140 hectares - is split into various sections including: a camping site, the Abotab water park, woodlands, playing fields, green areas and an amusement park.

★ Koodak

[Koodak Park](#) is one of the newer parks built in the city and benefits from good maintenance and cleanliness. A unique appeal of the park is its huge sandpit and water play area which can occupy children for hours!



Water Play Area at Koodak Park

★ Bonyadi

[Bonyadi Park](#) is another large park with many facilities. This particular park has a beautiful fountain and multiple walkways to enjoy.



Photos from Bonyadi Park

AMUSEMENT PARKS

Amusement parks provide a refreshing break by offering fun and entertainment for families, children, and visitors of all ages. Whether one is looking for thrilling rides, family-friendly attractions, or simply a place to relax and enjoy the outdoors, these parks have something to offer. While there have been past concerns regarding the safety of some rides, visitors can be reassured that strict regulations are in place to ensure regular maintenance and safety, even if some rides appear aged. The amusement parks in Qum can be divided into two categories; outdoor and indoor.

OUTDOOR AMUSEMENT PARKS

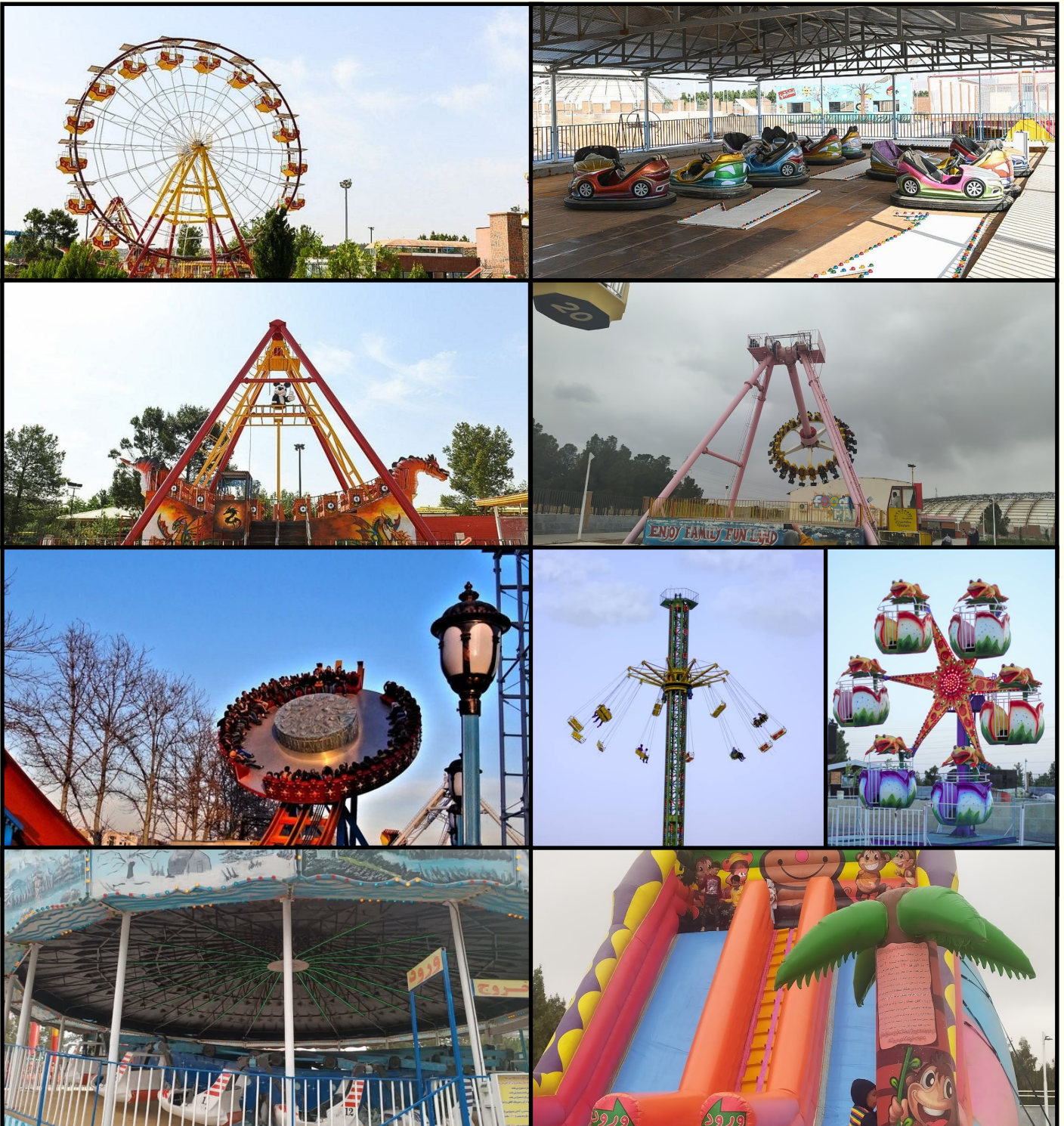
As the name suggests, these parks are located outdoors and are usually spread over wide areas. They typically feature a variety of rides and attractions, from exciting pendulum rides, bumper cars and ferris wheels to more tranquil options such as carousels and train rides. The open-air setting not only enhances the enjoyment of the attractions but also allows guests to bask in Qum's pleasant weather during the spring and autumn months. In the summer; however, the weather is too hot during the day, so rides may be closed until the temperature drop in the evening. This does mean however, that the parks may become very crowded at night. Popular outdoor amusement parks include: [Alavi](#), [Ghadeer](#), [Fadak](#) and [Hashemi](#).

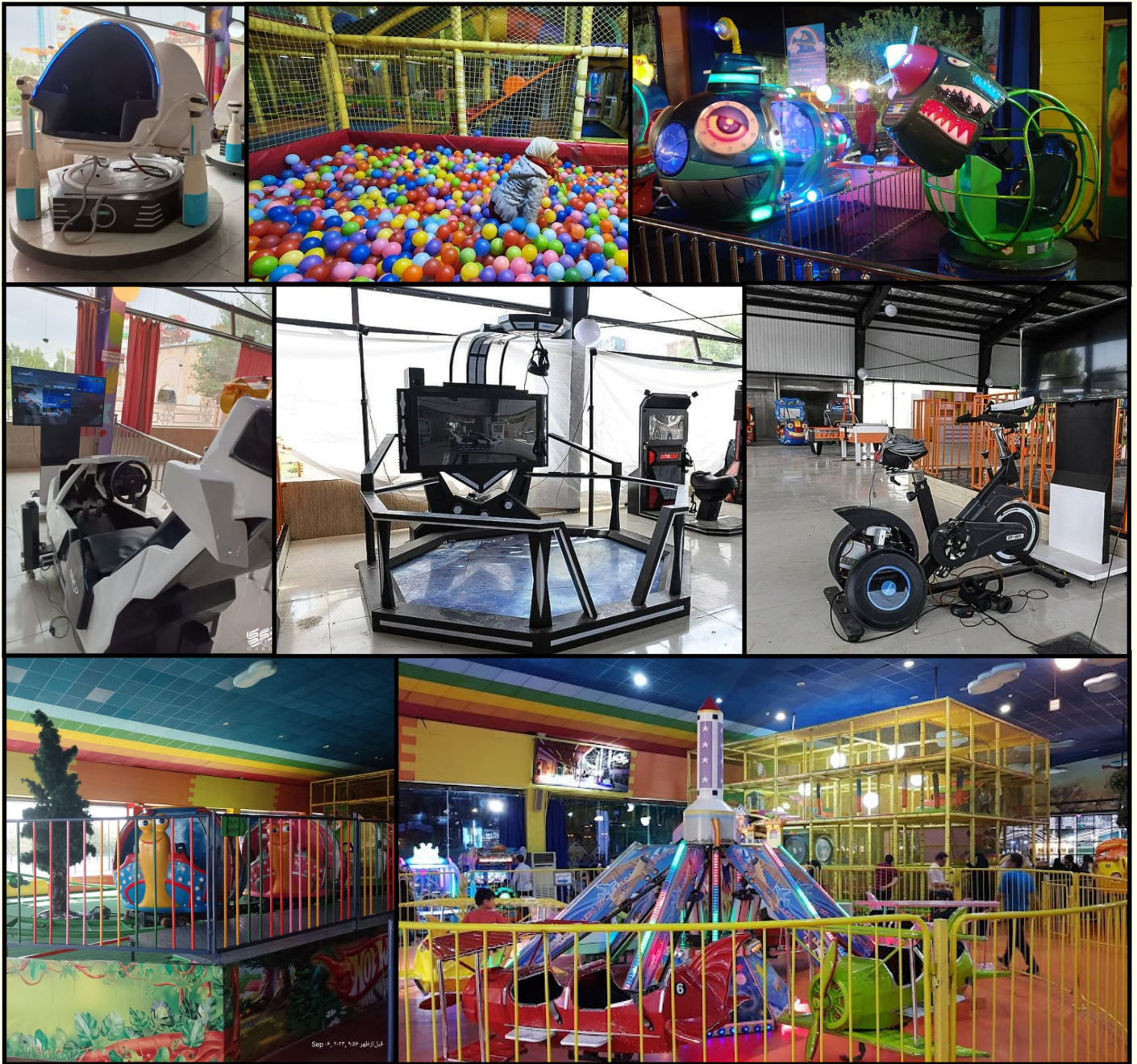
INDOOR AMUSEMENT PARKS

Indoor amusement parks offer a climate-controlled environment where families and visitors can enjoy a range of indoor attractions, especially during the hotter months when outdoor activities can be less appealing. Usually housed within

large, well-ventilated complexes, indoor amusement parks normally include arcade games, virtual reality experiences, motion simulators, and rides such as bumper cars and mini roller coasters. Many also include dedicated play areas for younger children, ensuring fun and safety for all age groups. The convenience and comfort of indoor parks make them a popular choice for year-round entertainment. Some of the best indoor amusement parks in Qum include: [Rangeen Koman](#), [Alavi](#) and [Sirang](#).

A Selection of Attractions at the Outdoor Amusement Parks





A Selection of Attractions at the Indoor Amusement Parks

MUSEUMS

Museums in Qum offer a glimpse into the rich cultural, religious, and historical heritage of the region. These museums house a diverse array of artifacts, artworks, manuscripts, and exhibits that reflect Qum's significance as a spiritual, academic and religious hub. Visitors can explore collections that span centuries, providing insights into the religious traditions, scholarly achievements, and everyday life of the city's inhabitants. There are three main museums worth visiting.

LADY MASUMAH MUSEUM

Located in Astaneh Square, adjacent to one of the main entrances of the Lady Masumah (a) shrine, [this museum](#) houses two main halls, Etrat and Ebrat, along with 40 valuable collections of ancient, historical, and artistic artifacts. There is an entrance fee of approximately \$2 per person.

Visitors can explore a wide array of museum pieces, including millennia-old bronze and clay artifacts, glass and tile works, metal objects, wooden artifacts, textiles and carpets, seals and gems, stamps and coins, and sports medals and badges, all showcased in the Ebrat hall. Meanwhile, the Etrat Hall is dedicated to the Lady Masumah (a).



Visitors Browsing the Displays at Lady Masumah (a) Museum

It features thousand-year-old sacred historical objects from the holy shrine, including 840-year-old tiles from the mausoleum, ancient shrine and dome artifacts, and hundreds of other precious items related to the culture of pilgrimage, service traditions, historical professions, ceremonies, and Quranic culture. It also displays handwritten Qur'ans attributed to the Infallible Imams (a) and blessed artifacts from the holy shrines in Iraq.

MUSEUM OF RELIGION AND THE WORLD

The [Museum of Religion and the World](#) is one of the most important and fascinating museums in the city. Spanning over 3200 square meters, this museum was established with the aim promoting the Islamic way of life by educating visitors about religious knowledge and Islamic jurisprudence. The museum comprises of ten collections, each with a wide range of interesting exhibits:

Environmental Collection: This collection features a large and attractive array of taxidermic and synthetic animals including over 200 species of aquatic animals, more than 60 species of birds, over 200 species of reptiles and insects, and more than 20 species of quadrupeds.



A Young Visitor Fascinated by the Taxidermic Models

Holy Relics Collection: Items such as the genealogical records of the Ahl al-Bayt, sacred flags of the shrines of the Ahl al-Bayt, and models of the holy shrines are displayed in this collection.

Jamkaran Mosque Collection: Here, visitors can find genealogical records of the special deputies of Imam Mahdi (a), models and old mihrabs of the mosque.

Scholars and Jurists Collection: This collection features genealogical records and photos of Shia marjas and jurists and a variety of their personal belongings such as handwritten books and, unusually, the car of Grand Ayatollah Gulpaygani (ra).

Worship Collection: This collection displays a model of the Kaaba, visual representation of the Hajj rituals and other acts of worship and precious stones.

Work and Life Collection: For those interested in the history of Iran and the Islamic world, this section shows some of the ancient tools and equipment used for work and daily life, and traditional and antique items.

Economy Collection: This features a collection of coins, banknotes, old endowment deeds, contracts, and ancient scales and balances.

Cultural and Social Collection: The Islamic Republic of Iran has been the target of western imperialism for decades so this collection showcases some examples of the ‘cultural invasion’, including gambling tools, drugs, leisure and entertainment instruments, and ostentatious clothing.

Citizenship Collection: Displays in this section highlight issues such as infringement on people's rights, neighborhood rights, obstruction and noise pollution, and the destruction of public property through visual representations.

Defence Collection: In this section, models of historical Islamic battles such as the battles of Uhud and Khandaq, various types of light and heavy weapons, spoils of war, and more, are on display for the public.

HOLY DEFENCE MUSEUM

Over forty years have passed since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, often referred to as the ‘Holy Defence’. [This museum](#) serves to honour the brave men who sacrificed their lives in the war and to remember the lofty goals of the Islamic Republic. Numerous artifacts from the war are on display both outdoors and inside the main building. The main building itself covers an area of 7800 square meters and comprises of three floors, one of which houses the largest and richest library on the Holy Defence and related themes. Despite the museum being



An Iranian Fighter Jet on Display at the Holy Defence Museum

inaugurated in 2020, there are a limited number of exhibits; however, there are plans to add 14 more galleries by the end of 2024. Unlike many other museums, entry to this museum is free of charge.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

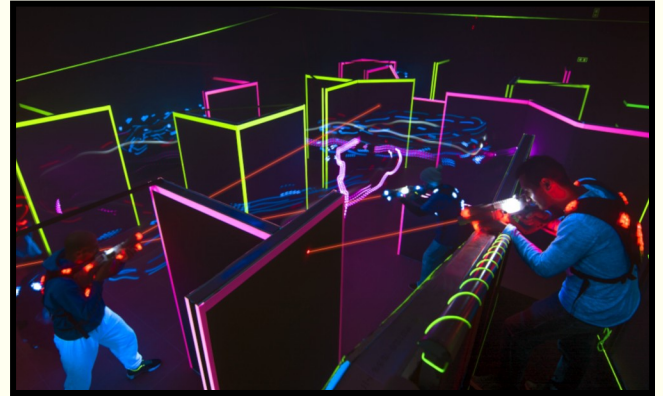
In addition to the above, there are various other activities students and their families can engage in while in Qum, such as:

PAINTBALL



Paintball is a team shooting sport in which players eliminate opponents from play by shooting them with paintballs (paint-filled capsules) that break upon impact. Game types and goals vary, but include capture the flag, elimination, defending or attacking a particular point or area, or capturing objects of interest hidden in the playing area. Qum has two outdoor paintball arenas - in [Pardisan](#) and in [Alavi Park](#). Prices start from around \$2 per person, which includes hire of equipment, protective gear and a limited number of paintballs. More paintballs can be purchased at an extra cost.

LASER TAG



Laser tag is another recreational shooting sport where players use infrared-emitting light guns and wear signalling devices to tag designated targets, register hits and track firing of the beam. The only laser tag arena in Qum is located within the Noor Cultural Institute [here](#). Prices start around \$2 per person, which includes 10 minutes of training, equipment, 20 lives, a 300 shot limit and two 20-minute rounds of play. Four to eight people can play at one time, including families (both men and women) on the condition that they are all *mahram* to each other). Bookings can be made [here](#).

BIRD PARK



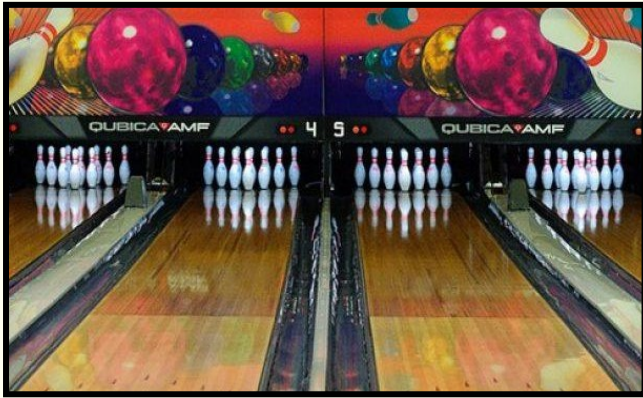
The [Qum Bird Park](#), the second largest bird park in Iran, is a vast and picturesque area featuring a variety of birds in natural and enclosed tropical environments. Visitors can enjoy the views of free-roaming peacocks, ostriches, and other birds, along with scenic water ponds and greenery, offering great opportunities for nature walks and photography. The tropical greenhouse showcases diverse plant species and tropical birds, while specific enclosures house parrots and other exotic birds. Due to the variable weather in Qum, however, the number of birds on display may vary according to the season.

MOUNTAIN COASTER



Located on the at the far end of the [Alavi park](#), the tracks of this coaster have been built on the side of a hill allowing gravity to pull the rider down and around corners. Riders sit in bobsled-like cars and — unlike traditional roller coasters — control their own speed. This 943-meter long toboggan ride, which opened in 2015 and was constructed in collaboration with the German company Wiegand, offers great views of the park and the whole city. For safety reasons, the ride is not suitable for children under the age of three, and children between three and eight years must be accompanied by an adult. Tickets are priced at approx. \$1 per person or \$1.50 for an adult and child in one car.

BOWLING



Bowling is a fun, indoor group activity. Based in the family-friendly [Rangeen Koman complex](#), this bowling alley has six lanes with balls of various sizes and weights to accommodate all players. Up to four people can play on each lane which can be hired for approximately \$4 for half an hour or \$8 for an hour of play.

KART RACING



Another exciting and competitive activity is Kart racing, which involves driving small, open-wheel vehicles on a track. The simplicity of driving these karts means both adults and children over the age of 8 can enjoy this activity. Two karting tracks are available in Qum, at [Ghadeer park](#) and [Rangeen Koman](#).

TRAVELLING

- ◆ Places to Visit
- ◆ Modes of Transport
- ◆ Bookings



PLACES TO VISIT

Iran is a large, beautiful country with an enormous wealth of history, culture and architecture in addition to a diverse range of appealing activities and natural attractions for all ages to enjoy. Students can easily make use of some of their free time during holidays or long weekends to explore the country and benefit from the rich heritage Iran has to offer.

MASHHAD

★ Shrine of Imam al-Ridha (a)

Located in the northeast of Iran, Mashhad is home to the magnificent shrine of Imam al-Ridha (a). As one of the most important religious cities for Shias, it attracts a vast number of visitors throughout the year. The primary reason to visit Mashhad is to perform the ziyarah of Imam al-Ridha (a) and connect spiritually through supplications and prayers.



Tomb of Imam al-Ridha (a) in Mashhad

The shrine is a place of profound sanctity, where numerous miraculous events have been recounted over the centuries.

The *haram* complex is extensive and can be quite daunting for newcomers. To aid visitors, [Astan Quds Razavi](#), the charitable foundation managing the shrine, has created a helpful leaflet available in Farsi, Arabic, and English, complete with a map of the shrine and surrounding areas. These leaflets are freely available at the ‘pilgrim guide’ kiosks scattered around the *haram*. (An English copy of the

map can be viewed [here](#)). Despite the sheer number of pilgrims and the congestion near the tomb, it is often possible to find a tranquil spot to sit, reflect, and worship within the numerous courtyards, porticos, and halls of the *haram*.

The *haram* complex also hosts the tombs of other venerated figures such as Shaykh Bahai, Shaykh Tabarsi, and Shaykh al-Hurr al-Amili. Additionally, it houses three notable museums:

- [Qur'an Museum](#), which contains precious and antique copies of the Holy Qur'an, with some attributed to the Imams.
- [Astan Quds Razavi Central Museum](#), showcasing rare and valuable artefacts, manuscripts, and coins.
- **Carpet Museum**, featuring a collection of over 650 handmade carpets and rugs from the Safavid period to the present day, making it the largest carpet museum in the Middle East.

★ Khwaja Aba Salt Shrine

Khwaja Aba Salt was a close companion of Imam al-Ridha (a) and a narrator of hadith. [This shrine](#) is one of three places attributed to be his grave (the others being in Qum and Semnan). Some mystics, such as Darvish Ali, are also buried here.

★ Raza Bazaar

The famous '[Raza Bazaar](#)' is a long, indoor market located east of the *haram* complex and is built on two floors with two corridors. The bazaar has a unique charm which draws huge crowds of pilgrims and is a centre for buying souvenirs such as toys, prayer mats, rings and saffron as well as everyday items like clothing

and perfume. With over 1700 business units in the bazaar, there is plenty to see; however, many shops stock the same or similar items.

★ Kuh Sangi Park

Kuh Sangi, literally ‘stony mountain’, is the second largest park in Mashhad after Mellat Park. It is a beautiful, scenic area which has a lake and a small mountain which can be climbed easily via the stairs. It takes approximately 15 mins to reach the top where one can enjoy the views of the city. [This park](#) is a very popular destination and can get pretty crowded, especially at night. In addition to appreciating the nature of the park, there are activities for children such as an amusement park and pony rides.

★ Wakil Abaad Forest Park

Located approximately 10km from the *haram*, [Wakil Abaad Forest Park](#) is a large wooded area which has numerous pathways and beautiful streams to enjoy. The complex also includes a good sized zoo and amusement park.

★ Neyshabur

[Neyshabur](#) is a city about a two hour drive away from Mashhad. About 20km outside of Neyshabur is the ‘*Qadam Gha*’, where it is reported that Imam al-Ridha (a) narrated the famous hadith with the ‘golden chain’. There is also a water spring



Photo of Footprints in Stone Attributed to Imam al-Ridha (a)

believed to have appeared at the will of the Imam (as) and a stone inside the building with two footprints visible, again, said to belong to Imam al-Ridha (a).

TEHRAN

★ Behesht Zahra

[Behesht Zahra](#) — The Paradise of Zahra (a) — is the largest cemetery in Iran and is famously known to house many martyrs of the Islamic Revolution. It is also the site where Imam Khumayni (ra) chose to deliver his first speech to the public upon his return to Iran in February 1979 following his 14-year exile.

★ Mausoleum of Imam Khumayni (ra)



Mausoleum of Imam Khumayni (ra)

Within the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery complex lies the impressive [mausoleum of Imam Khumayni \(ra\)](#). The tombs of his wife, Khadijeh Saqafi, his second son, Ahmad Khomeini and other known figures are also housed in this mausoleum.

★ Shah Abd al-Azim Shrine

Located in the city of Rey, adjacent to Tehran, lies the [tomb of Abd al-Azim al-Hasani \(Shah Abd al-Azim\)](#) who was not only a fifth generation descendent of the second Imam, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a) but also a companion of the ninth and tenth Imams (a). He was a very pious man in his own right and a transmitter of *hadith*. It has been reported that visiting the shrine of Shah Abd al-Azim carries the reward of visiting Imam Husayn (a) in Karbala.

★ The Holy Defence Museum

Officially called the '[National Museum of the Islamic Revolution and Holy Defence](#)', this is one of the largest museums in Iran, and is dedicated to the preservation of the memory of the eight year Iran-Iraq war (commonly referred to as the Holy Defence). The museum consists of eight sections displaying different aspects of the struggle and the long-lasting impacts of the war through monitors, projectors and holograms. A guide normally accompanies groups to give further explanations about the different exhibitions. The museum includes a 360° degree circular cinema showing films about the Holy Defence in the spectacular 40-meter diameter dome building. There is also a 5D cinema in the main museum.

★ Ebrat Museum

The SAVAK or 'Organization of Intelligence and National Security' was the name of the Shah's secret police. This building was their prison in which they illegally detained and brutally tortured hundreds of people. Converted to a museum, it now stands a reminder of the atrocities that took place under the Shah through vivid visual displays, films and first hand experiences. A tour guide accompanies the visitors and explains the history of the site and some of the horrific details of the prison. As expected, due to the sensitive nature of the [Ebrat Museum](#), there is an age limit for entry so children are unable to visit.

★ Other Attractions

Tehran is a huge city with many attractions and places to visit, catering to various interests and preferences whether it be to explore the culture, learn about Iranian history, heritage & architecture or simply to enjoy nature's beauty. While it is impossible to encompass everything within the scope of this book, in addition to the aforementioned recommendations, the following are popular destinations worth exploring:

- ⇒ [Tochal Mountain](#) – The highest summit of the Alborz mountain range with a ski resort, cable cars and restaurants.
- ⇒ [Eram Park & Zoo](#) – The largest park in Iran containing a zoo with over 800 animals, an amusement park and a large artificial lake suitable for boat rides.
- ⇒ [Milad Tower](#) – A multi-purpose telecommunication tower – the tallest building in Tehran, which has an observation deck at the top for visitors to admire the views of the city and capture scenic photographs.
- ⇒ [Tabiat Bridge](#) – The largest pedestrian overpass in Iran connecting two public parks containing a restaurant and café in addition to multiple seating facilities along the bridge.
- ⇒ [Azadi Tower](#) – Tehran’s iconic landmark, an impressive monument built in 1971 with a museum and galleries in the basement.
- ⇒ [Jamaran](#) – The village in Tehran where Imam Khomeini’s house is located. Adjacent to the simple house is the mosque where he used to deliver his speeches.

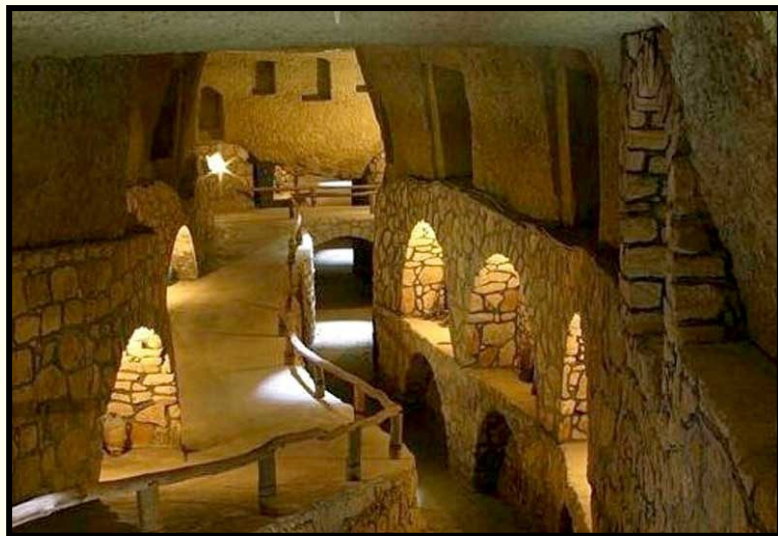
KASHAN

★ Abbasi House

Kashan is renowned for its magnificent architecture and spacious houses. Unlike the present day, houses often used to be built with several courtyards, numerous chambers and even pool rooms. The [Abbasi house](#) is one example of a traditional mansion of a wealthy merchant during the 18th century, beautifully decorated with stained glass windows and elaborate mirrorwork on the ceilings. Other such houses worth visiting in the area include the [Borujerdi house](#) and the [Tabataba’i house](#).

★ Underground City of Nushabad

Another fantastic display of historical architecture is found in the [underground city of Nushabad](#), located about 5km north of Kashan. Constructed over 1500 years ago, it was designed to shelter inhabitants from both the harsh weather conditions and from foreign invasions. It is made up of at least three storeys with winding tunnels, stairs, hidden chambers, traps to fool enemies and even a well thought-out air circulation and cooling system.



A View from Inside the Underground City of Nushabad

★ Niasar Waterfall

Kashan also has some natural scenery to admire such as the [Niasar waterfall](#), a 25-meter high spring-fed waterfall with a park at the top. There is a path from the top of the waterfall leading all the way to the bottom which in itself is also an exciting walk. The plunge pool (base of the waterfall) is fairly small and can get very crowded during peak times.

★ Mashhad Ardehal

[Mashhad Ardehal](#) is a small city approximately 50km west of Kashan which contains the mausoleum of Sultan Ali, the son of the fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad Baqir (a). History narrates that Sultan Ali was sent to Iran by his father to propagate the true Islam. He settled in Ardehal for three years where he became very popular, managed to guide many people and attracted many followers. The Ummayyad ruler at the time grew increasingly concerned about Sultan Ali's effectiveness and in order to eradicate any threat, dispatched an army

to kill him. A brave battle was fought, but eventually, the army defeated and killed Sultan Ali and a hundred of his companions. Due to the resemblance between Sultan Ali's martyrdom and that of his holy grandfather, Imam Husayn (a), Mashhad Ardehal is famously referred to as the 'Karbala of Iran'.

ISFAHAN

★ Naqsh-e Jahan Square

A UNESCO World Heritage site, [Naqsh-e Jahan Square](#) is a grand public space in the centre of Isfahaan built in the 17th century. It is a popular tourist destination and is surrounded by architectural wonders, including the Abbasi Jam'i Mosque, Sheikh Lutfullah Mosque, Ali Qapu Palace, and Qeysariyyeh Bazaar.

★ Chehel Sutoon Palace

Another historic symbol of Iran's rich cultural and architectural heritage is the [Chehel Sutoon Palace](#), or 'the Palace of Forty Columns', built during the Safavid dynasty. The palace's name originates from the twenty slender wooden columns reflected in the adjacent pool, creating an illusion of forty columns. Much of the interior decorations showcase Iranian art and design, some of which depict selected historical events during different periods of time.

★ Abbasi Jami Mosque

Also known as the Imam mosque, the [Abbasi Jami mosque](#) is a beautiful display of Iranian craftsmanship during the Safavid period in the early 17th century.

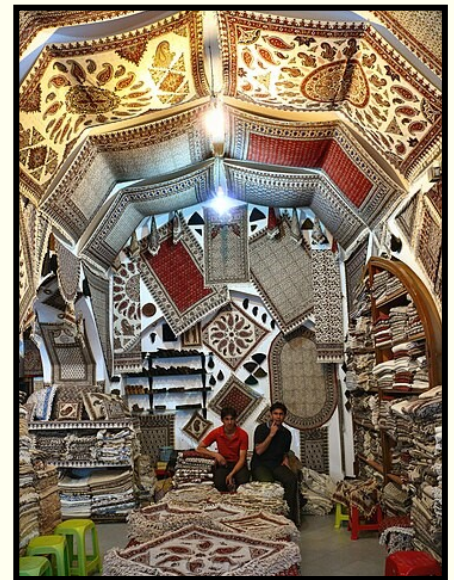


Beautiful & Intricate Interior Design of Abbasi Jami Mosque

This mosque is renowned for its stunning turquoise and blue tile mosaics creating various geometrical and floral patterns, and the grand dome adorned with intricate *muqarnas* (honeycomb vaulting). Not only is it a work of beauty, but is also a marvel of acoustic engineering as the vast dome focuses the sound waves bouncing between the floor and the ceiling, forcing the waves to keep moving back and forth in a regimented fashion and thereby causing multiple echoes. This ensures that anyone speaking under the dome will be clearly heard by those inside.

★ Qeysariyyeh Bazaar

If looking for souvenirs, one should go no further than the [Qeysariyyeh bazaar](#), considered to be one of the oldest and largest covered markets in the Middle East. The labyrinth of alleys are lined with shops that offer a wide array of traditional goods, from spices, carpets, and handicrafts to fabrics and clothing. Many workshops are also located in the bazaar allowing visitors to see first-hand how ornaments and other intricate handicrafts are made. When making



A Shop Inside Qeysariyyeh Bazaar

purchases, it is important to bear in mind that Isfahan serves as a tourist destination, and thus, vendors are inclined to maximize their profits, particularly from foreigners. Engaging in price negotiations is very common in Iran, and individuals should not hesitate to bargain when buying souvenirs or other goods.

★ Khaju Bridge

Yet another example of historical Iranian architecture in Isfahan, is the [Khaju bridge](#), connecting the two sides of the city over the Zayandeh River. It features 21 arches and includes a pavilion in the middle, providing a peaceful spot for visitors to enjoy the scenic views of the river and the surrounding gardens.

SHIRAZ

★ Shah Cheragh Shrine

One of the most famous shrines in Iran after that of Imam al-Ridha (a) and Lady Masumah (s) is the shrine of Ahmad — known as [Shah Cheragh](#) — the son of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a) and brother of Imam al-Ridha (a). Ahmad ibn Musa al-Kadhim was born in Medina, and according to Shaykh al-Mufid, he was a pious,



Dome and Minaret of the Shah Cheragh Shrine

noble individual who was much loved by his father. It has been reported that during the caliphate of the Abbasid ruler, Mamun, he travelled to Khorasan (modern day Iran) to visit his brother, Imam al-Ridha (a), but after hearing of his martyrdom, sought refuge in Shiraz until he too was eventually martyred by Mamun.

★ Tomb of Hafez

Shiraz is known as the city of poets due to its literary heritage and for housing the tombs of some of the most famous Iranian poets in history. [Hafez](#), whose full name was Khwaja Shams-ud-Din Muhammad Hafez Shirazi, is regarded as one of the greatest classical Iranian poets. His poetry often reflect deep philosophical and mystical ideas, and has been translated into many languages. Hafez's verses are celebrated and recited in Iran and around the world, and have influenced the works of numerous poets and writers till today.

★ Tomb of Saadi

Another renowned and eloquent Iranian poet from the 13th century, [Saadi](#) is considered to be a master in the classical literary tradition. He travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia after

undertaking studies in Baghdad in the fields of Islamic law, history and Arabic literature. Saadi's most famous works include 'Bustan', which explores themes of love, morality, and social justice, and 'Gulistan', a collection of moral stories and allegories that conveys lessons of ethics and wisdom.

★ Persepolis

[Persepolis](#), located approximately 60km from Shiraz, is an ancient city that served as the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire during the 6th century BC. Nestled in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, Persepolis holds immense historical significance, showcasing the grandeur and power of the ancient Persian civilization. The ruins of Persepolis consist of impressive stone structures and intricately carved reliefs that depict scenes from ancient Persian life, battles, and religious ceremonies. Visitors can explore notable features such as the Gate of All Nations, Apadana Palace, and the Hall of Hundred Columns. These UNESCO World Heritage sites provide a captivating insight into one of the greatest civilizations in ancient history.



Some of the Ruins from the Ancient Persian Civilization in Persepolis

MODES OF TRANSPORT

AIR

In addition to international airports in major cities like Tehran and Mashhad, Iran has numerous domestic airports across the country. Qum currently lacks its own airport, making Mehrabad Airport in Tehran the nearest option. Mehrabad Airport comprises six terminals: Terminals 1 and 2 manage departures and arrivals for ATA Airlines, Iran Air, Iran Airtour, Kish Air, Meraj Airlines, Qeshm Air, and Zagros Airlines, while Terminals 4 and 6 handle those for all other airlines.

A typical taxi ride from Qum to Mehrabad Airport would take between two and two and a half hours, and should cost less than \$10.

Although airfare is more expensive than other modes of transportation, it is relatively affordable and particularly beneficial for long-distance travel when saving time is a priority. For example, a one-way, off-peak flight from Tehran to Mashhad costs approximately \$40 and the journey typically takes around 1.5 hours.

There are two types of flights: chartered and scheduled. Chartered flights tend to be more budget-friendly but come with certain limitations. Once a charter ticket is purchased, it cannot be changed or cancelled, and refunds are not provided. Conversely, scheduled flights offer more flexibility, allowing passengers to make changes to their itinerary if needed. Additionally, scheduled flights often feature discounted fares for children and infants.

RAIL

A popular choice among travellers is Iran's extensive railroad network, known for its safety and comfort. The [train station](#) in Qum is conveniently located in the city centre, about a five-minute taxi ride from the shrine. With both direct and

indirect routes to multiple cities, taking the train offers a convenient and affordable means of travelling around Iran. Several train operators provide varying degrees of quality and service, with some even offering different classes on a single train.

Many long-distance trains are ‘sleeper trains,’ equipped with beds that allow passengers to sleep comfortably during their journey. Fresh linen and bedding are provided, along with refreshments and meals, depending on the train operator and the service purchased. Washrooms are located at each end of a wagon, which contains ten cabins, and are usually fitted with an ‘eastern’ squat toilet rather than a ‘western’ style toilet.



Inside View of a Four-Passenger 'Sleeper' Train Cabin

Cabins accommodate either four or six passengers. Six-passenger cabins are significantly cheaper but can feel cramped and uncomfortable, especially when sharing with unknown passengers. Unlike air travel, there are no size or

weight limits for luggage, and bags are not checked in. Passengers are responsible for carrying all luggage onto the train themselves and storing it in their cabins. Each cabin has an overhead storage compartment that can fit two medium-large suitcases, while smaller bags and suitcases can be stored under the seats.

Trains stop during the journey for prayer times, but only 15-20 minutes are given for passengers to alight, use the washrooms, and pray at the station. This often results in chaotic scenes as passengers try to complete their prayers and return to

the train before it departs. That being said, the facilities at many stations are decent and can accommodate large numbers of people, so travellers are advised to remain calm and perform their prayers promptly before returning to their train cabin.

Prices of trains are more affordable than airfares. For instance, a single journey from Qum to Mashhad ranges from \$5 for a seat in a six-passenger cabin to approx. \$20 for a seat in a first-class, four-passenger cabin. The fare for children between 2 and 12 would be half the mentioned adult price and children under 2 only pay a nominal fee. Discounts are also available for booking the whole cabin. Cancellation fees are also very reasonable (90% refund if cancelled by noon the day before departure, 70% refund if cancelled up to 3 hours before departure, and 50% refund if cancelled less than 3 hours before departure).

ROAD

If one is fortunate enough to have a personal vehicle, road trips are an affordable and exciting way to explore the country by using Iran's network of highways and roads which connects major cities and towns. For those without a personal vehicle, several other intercity road transportation options are also available.

Coaches are among the most common modes of intercity transport. [Qum's main bus terminal](#), located on the outskirts of the city, offers regular services to numerous destinations across Iran. Several bus companies operate from this terminal, providing a range of class options from standard to luxury (VIP) coaches. Luxury coaches are equipped with more comfortable and spacious seating, air conditioning, and sometimes even refreshments and entertainment options, making long-distance travel more pleasant. Other bus terminals include [Fadak terminal](#), which predominantly serves passengers traveling to southern and

western cities of the province, and the [72 Tan terminal](#), which has services to cities like Karaj, Kashan, and Tehran. Many of the coaches at 72 Tan do not require advance booking; rather, passengers can simply jump on any coach with available seats and pay the fare to the conductor during the journey.

Coach fares are cheap. A typical economy coach journey from Qum to Tehran would cost approximately \$1 whereas from Qum to Mashhad on a VIP coach would be around \$8.

Taxis are another option for intercity travel, with both shared and private taxis available. Shared taxis usually follow specific routes to neighbouring cities and towns, many of which can also be found at 72 Tan terminal.

Travellers who require a more personalised and direct journey can arrange private taxis either through local taxi services, ride-hailing apps or reliable drivers that many students have used before, such as:

Name	Telephone	Vehicle Type
Agha Muhammad Bahluli	0935 610 0636	Saloon Car (up to 4 Adult Passengers)
Agha Hadi Jahangir	0912 552 0482	Saloon Car (up to 4 Adult Passengers)
Agha Sulgi	0912 746 9151	7-Seater Van
Agha Ramazani	0912 753 3881	15-Seater Minibus

BOOKINGS

TRAVEL AGENTS

Local travel agencies in Qum can assist with all types of bookings. Since many of these agencies have established relationships with hotels, they can often secure good rates and availabilities, particularly during peak travel seasons. They can also

provide comprehensive travel packages that include transportation, guided tours, and accommodation. Some recommended travel agents include:

Name	Address	Telephone
Khanom Vameqiyam	45 Metri Ammar Yasir, ZamZam Complex, First Floor, Unit 183	0935 999 3067
Khanom Tahereh Zakeri	Muallim Street, Publishers Complex, First Floor, Unit 136	0930 540 4176
Seyed Amir Safawi	Inqilab Street, Between Alley 7 and 9, No. 215	0912 352 0366
Agha Mahdi Modarresi	Somayyeh Street, Besides Aal al-Bayt University	0919 652 8074

ONLINE

There are many online booking platforms that cater to a wide variety of travel needs, from budget hostels and luxury hotels to coaches and flights. These platforms generally offer detailed descriptions, filters to refine searches, customer reviews, and ratings to help travellers make informed decisions. A selection of these platforms has been provided below.

Best for:	Name	Website	Telephone No.
Hotels	Hotelyar	https://hotelyar.com/	021 44 69 86 11
	Eghamat24	https://www.eghamat24.com/	051 38085
	Snapp!	https://www.snapptrip.com/	021 92 00 01 23
Suites & Villas	Shab	https://www.shab.ir/	021 28 11 12 88
	Vilajar	https://www.vilajar.com/	-
	Jabama	https://www.jabama.com/	021 43 90 09 00
Flights	Flightio	https://flightio.com/	021 41 501
	Fly Today	https://www.flytoday.ir/	021 42 40 50 00
	Alibaba	https://www.alibaba.ir/	021 43 90 00 00
Trains	Raja	https://www.raja.ir/	021 88 31 08 80
	Fadak	https://www.fadaktrains.com/	021 91 00 68 88
Coaches	Payaneh	https://payaneh.ir	021 41 60 90 00
	Safar 7/24	https://safar724.com/	021 53 826

PEOPLE & CULTURE

- ◆ Societal Etiquettes & Customs
- ◆ Office Hours
- ◆ Public Holidays
- ◆ Cuisine



SOCIETAL ETIQUETTES & CUSTOMS

TA'ARUF

Since the Iranian civilisation is one of the oldest in the world, it inevitably has customs and etiquettes which may appear strange at first.

One of the most striking of these, is *ta'aruf*. *Ta'aruf* can be described as a complex form of formalities and politeness that involves a series of ritualised exchanges and gestures where individuals insist on offering something, such as a gift or service, and the recipient politely declines multiple times before accepting.



It may initially be very pleasing to be on the receiving end of such complements and courtesy; however, one quickly realises that many people express such gestures out of habit and tradition rather than with sincere intent. A typical example is when a customer would like to pay for their goods. After the cashier calculates the cost, he would say "*Qaabil nadarad*", literally 'it's not worth it'. To the uninformed, this would suggest the customer is being offered the goods for free! However, this is just a verbal formality and the correct response would be to insist the cashier takes the payment by saying "*befarmayeed*".

Many such instances are encountered during everyday life in Iran, so foreigners must learn to navigate through all the *ta'aruf* to avoid potential mistakes and embarrassment.

GREETINGS

Iranians typically greet each other by saying '*Salaam*' rather than the full '*al-Salaamu Alaykum*' and '*Alaykum al-Salaam*' that many Muslims are accustomed to. Alternatively or additionally, they may use the Farsi equivalent of 'Good Morning', 'Good Afternoon' or 'Good Evening'. This is accompanied by a medium-grip handshake or placing one's hand on one's chest and bowing very slightly as a sign of respect. Unlike the Arab tradition, embracing and exchanging kisses on the cheek or shoulder is usually reserved for family members or very close friends.

All of these customs, of course, apply between people of the same gender, as law and tradition forbid physical contact between non-related males and females. When parting, *Khuda Hafiz* (may God protect you) is the phrase most commonly used to bid farewell.

In Iranian culture, it is customary for people to address each other using formal titles, even in informal gatherings or between friends and colleagues. Men should be addressed as '*Agha*' (Mr) and women as '*Khanom*' (Mrs), followed by their surname e.g. *Agha* Tabatabai or *Khanom* Beheshti. If one does not know the counterpart's surname, simply using '*Agha*' or '*Khanom*' is also sufficient e.g. *Salaam Agha*. Interestingly, titles can also be used to address a person by their first name which indicates a closer relationship whilst still giving respect. For example, a man would be addressed by his first name followed by '*Agha*', such as *Ali Agha* and a woman by her first name followed by '*Khanom*', like *Fatemah Khanom*. Addressing others by their first name alone is really only reserved for family or very close friends. It is worth noting that many Iranian surnames reflect a family's local city or region, for example, someone with the last name *Tehrani* is likely to have ancestors from Tehran.

DRESS CODE

Due to the influence of a number of different cultures on Iran and Qum, men will be seen wearing a range of different clothing styles. Scholars will usually wear the traditional *abaa* and *kaba* with a turban while seminary students are expected to wear long-sleeved, loose fitting clothes and should refrain from wearing western clothing such as jeans, suits and t-shirts in public. Wearing shorts in public is not permitted.



A Typical *Hawzah* Student Shirt

A common item in a seminary student's wardrobe is the collarless shirt, known as the *talabeh* (*hawzah* student) shirt. These, and other suitable clothing, can be purchased from the [Saheb al-Zaman Shopping Mall](#).

Women, as expected in an Islamic environment, are required to adhere to the Islamic dress code and must observe the hijab at all times. Outdoors, many women will wear a black *chador* — a large piece of cloth used to cover the head and body — and whilst visiting the holy shrine, as a sign of respect, wearing a *chador* is mandatory.

HOSPITALITY

Iranians have a strong culture of hospitality and treat guests with great warmth and generosity. Inviting guests over for meals or tea is a common tradition in Iran, and hosts often go to great lengths to ensure their guests are comfortable and well-fed. It is customary for guests to bring a gift for the host, such as a box of sweets, to express their appreciation.

When guests arrive, they are typically greeted with a warm welcome and offered refreshments such as tea or a cold beverage. It is considered polite to accept the

offered refreshment, even if one does not plan to consume it. The host may then engage in conversation with the guest, asking about their well-being, family, and other topics of interest. Unfortunately, their friendliness and curiosity can sometimes be mistaken for an intrusion into one's privacy, as they often ask questions which — especially to those from the West — seem very personal. One shouldn't feel offended with such intrusive questioning, and could instead try to delicately side-step questions one is not comfortable answering.

In Iranian culture, it is customary to offer guests a generous spread of food, often including traditional dishes such as rice, stews, kebabs, and bread. It is common for hosts to insist that their guests take seconds or even thirds, and it may be considered impolite to refuse such offers. Guests are also expected to frequently show respect and gratitude towards their hosts and to compliment the food served.



A Typical Iranian Table Spread on a *Sofreh*

Phrases like “*daste shoma dard nakoneh*” (may your hands not hurt) are used to express appreciation for the hospitality they have received. The host will often respond with modesty, indicating it was no trouble at all.

TABLE ETIQUETTE

Iranian table etiquette reflects the values of hospitality, respect, and community, and is rooted in the country's cultural and religious heritage. Traditionally, meals are served on a *sofreh*, a large piece of cloth spread on the floor, though tables and chairs are commonly used in modern settings. Seating is usually arranged to

ensure that proper hijab is maintained, often meaning the separation of men and women. Food is typically served family-style, with large communal dishes placed in the centre of the *sofreh* so everyone can help themselves. It is polite to wait for the host to start eating although he/she will insist the guests start first.

A notable difference between Iranian and Western food culture is the way utensils are used. Iranians primarily use spoons and forks for their main meal and knives are very rarely seen at the dining table, except for cutting fruits. Some foods are wrapped in bread and eaten by hand only. (Based on Islamic etiquettes, the right hand is used to eat food.)

When passing dishes to others, it is customary to use the right hand or both hands, as the left hand is considered impolite. It is also polite to take a portion of food and then pass the dish on to the next person. At the end of the meal, it is customary to thank the host again and to express how enjoyable the food was. Helping to clear the table can also be a sign of appreciation and respect, though the host might insist the guest relax and enjoy the hospitality.

BUREAUCRACY

Iran is well known for its excessively complicated administrative procedures — challenging not only for foreigners to navigate, but locals as well. Government offices, often spread across various locations, handle a myriad of tasks such as issuing permits, licences, and official documents. The paperwork involved can be extensive, and the need for multiple stamps and signatures from different departments often adds to the time and effort required.

Visiting these offices, one quickly gets the impression that they are unnecessarily overstaffed by unqualified and inexperienced personnel, possibly as a measure to address the high rates of unemployment.

The influence of local customs and the importance of personal relationships cannot be underestimated; knowing the right person can significantly expedite processes that might otherwise take considerably longer.

Despite efforts to modernise and digitise certain services, many procedures still rely heavily on physical paperwork and in-person visits, which can be time-consuming and frustrating. Furthermore, the language style, *ta'aruf* and laid-back attitude means Iranians can take quite a long time to get to their point, so simple tasks and requests seem to take much longer to accomplish.

One stark difference between the administrative style of Iran and what many western students are accustomed to, is the expectation that the individual is responsible for chasing up any paperwork, rather than assuming it will be completed once handed to the appropriate staff member. This, unfortunately, has led to many students experiencing delays in the completion of their administrative work and has sometimes even resulted in significant financial loss.

Awareness of these social norms, in addition to a combination of patience and persistence, is essential for anyone dealing with bureaucratic processes in Iran, and can help individuals effectively manage and complete their administrative tasks.

OFFICE HOURS

Qum generally operates on a six-day workweek, with Friday being the official weekend; however, most offices also reduce their hours on Thursdays.

Qum has the tradition of closing in the afternoons for a siesta, typically occurring between 2pm and 5pm. This midday break, while providing a welcomed respite

from the intense heat during the summer, can be somewhat frustrating for new students who may find shops closed when they need them most. This is especially true considering that classes often run into the afternoon, making it convenient to run errands before heading home.

Despite the widespread afternoon closures, not everything in Qum shuts down during siesta time. Many supermarkets remain open, ensuring that essential goods are accessible. Additionally, emergency medical care is always available, providing peace of mind for those who may need urgent attention.

Beyond supermarkets and medical facilities, many cafes and restaurants also remain open, offering a place for socializing or enjoying a meal during the siesta hours.

	Sat - Wed	Thurs
School Offices	07:30 – 14:00	08:00 – 12:00
Government Offices	08:00 – 14:00	08:00 – 12:00
Banks	07:30 – 14:00	07:30 – 12:00
Supermarkets	09:00 – 20:00	09:00 – 20:00
Shops and Shopping Centres	09:30 – 14:00 17:00 – 20:00	09:30 – 14:00 17:00 – 20:00
Medical Appointments	09:30 – 14:00 17:00 – 20:00	09:30 – 14:00 17:00 – 20:00

Typical Opening Times in Qum

For those intending to carry out administrative tasks, it is advisable to plan visits to offices in the morning or early afternoon, as services are normally unavailable during the siesta period. Banks and post offices, crucial for daily transactions, follow the same siesta schedule but may extend their hours slightly in the evenings to accommodate the public.

This unique schedule means that the city is normally much quieter and less crowded during the siesta, making it a good time for visiting the shrine or other sites of interest which may be open.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The Islamic Republic of Iran has the highest number of yearly public holidays in the world, all of which are deeply rooted in the country's cultural, religious, and historical heritage. The calendar is marked by a mix of Islamic occasions and Iranian-specific holidays, each commemorated with distinctive customs and rituals.

IRANIAN-SPECIFIC HOLIDAYS

Occasion	Date
1 Nowruz	1 st – 4 th Farvardin (21 st – 25 th March)
2 Islamic Republic Day	12 th Farvardin (1 st April)
3 Nature Day	13 th Farvardin (2 nd April)
4 Death Anniversary of Imam Khomeini (ra)	14 th Khordad (3 rd June)
5 15 th Khordad Uprising	15 th Khordad (4 th June)
6 Islamic Revolution Day	22 nd Bahman (11 th February)
7 Oil Nationalisation Day	29 th Isfand (20 th March)

ISLAMIC CALENDAR HOLIDAYS

Occasion	Date
1 Tasua	9 th Muharram
2 Ashura – Martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a)	10 th Muharram
3 Arbaeen	20 th Safar
4 Death Anniversary of Holy Prophet (s) & Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a)	28 th Safar
5 Martyrdom of Imam al-Ridha (a)	30 th Safar
6 Martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a)	8 th Rabi' al-Awwal
7 Birth Anniversary of Holy Prophet (s) & Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a)	17 th Rabi' al-Awwal
8 Martyrdom of Lady Fatimah al-Zahra (a)	3 rd Jumad al-Thani
9 Birth Anniversary of Imam Ali (a)	13 th Rajab
10 Start of Prophetic Mission (Mabath)	27 th Rajab
11 Birth Anniversary of Imam al-Mahdi (a)	15 th Sha'baan
12 Martyrdom of Imam Ali (a)	21 st Ramadhan
13 Eid al-Fitr	1 st & 2 nd Shawwal
14 Martyrdom of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a)	25 th Shawwal
15 Eid al-Adha	10 th Dhul Hijjah
16 Eid al-Ghadir	18 th Dhul Hijjah

CUISINE

Iranian cuisine is a combination of ancient traditions and modern influences that reflects the country's diverse cultural heritage and geography. It is characterized by the use of fragrant spices, fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables, and a variety of meats, including lamb, beef, and chicken.

POPULAR DISHES

★ Kebabs

Kebabs are a favourite across Iran. They come in many forms and can be made with a variety of meats, including lamb, chicken and beef. They are usually marinated in a mixture of spices, yogurt,



A Display of Various Kebabs Served with Grilled Tomatoes, Rice and Salad

and lemon juice, and then grilled over an open flame. Kebabs, along with stews and other dishes, are commonly served with rice, one of the most important staples in Iranian cuisine. They are known for their delicate flavours and textures, and are often seasoned with saffron, cinnamon, and other spices. The two most popular kebabs are *Kebab Koobideh* made from ground meat, and *Joojeh Kebab* made from chicken.

★ Stews

Iranian stews, known as *khoreshht*, are another important component of the national cuisine. These curry-like dishes are typically made with meat, vegetables, lentils and herbs. Some popular *khoreshht* dishes include *Qaymeh*, a lamb and

split pea stew with tomatoes, onion, and dried lime, garnished with golden, thinly sliced crispy potatoes. *Fesenjan* is a rich stew made with chicken or duck, pomegranate paste, and walnuts. Another Iranian favourite, *Qorma*



Qorma Sabzi

Sabzi, is made from a mixture of aromatic herbs and vegetables such as parsley, coriander, leeks and spinach cooked with red beans, dried limes and lamb.

★ Soups



Aash Reshteh

Iranian soups, like *Aash*, are thick, hearty dishes often packed with legumes, herbs, and sometimes meat. Popular varieties include *Aash Reshteh*, a thick noodle soup with beans and greens and *Aash Jo*, a barley soup.

VEGETARIAN DISHES

Despite the richness and diversity of Iranian cuisine, there is limited availability of vegetarian options, especially at restaurants. Traditional Iranian meals heavily feature meat, particularly lamb, chicken, and beef, which are central to many iconic dishes.

While Iranian cuisine does include a variety of vegetable dishes, they are often not vegetarian. For instance, many stews and soups contain small pieces of meat and even dishes that appear to be totally vegetable-based may use animal broths in their preparation.

This being said, vegetarian dishes do exist within Iranian cuisine. For instance, *Khoresht Bademjan*, is a flavourful eggplant stew that can be enjoyed with or without rice. The eggplant is simmered in a tomato-based sauce with onions, spices, and sometimes other vegetables like potatoes or green beans. This is a vegetarian adaptation of the original dish which is made with beef. *Adas Polo* is a rice-based dish combining the goodness of lentils with the sweetness of raisins and fragrant spices like turmeric and cumin. Another common vegetarian dish is *Kuku Sabzi*, an omelette that is made with fresh herbs and spices and is typically served with bread and yogurt.



Khoresht Bademjan

APPETISERS & DESSERTS

In addition to these main dishes, Iranian cuisine also includes a variety of side dishes, appetisers, and desserts. Some popular appetisers include *Borani*, a yogurt and herb dip, and *Kashk Bademjan*, a creamy dip made by blending roasted eggplant with garlic, onions, and whey and subsequently topped up with caramelized onions and mint. Desserts include different types of pastries, cakes, sweets and cookies, such as *Sohan*, a traditional saffron brittle toffee, *Gaz*, Iranian nougat that originated in Isfahan, *Noon Khamei*, the Iranian cream puff, and many others.



A Selection of the Different Types of Sweets Available in Qum

TRADITIONAL BREADS

Bread, known as *naan* or *noon* in Farsi, is one of the most important staple foods in Iran. Iranian bread-making traditions are unique and distinctive, featuring four primary types of flatbreads: *Sangak*, *Barbari*, *Lavash* & *Taftoon*.



★ Sangak

This traditional stone-baked bread, typically 70-80cm long and either triangular or rectangular, is named for the pebbles (*sangak*) used in its baking process. Made from whole wheat flour, the dough is baked in a dome-shaped oven over a bed of hot pebbles, giving it

a distinctive texture and appearance. Some bakeries enhance the bread by sprinkling toppings such as sesame seeds, poppy seeds, or dried herbs.

★ Barbari

Known for its thick, fluffy interior and crispy crust, *Barbari* originates from the Barbar region in northeastern Iran, near Afghanistan. This bread is formed into a long oval shape and dusted with *roomal*, a flour glaze that gives it a delicate, airy interior and a beautiful golden crust. Poppy, nigella, or sesame seeds are



frequently added before baking in traditional tandoor ovens or, as is more common nowadays, in modern rotating conveyor belt ovens. Each *Barbari* bread is approximately 70cm long and 25cm wide.



★ Lavash

A soft, thin, and pliable flatbread, *Lavash* is widely used as a wrap for kebabs, cheese and other fillings, making it ideal for sandwiches. *Lavash* bakes quickly in a hot oven due to its thinness but also dries out quickly and becomes brittle and hard if not consumed when fresh.



★ Taftoon

Similar to lavash but slightly thicker, *Taftoon* is a round, soft flatbread made from white or whole wheat flour, milk, yoghurt, and eggs and is baked in a clay oven resulting in a unique texture and flavour.

Bakeries, known locally as *nanvairi* or *nanva*, are often busy, so customers should be aware of their schedules and operational structures. There are numerous bakeries scattered throughout the city, and a person can usually find one within a short walking distance from their home.

Each bakery typically specialises in only one type of bread and operates during specific hours: early morning, midday, and early evening, ensuring fresh bread is available throughout the day. It is common to see queues outside popular bakeries, especially during peak hours, and it can sometimes take half an hour or more before one's turn arrives.

There are normally three queues at the *sangak* and *barbari* bakeries: two for men

and one for women. One of the men's queues is for purchasing a single bread, while the other is for purchasing greater quantities. Consequently, a person may receive their bread before someone who has been queuing for longer.

Customers should also be aware that cash payments are no longer accepted at bakeries, and there are quantity limits imposed on each person. The prices of bread are remarkably affordable due to government subsidies on flour: *Sangak* and *Barbari* cost approximately \$0.05, *Taftoon* around \$0.02, and *Lavash* less than \$0.01 per bread. This system ensures that bread remains accessible and affordable for everyone.

DRINKS AND BEVERAGES

Iranian cuisine also features a variety of drinks and beverages either to accompany meals or be enjoyed as standalone refreshments.

Tea (*Chai*) is by far the most popular and most consumed hot beverage in Iran. Dating back to the Qajar period, Iranian tea is served black, lightly brewed with a variety of spices, and served in small cups often with sugar, rock candy or dates. A distinctive habit among Iranians is drinking tea while gently holding a sugar cube in their mouth, allowing the sweetness to gradually dissolve as they sip - an art which many foreigners find fascinating.

As an alternative, many Iranians will drink *Damnoosh*, herbal tea, for its health benefits and claims of relieving issues such as headaches, insomnia, the common cold and even stress. Many varieties are available, the most popular perhaps being *Panirak* (mallow), *Gol Gav Zaban* (echium), *Babooneh* (chamomile), *Avishan* (thyme), *Behlimoo* (lemon beebrush), and *Ustukhudus* (lavender).

Among the cold drinks, there are many favourites, including *Doogh*, a traditional

yoghurt-based drink, often flavoured with mint and regularly consumed during the hot, summer months. Carbonated versions are also available.

Fresh juices are another favourite in Qum and around Iran in general. There is a plethora of juice bars in Qum serving a wide variety of freshly squeezed juices including: carrot, apple, orange, pomegranate, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, watermelon and many others. Customers can also request a combination of several juices or try the various milkshakes which are served at these juice bars as well.

Sharbat – a general term used to refer to a wide range of sweet drinks prepared from fruits, flowers or herbs – are also very popular during the summer.

Two such distinctly Iranian drinks are *Sharbat-e Khakshir* and *Tokhm Sharbati*. *Sharbat-e Khakshir* is made from flixweed seeds mixed with water, rose water and ice, and often sweetened with sugar or honey. It is known for its thirst quenching and cooling properties and the flixweed seeds themselves have been reported to regulate blood glucose levels, improving liver and digestive system functions.



Sharbat-e Khakshir

Tokhm Sharbati, another rehydrating and refreshing drink, can be made by adding basil seeds to any sweet, flavoured syrup with water. Like flixweed seeds, basil seeds have numerous health benefits and are packed with vitamins and minerals.



Tokhm Sharbati



IMMIGRATION SERVICES



- ◆ Entry Visas
- ◆ Residence Permits
- ◆ Exit Visas
- ◆ ID Codes
- ◆ Consular Services

ENTRY VISAS

A visa is an official document that allows the bearer to legally enter a foreign country. Almost all foreigners require a visa to enter the Islamic Republic of Iran, whether it be a visa on arrival or one obtained in advance. However, citizens from a handful of countries, such as Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon, enjoy visa-free travel to Iran.

Recent changes have modernised the visa process; a traveller's passport is no longer stamped or affixed with a visa. Instead, a paper visa is issued. Additionally, the date of entry and exit from the country are no longer stamped, as eVisas are linked to the individual's passport number and all details are stored electronically. As with any country, Iran has its own specific visa application requirements, which must be carefully adhered to. More details and official guidelines can be found [here](#).

STUDENT VISAS

Once an application to study in the *hawzah* has been approved, the institution will initiate the process of securing an education visa (*visa tahseeli*), also known as a student visa, on behalf of the student. This procedure can take very long, sometimes extending to six months or more, depending on the student's nationality. Security clearances and visa issuance times for students from the USA, Canada, and the UK typically take longer due to their political and diplomatic relations with Iran. It is advisable for students to periodically check on the status of their application by contacting the school directly.

Upon obtaining the necessary security clearance, the school will request a 'Visa Grant Notice', commonly referred to as an 'authorisation code'. This code, issued

by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, authorises the Iranian embassy in the student's home country to issue the visa. Once the Visa Grant Notice is received by the school, it is forwarded to the student, who then must follow the procedures of the respective Iranian embassy to obtain the visa. It is recommended that students contact their local Iranian embassies for specific instructions and further information.

Education visas are typically not free, so students should be prepared to pay a fee. The cost varies from country to country, but generally ranges from \$50 to \$400. The Visa Grant Notice is normally valid for 60 days, requiring the bearer to submit their passport to the embassy within this period to obtain the visa. The visa itself is typically valid for 90 days, meaning the bearer must enter the country within three months from the date of issue.



ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
E-VISA SYSTEM

VISA GRANT NOTICE




Application Details

Date of Visa Application: 2024/06/11

Track Code: WCTA3658ECC99098

Applicant Details

Applicant ID: EQPTKB16

Applicant Name:

Date of Birth:

Nationality: United Kingdom

Passport Number:

Grant Details

Visa Type: Student (E)

Visa Grant Validity: 2024/08/10 *

Travel Document Number:

Travel Document Country: United Kingdom

Stay Period: 30 day(s) from the date of each arrival

Entry Option: Single

* You need to submit your passport to Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran-London before this date.



ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
E-VISA SYSTEM

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran-London
Department of Electronic Visa



WCTA3658ECC99098



ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
E-VISA SYSTEM

ELECTRONIC VISA




VISA NO. IR-218100501

Applicant Details

Applicant Name (نام و نام خانوادگی):

Date of Birth (تاریخ تولد):

Nationality: United Kingdom

ملیت: انگلستان

Passport Number (شماره گذرنامه):

Grant Details

Track Code (کد رهگیری): WCTA3658ECC99098

Visa Type: Student

نوع روادید: تحصیلی

Visa Issue Date (تاریخ صدور روادید): 2024/6/24 (1403/04/04)

Stay Period: 30 day(s) from the date of arrival

مدت اقامت: ۳۰ روز بعد از تاریخ ورود

Valid: From 2024/6/24 To 2024/9/21

اعتبار: از 1403/06/31 تا 1403/04/04

Entry Option: Single

نوع ورود: یکبار

Insurance Number (شماره بیمهنامه): 1403/1515/113/4528/195051



ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
E-VISA SYSTEM

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran-London
Department of Electronic Visa
June 24, 2024



WCTA3658ECC99098

<< لطفاً تا پایان سفر این برگه را نگه دارید. >> Please keep this letter until the end of your trip.



Examples of Iranian Visa Grant Notice and Electronic Visa Documents

VISAS FOR DEPENDENTS

A student visa is issued solely to the individual applying to study in the *hawzah* and does not extend to family members. Married students intending to bring their families (spouse and children) must independently secure separate visas for them.

Applications for the Visa Grant Notice can be submitted electronically through the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs E-Visa website](#) or via a travel agent. The online application offers the benefit of tracking one's application, and does not incur a fee for the visa code. However, many individuals report delays and a higher rejection rate using this method. Utilising a travel agent can significantly increase the chances of approval and expedite the process, although it can work out quite expensive as they charge between \$20 and \$80 per application (excluding the visa fee itself).

It is crucial for the student's family members to arrive on a visa that can later be converted into a residence permit. The most suitable options for this purpose are an Entry Visa, a Pilgrimage Visa, or a Tourist Visa. A transit visa is inadequate for this purpose and should be avoided.

RESIDENCE PERMITS

Residence permits (*iqamah*) for students in Iran are an essential aspect of legally residing and studying in the country. These permits allow students to stay for an extended period and are renewable based on the duration of their studies.

APPLICATIONS

Once an education visa has been issued and the student has entered the country, the next step is to apply for a residence permit. The *hawzah* will assist with this

process, guiding students through the necessary steps. The application involves submitting various documents to the Immigration Police, including:

- **Completed Application Form:** This form is typically filled out in Farsi or both English and Farsi. The school will assist students in completing it accurately.
- **Original Passport**
- **Copy of the Student Visa:** It is advisable to keep a printed copy of the visa when travelling to Iran and to provide it to the school when needed.
- **Passport-sized Photographs:** Two 3cm x 4cm passport-sized photographs are required for the application. Numerous photography studios in the city, such as [Namdaar Photographers](#) located near SIOS, can take and print these photos within a few hours. Students should also obtain a digital copy of the photo, as it will eventually be needed by the school. The average cost for eight printed photos and a digital copy is around \$2.
- **Official Letter from the Hawzah:** This letter, confirming the student's enrolment, will be provided by the school.
- **Proof of Health Insurance:** The school will arrange for the student's health insurance.

Photographers will normally keep files saved for quick re-prints. Keep a note of the code written on the back of the photographs.

This process should begin soon after arriving in Iran. Ideally, the new student should report to the school within a few days of arrival to avoid delays, as the issuance of the residence permit can take between 15 and 90 days. If the residence permit is not issued before the expiry of the student visa, a visa extension will need to be applied for. Again, this will be handled by the relevant school department; however, it is the student's responsibility to follow up and ensure the necessary applications are made before the visa expires.

Once all the documents have been collected, the school will liaise with the Immigration Police to facilitate the issuance of the residence permit. As part of the application process, a semi-formal interview may be conducted by the Immigration Police to verify the student's identity and carry out security assessments. Apart from this interview, it is rare for students to need to interact directly with the Immigration Police or visit their offices, as the school's liaison typically handles these interactions.

Family members, i.e. spouse and children, are also eligible for residence permits in Iran for the duration of the student's education. Their applications can typically be processed simultaneously with the student's application, although some additional documents are required. Specifically, a marriage certificate is necessary to establish a legal relationship between the student and spouse and hence, their eligibility for a residence permit. The original marriage certificate must first be legalised by the Iranian embassy in the student's home country. This process may involve several steps, including notarisation and payment of relevant fees. (Students should refer to the Iranian embassy in their own country for detailed instructions on legalising documents.)

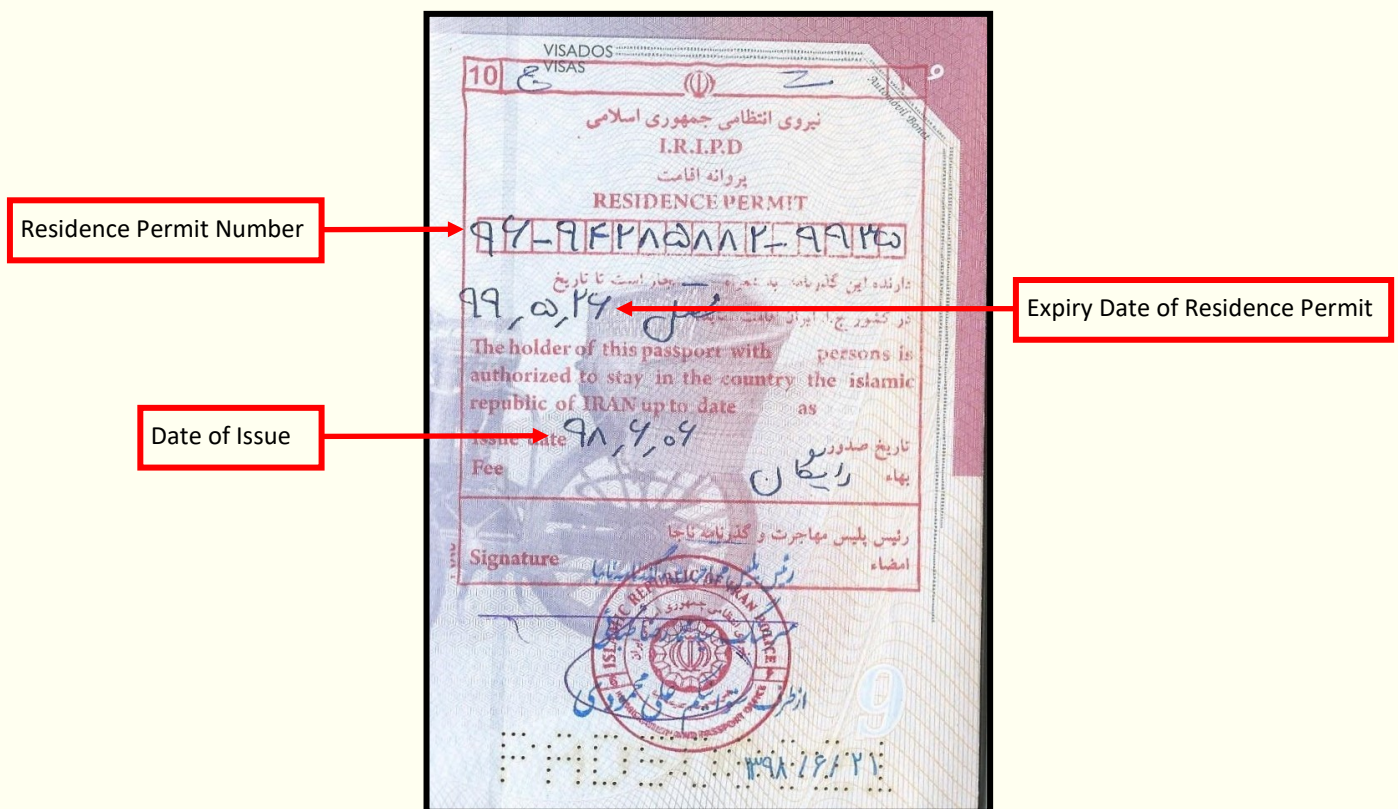
A family member's residence permit is dependent on the student's permit and will normally expire on the same date as the student's permit!

The legalised marriage certificate then needs to be verified by the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) in Iran and translated into Farsi at an [official translation office](#) before being submitted to the school with the other necessary documents; translation of the marriage certificate, original passports, passport-sized photographs, and visas for all family members. These documents should be submitted to the school, which will

Some schools also require education certificates to be legalised. To save time and money, send this to the embassy together with the marriage certificate!

assist with the application process. The approval process for residence permits can take up to three months, during which applicants may need to apply for visa extensions.

Residence permits are usually valid for one year and are stamped inside the passport. However, nationals from certain countries, predominantly Western countries, can request that all stamps be placed on an external document. This system aims to facilitate easier travel in Europe and North America by avoiding restrictions imposed by certain countries and conserves valuable passport pages, which can be costly to renew.



An Example of a Residence Permit Stamp

RENEWAL

As mentioned earlier, residence permits in Iran are typically issued for one year and must be renewed annually. To ensure timely renewal, students should submit the necessary paperwork and documents to their school between two and four

weeks before the permit's expiration. The expiry date is clearly visible on the stamp but is displayed in the Persian calendar, so students should be extra careful to calculate the corresponding Gregorian date to avoid late submissions and ensure their legal status in Iran remains uninterrupted.

There is a daily fine for late submissions, currently around \$2.50 per day per person. While this amount may seem minimal, it can quickly add up and impose an unnecessary financial burden on the student. Therefore, it is crucial for students to manage the renewal process diligently.

If a passport is due to expire, the residence permit will only be issued or renewed up to the passport's expiry date!

The renewal process requires submitting an application form, the original passport, and a photocopy of the current residence permit. Students are responsible for ensuring these documents are provided to the school in a timely manner. Once submitted, the updated passports with the new residence permits are typically returned within two weeks. The fee for issuing and renewing residence permits is around \$4 but is normally covered by the school.

EXIT VISAS

Exit visas (*khurooji*) are needed when a foreigner with a residence permit wishes to leave the country, either temporarily or permanently, and ensures that the individual has settled any legal or financial obligations before departure. This is a concept that many westerners may not be familiar with as they are accustomed to leaving their home countries without prior approval from any authorities. Understanding the process and requirements for obtaining an exit visa is essential in order to ensure a smooth departure.

TYPES OF EXIT VISAS

★ Exit and Re-Entry Visa

This type of exit visa allows foreign residents to temporarily leave Iran and return without having to reapply for a new entry visa. It is issued to those students and their families who plan to travel abroad for short periods and return to continue their stay in Iran. There are two types of exit and re-entry visas:

- **Single-Entry Exit Visa:** Allows the bearer to exit Iran once. If they wish to leave the country again, they would need to apply for another exit visa
- **Multiple-Entry Exit Visa:** Permits the bearer to leave and re-enter Iran multiple times within the validity period of the visa.

★ One-Way Exit Visa

This visa is intended for foreign nationals who plan to leave Iran permanently. It is issued to those who have completed their studies, or are unable to continue their education in Iran, and do not intend to return. Unlike the exit and re-entry visa, the one-way exit visa does not permit the holder to re-enter Iran.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process for an exit visa involves several steps, including the submission of various documents, and in some cases, obtaining clearance from different authorities.

The first step for a student to apply for an exit visa is to get approval from the school's Academic Affairs department. This is especially important if the travel plans fall during the term time. Once this leave of absence has been granted, an application form for an exit visa and accompanying documents should be submitted to the school. The documents required are the original passport and a

copy of the current residence permit.

The processing time for an exit visa can vary depending on the individual's circumstances and nationality, but on average, it can take between 7–14 days. It is advisable to apply for the exit visa well in advance of the planned departure date to accommodate any unforeseen delays.

VALIDITY PERIOD

The exit visa is typically valid for one month from the date of issuance. This means that the bearer must exit the country within this 30-day period. Failure to do so would require reapplying for a new exit visa, which could involve additional fees and administrative procedures.



An Example of an Exit—Re-Entry Visa Stamp

Once an exit visa is obtained, foreign resident permit holders can stay outside Iran for up to three or six months, depending on the specific terms of their visa. Unfortunately, the validity dates and the date by which an individual must return

to Iran by are normally displayed in the Persian calendar. Careful attention should be paid to these dates so students and their families re-enter within the stipulated time frame and avoid the need to reapply for a new entry visa.

COST

The cost of an exit visa is less than \$1; however, different schools will have different policies, some even waiving the fee altogether. It is recommended to check the latest fees through the school’s administration.

	Original Passport	Passport-sized Photo	Copy of Passport	Copy of Visa	Copy of Residence Permit
First-Time Residence Permit Issuance	✓	✓		✓	
Residence Permit Renewal	✓				✓
Exit & Re-Entry Visa	✓		✓		✓
One-Way Exit Visa	✓	✓	✓		✓
Visa Extension	✓	✓		✓	

A Summary of the Documents Required for Each Application

ID CODES

Every Iranian national is assigned a unique, 10-digit national identity number (*Code Melli*), essential for accessing services such as banking, medical care, education, and other administrative services. Since foreigners do not have such a code, there have been significant shortcomings in integrating them into the Iranian bureaucratic and administrative systems. This has resulted in a sense of exclusion and inefficiency in accessing these services.

Iran's administrative systems are often characterised by their complexity and rigidity and foreigners are left encountering numerous obstacles when navigating these systems. One such challenge is the requirement for multiple identification codes, each serving different administrative purposes. This can become confusing and burdensome as it requires keeping track of several distinct identifiers and knowing when and where each one is supposed to be used.

Although there seems to be a plan to simplify this and implement a unified identification system that consolidates the various codes into a single, comprehensive ID, such reforms are far from being materialised and foreigners must continue to manage multiple codes.

CODE SHENASEH FARAGIR

The Immigration Police in Iran issue a 16-digit code to every individual who legally enters the country. This *Code Shenaseh Faragir* is automatically generated at the point of entry, and a barcode label sticker containing the unique code is affixed to the passport. It is important that this label remains intact and is not removed. If such a label is not attached to the passport upon entry, it will be affixed when the residence permit is issued.

CODE YEKTA

Code Yekta is a unique identification number assigned to foreign nationals residing in Iran. It is intended to serve as the equivalent to the *Code Melli* of Iranian citizens. While it is anticipated that all foreign nationals will eventually require this code, it is currently being issued primarily to children, as it is needed for school registration.

Applying for a *Code Yekta* cannot be done online; it requires visiting a Foreign

Nationals Support Office (*Daftar Kifalat*). An appointment must be scheduled with one of these offices (a downloadable list is available [here](#)). During the appointment, officials will verify the applicant's passport and residence permit, collect biometric data, and charge a small fee before issuing the code a few days later. Typically, there will be two codes: one unique code for the individual and a family code shared by all family members. These codes will be printed on paper and given to the applicant, and should be kept in a safe place as they may be required by various institutions for different services.

CODE FARAGIR

Yet another important code required for foreigners residing in Iran is the *Code Faragir*, also called *Code Fida* or *Code Ikhtisasi*. This 12-digit unique identifier is used by banks and other financial institutes for foreigners instead of the *Code Melli* and is required to open bank accounts and subsequently make financial transactions. Similar to the *Code Yekta*, this code is obtained from a *Daftar Kifalat*, so it would be convenient to request both simultaneously. Alternatively, banks or *hawzahs* may be able to assist in obtaining this code independently.

OTHER CODES

- **Driving Licence Melli ID:** This code, issued by the Road Traffic Police, is for foreigners and functions like a *Code Melli* but is used specifically within the context of driving. It consists of a letter followed by 9 digits.
- **Vehicle Ownership Melli ID:** Vehicle registration and ownership documents contain details about the make and model of the car, as well as personal details of the owner. This code, also issued by the Road Traffic Police, appears on these documents. Even if a foreigner already

has a driving licence with a driving licence Melli ID, another distinct code, which looks exactly like the previous one, is issued to identify the foreign owner of the vehicle.

- **School Melli ID:** Generated by the Ministry of Education, this code is for school-age children. It is used for school registration, ordering books and tracking a child's progress.
- **Student Code:** A student ID number is issued by some schools to each student. This is normally displayed on an identification card with the student's picture.

CONSULAR SERVICES

As a foreigner residing in another country, students may find themselves requiring consular services such as passport-renewal, issuance of emergency travel documents, issuance of birth certificates or certification of official documents. These services are provided for by foreign embassies to their citizens visiting or residing in Iran.

These embassies are primarily located in the capital city, Tehran, and usually require their citizens to book an appointment beforehand. Details of a selection of embassies are provided on the next page.

Country	Address	Telephone	Website
Australia	11 Yekta Street, Bahar Street, Shahid Fallahi Street, Vali Asr Avenue	021 7206 8666	iran.embassy.gov.au/
Belgium	Agha Bozorghi Street, Shirin Dead End, No. 4, Elahieh	021 2239 8780	iran.diplomatie.belgium.be/en
Canada	There is no active Canadian embassy in Iran. The Embassy of Canada in Ankara, Turkey has consular responsibility for Iran.		
Denmark	10 Dashti St., Hedayat St. Near Sadr Bridge, Dr. Shariati Avenue	021 2815 5000	iran.um.dk/en
Germany	320-324 Ferdowsi Avenue	021 3999 0000	teheran.diplo.de/ir-de
India	22 Mir Emad Street, Corner of 9th Alley, Dr. Beheshti Avenue	021 8875 5103	indianembassytehran.gov.in/
Iraq	Vali Asr Avenue	021 8893 8865	mofa.gov.iq/tehran/
Kenya	21 Samare St, Vali Asr Avenue	021 8866 7394	kenyaembassytehran.ir/
Lebanon	Haqiqat Talab Street	021 8890 8451	tahrn.mfa.gov.lb/iran/english/
Pakistan	Dr.Hussain Fatemi Street, Eitemadzadeh Road, No.1	021 6694 1388	mofa.gov.pk/tehran-iran
Portugal	16 Rouzbeh Alley, Hedayat Avenue	021 2276 4060	teerao.embaixadaportugal.mne.gov.pt/en/
Spain	10 Shadi Street, Sharzad Blvd	021 2256 8681	exteriores.gob.es/Embajadas/teheran/en/Paginas/index.aspx
Sweden	27 Nastaran St, Boostan St. Pasdaran Avenue	021 2371 2200	swedenabroad.se/en/embassies/iran-tehran/
Switzerland	2 Yasaman Street, Sharifi Manesh Avenue	021 2200 8333	eda.admin.ch/tehran
United Kingdom	172 Ferdowsi Avenue	021 6405 2000	gov.uk/world/organisations/british-embassy-tehran
United States of America (Interests Section of Swiss Embassy)	Pasdaran, Shahid Mousavi St. (Golestan 5th), Corner of Paydarfard Street, No. 55	021 2254 2178	eda.admin.ch/countries/iran/en/home/representations/embassy/embassy-of-switzerland-foreign-interests-section.html

MISCELLANEOUS

- ◆ Time Zone
- ◆ Calling Codes
- ◆ Electrical Supply
- ◆ Mobile Phones
- ◆ Internet Services
- ◆ News
- ◆ Islamic Legal Questions
- ◆ Emergency & Other Useful Contacts



TIME ZONE

Iran is located in the Iranian Standard Time (IRST) time zone which is three and a half hours ahead of Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). Since Iran abandoned daylight saving time in 2023, there is no time-change during the year.

CALLING CODES

In order to call into Iran from another country, the country code +98 must be dialled before the national telephone number. For example, to call the Iranian mobile number 0933 786 1234 from outside of Iran, the following should be dialled: +98 933 786 1234 or 0098 933 786 1234.

QUM AREA CODE

The area code for Qum is 025 and should be prefixed to the local Qum telephone numbers when dialling from another city. For example, to call the Qum local number 3256 1234, the following should be dialled: 025 3256 1234. The same applies when calling from a mobile phone.

ELECTRICAL SUPPLY

The standard voltage in Iran is 220 V with 50 Hz frequency. Visitors can safely use electric appliances brought from their home countries if the standard voltage there is between 220 - 240 V (as is it is in the UK, Europe, Australia and most of Asia and Africa). In the United States and Canada, the standard voltage is 110 V; however, many modern devices are ‘dual voltage’ — meaning they will work on both currents. Normally this is indicated on the appliance; for example, “110 - 220 V” or “110/220V”. Some older devices may not be designed to cope with the voltage difference. In such cases, a bulky and heavy voltage converter is required,

which can be difficult to find in Iran.

The plug types used in Iran are Type C (two round pins) and Type F (two round pins with earth clips on the side). Adapters are readily available in Iran at very affordable prices.



MOBILE PHONES

In 2017 Iran implemented a tax on mobile phones purchased from abroad, including used phones brought in by travellers. Consequently, once a SIM card is inserted into such a mobile phone, it will

Ensure your phone has been unlocked by the mobile carrier in your home country before travelling to Iran.

function normally for only 30 days before being automatically blocked by mobile networks. To continue using the phone beyond this period, it needs to be registered upon entry into the country and the applicable tax must be paid.

FOREIGN MOBILE PHONE REGISTRY

To register a foreign mobile phone in Iran, one must follow these steps:

1. **Obtain a Shenaseh Faragir Code:** This is normally printed and affixed to the back of the passport at the airport.
2. **Visit the Mobile Registration Office:** At Imam Khomeini International Airport, this office is located after luggage pick-up.
3. **Register Personal and Device Details:** The passenger's personal details, Shenaseh Faragir code, and the phone's unique IMEI number will be recorded.

Dial *#06# from your device to find your IMEI number.

4. **Pay the Tax:** The passenger must return to the airport within 30 days to pay the tax, which is approximately 20-40% of the phone's retail value, as determined by customs.

Note: The phone owner and the **SIM** card owner must be the same in order to register the phone.

Purchasing a handset within Iran might be more convenient and cost-effective than registering one from abroad. Phones bought locally have already had the tax paid and require only simple registration via SMS. While managing two phones may seem inconvenient, many students find it useful to have one phone for their home country and a separate one for use in Iran.

SIM CARDS

There are three main mobile operators in Iran:

- [Iran Mobile Communications Company \(MCI\)](#): Commonly referred to as 'Hamrah Avval', this is the first and largest state-owned operator. Their services are generally more suited to Iranians than foreigners.
- [MTN Irancell](#): The second largest mobile operator, preferred by many foreigners due to the ease of purchasing and registering **SIM** cards and other services.
- [Rightel](#): A recent addition to the mobile network market, with a smaller market share and limited services.

As with other countries, signal quality depends on numerous factors, including distance from the nearest mobile tower. It may be worth checking signal strengths in areas where one will spend most of their time before deciding which **SIM** card to buy.

Each mobile operator offers both pre-paid (*i'tibari*) and post-paid (*daimi*) SIM card options. A pre-paid SIM card is where credit is purchased in advance of service use and can be used for calls, text messages, internet data etc. A post-paid SIM card is where the mobile network service is provided first, and the user is billed after a period according to their use of services. Mobile operators also provide a switching service from pre-paid to post-paid.

Apps for each of the operators are also available ([MyMCI](#), [MyIrancell](#) or [MyRightel](#)) where users can manage their account, check their credit balance, top-up credit and pay bills.

Foreigners are recommended to purchase a SIM card from the airport, as it can be more challenging to obtain one later, especially without a residence permit. MTN Irancell and Hamrah Avval kiosks are available at the airport both before and after luggage pick-up, where passengers can buy and register a SIM card for around \$2. If a SIM card is not purchased at the airport, it can be obtained from one of the mobile operator offices in Qum.

MOBILE DATA

Iran has nationwide 4G network coverage with many areas also supporting 4.5G technology and speeds. The new 5G technology is only available in one part of Tehran at the moment and it will likely take many years before the infrastructure is ready for a nationwide roll-out.

Mobile data packages can be purchased either by:

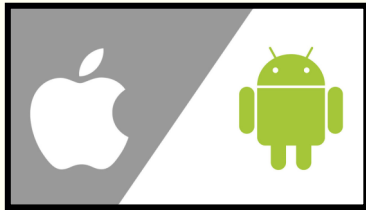
- ⇒ Visiting a retailer (where cash can also be accepted) to top-up one's balance
- ⇒ Using the mobile operator's dedicated mobile app
- ⇒ Using mobile banking apps

⇒ Using the mobile operator's USSD codes. These codes are dialled on the mobile phone to access various menus which allow the user to change numerous settings as well as buy credit or internet packages. The USSD codes for the three operators are as follows:

MCI (Hamrah Avval)	MTN Irancell	Rightel
*100#	*555#	*200#

ANDROID VS iOS

There are two predominant mobile phone operating systems worldwide: iOS, exclusive to Apple, and Android, owned by Google. While Apple holds a significant market share globally, the situation in Iran is different due to sanctions that have led to the blocking of the Apple App Store. Consequently, iPhone users are relatively scarce in Iran. Android, on the other hand, is the most popular operating system here. This is unsurprising given its adoption by numerous mobile phone manufacturers, its greater versatility and customisability and its lower initial cost and repair expenses.



APPS

An app, short for “application,” is a type of software that can be installed and run on a computer, tablet, smartphone, or other electronic device. Most frequently, the term refers to mobile applications designed for specific functions. Apps are typically downloaded from the device manufacturer's app store (such as the [Apple App Store](#), [Samsung Galaxy Store](#), [Huawei AppGallery](#), etc.) or from third-party app stores.

For Android users, [Google's Play Store](#) is one of the most common and popular app stores; however, in Iran, internet restrictions make the Play Store inaccessible without a VPN. As a result, many alternative app marketplaces in Iran offer thousands of free and paid apps. The most popular app store in Iran is [Cafe Bazaar](#) (often referred to simply as Bazaar), which boasts over 36 million users and more than 150,000 apps. A significant advantage of Iranian app stores over the Google Play Store is the availability of local apps for banking, shopping, taxi services, social media, and more. Other Iranian Android app stores include [Myket](#), [Farsroid](#), [Getandroid](#), [Yasdl](#) and [Iranapp](#).

As previously mentioned, iPhones have limited capabilities in Iran due to difficulties accessing the Apple App Store. To download any apps from the Apple App Store, a VPN is required. Additionally, purchasing apps from the App Store presents further challenges.

Despite Apple's security measures, Iranians have developed their own app stores for Apple users. Unlike Cafe Bazaar and other Android app stores, these Iranian Apple app stores are membership-based and relatively expensive. After registering with a local mobile telephone number and paying the membership fees, users can access and download apps. The most common Iranian Apple app marketplaces are [Sibche](#), [Sibapp](#), [Sibaneh](#) and [iApps](#).

USEFUL APPS



Cafe Bazaar: As mentioned earlier, this is one of the most popular marketplaces for downloading both Iranian and non-Iranian Android apps. In order to install apps from Bazaar, the phone settings will need to be adjusted to enable the option “Install Apps from Unknown sources”.



Fast Dictionary: This is an essential app for navigating and learning the Farsi language. This English-Farsi/Farsi-English dictionary not only offers translations but also provides example sentences for each word searched.



MyIrancell: MTN Irancell is a popular mobile operator in Iran. This app allows users to check their balance, top-up credit, purchase internet packages and change numerous settings.



Baad Saba: This is an Islamic calendar app with functions including prayer times, adhan alarms, daily du'as & ziyarats, calendar reminders, weather forecast and more.



Snapp!: Uber revolutionised the taxi industry and many tried to replicate their success. Snapp! is one such Iranian taxi and transport app that allows users to hail a taxi by selecting the origin and destination. Other features include Snapp Bike (for getting a ride on a motorbike), Snapp Box (for a courier service) and Snapp Van to transport larger items such as furniture and white goods. Other similar taxi apps include Tapsi and Maxim.



Eitaa: With many of the western messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram unavailable, an alternative like Eitaa is almost essential. Like many other messaging apps, Eitaa also allows users to send images, audios, videos and documents and create groups and channels. The new update includes the ability to make voice and video calls to other Eitaa users.



Digikala: Digikala is one of the most famous brands for online shopping and is considered the Amazon equivalent in Iran. They offer a wide range of goods from mobile phones and laptops to kitchen appliances and clothing.



Divar: Divar is an online classified ad service similar to eBay, Craigslist or Gumtree. It has a user friendly interface and can be used for both buying and selling new or used goods. A huge variety of items and services are advertised, ranging from houses and cars to private tuition.



AP: Asan Pardakht or AP for short, literally means ‘easy payment’. It is a third party payment platform which allows users to make financial transactions across a wide variety of institutes, pay utility bills, give donations and even search and pay for bus and train tickets.



Snapp Food!: One of the largest online food ordering platforms in Iran is an offshoot of Snapp! called Snapp Food! What started off as an app to order food from restaurants has now grown to include delivery of groceries, fruits & vegetables, meat & poultry, bread and even ice-cream. Although these services can be accessed through the main Snapp! app, this standalone app is also available.



Alibaba: Alibaba is a metasearch engine and online travel agency. In addition to searching and purchasing domestic and international flights, users can also buy inter-city train and bus tickets and reserve hotels.

INTERNET SERVICES

In addition to accessing the internet via mobile data, there are three other main options for internet services; ADSL, fibre optic & wireless broadband.

ADSL

ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) is a relatively old technology which uses existing phone lines to connect to the internet and transfer data. An ADSL modem connected to a landline is required, and the maximum download speed is approximately 16 Mbps — although this will heavily depend on the quality of the phone line itself. ADSL is still commonly used in Iran with a number of companies providing the service.

Each company has their own tariffs and packages which are based on the period of service (1, 3, 6 or 12 months), the internet speed and amount of included data.

One of the largest providers of ADSL is the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI), a previously state-owned company which has been partially privatised. TCI seems to be among the cheapest providers with a 12-month, 16 Mbps speed service with 960 Gb of data for approximately \$20. Additional traffic (gigabytes) can also be purchased if the need arises.

Company	Website	Telephone number
TCI	https://www.tci.ir	2020 (from a landline)
Sabanet	http://www.sabanet.ir	1524
Asiatech	https://www.asiatech.ir	1544
Shatel	https://www.shatel.ir	021 9100 0000
Parsonline	https://www.parsonline.com	1585
Hiweb	https://www.hiweb.ir	1565

Some of the companies listed above also provide VDSL (very high-speed digital subscriber line) — a faster form of ADSL with download speeds up to 50 Mbs.

For enquiries and service coverage information, internet service providers can be contacted using the details provided above. To purchase a service, the telephone sales representative will typically verify the suitability of the landline and may dispatch an engineer to set up the connection. Once connected, a username and password will be provided to access the online account, where users can check their details, monitor internet usage, purchase additional traffic, and renew or cancel the service.

FIBRE OPTIC

Fibre optic cables allow transmission over longer distances and at higher data transfer rates (up to 900 Mbps) compared to electrical cables. Consequently, they have quickly become the primary choice for high-speed broadband internet connections in Europe and North America. While Iran has been steadily expanding its fibre optic network, many areas in Qum still lack access to this infrastructure and cannot benefit from its high speeds. Interested individuals should check its availability by visiting the [TCI website](#) or calling 2020 from a landline. Prices for fibre optic broadband are significantly higher than ADSL, with a monthly, 100 Mbps service with 500 Gb of data costing approximately \$8.

MOBILE WIRELESS BROADBAND

Another increasingly popular option for internet connection is mobile wireless broadband. This option is more flexible as it can be used without a fixed landline and while on the move, with speeds of up to 50 Mbs. Mobile wireless broadband requires a TD-LTE SIM card and a compatible modem which can be purchased

at various retail outlets. The SIM card is simply placed in the modem and the internet should connect automatically within a few minutes. The main providers of this option are [Mobinnet](#) and [MTN Irancell](#), though several other companies have recently joined the market.

Some of the main disadvantages of wireless broadband include:

- **Expensive Initial Cost:** A specific modem must be purchased. For example, Mobinnet offers a 12-month package with 400 GB of traffic for approximately \$100. These modems are typically locked to the provider and cannot be used with another provider's SIM card.
- **Higher Renewal Costs:** Renewal packages and additional traffic can be more expensive compared to other internet options. For instance, a 12-month, 1000 GB package costs around \$45.
- **Variable Coverage and Signal Strength:** Coverage maps for both [Mobinnet](#) and [MTN Irancell](#) can be checked to determine which provider offers better connection and speed, but signal strength may be poor in basement properties.

VPN

A virtual private network (VPN) is a way to improve online security and privacy by creating a secure connection between one's device and the internet. It is also used to bypass internet restrictions and access geo-restricted content in other countries by concealing the true IP address to make it appear as if the user is accessing the internet from a different location. This is especially useful for foreign students wishing to access content in their home countries such as academia, government services and online-banking. A number of websites and mobile apps — including Whatsapp and Youtube — will not work in Iran without a VPN.

NEWS

Keeping updated with local and global news is an important part of a student's routine as it can develop their insight and wisdom. Although many will be familiar with the usual, biased Western news outlets, here are few alternatives in order to get another perspective:



Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) is the official news agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran and was established in 1934.



Fars News Agency, established in 2003, is considered a semi-official news outlet.



Mehr News Agency, another semi-official news outlet established in 2003 has one of the widest news coverages in Iran providing political, social and economical stories in 6 languages.



AhlulBayt News Agency (ABNA) is truly an international news outlet with 27 language options and news from all around the world focussing on stories relevant to all Muslims.



Tasnim News Agency was established to 'defend the Islamic Revolution against negative media propaganda campaigns and provide readers with realities on the ground about Iran and Islam'.



Khamenei.ir is the official website of the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Syed Ali Khamenei. News on this website centres around the leader's speeches, meetings and visits.

ISLAMIC LEGAL QUESTIONS

One of the significant benefits of residing in Qum is being in close proximity to renowned scholars and religious authorities. This proximity allows residents and students to engage directly with these *ulema*, gaining insights and guidance on a wide range of religious and personal matters.

Many of the esteemed *maraji* have offices located in Qum, offering the opportunity to have jurisprudential questions answered accurately and promptly. These offices also facilitate the fulfilment of religious financial obligations such as *khums*, *zakat*, and *sadaqah*. Individuals can visit these offices during their opening hours, call to inquire about specific issues, or access information through their websites.

Marja	Office Address	Telephone	Website
Ayatullah Syed Ali Hussaini Khamenei	Shuhada Street	3774 6666	https://www.leader.ir/
Ayatullah Syed Ali Hussaini Sistani	Moallem Street	3783 6565	https://www.sistani.org/
Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi	Shuhada Street	3374 3111	https://www.makarem.ir/
Ayatullah Hussein Noori Hamadani	Shuhada Street, Alley 33, No. 16	3774 1850	https://noorihamedani.ir/
Ayatullah Musa Shubayri Zanjani	Muntazari Boulevard, Alley 6	3355 5655	https://zanjani.ir/
Ayatullah Hussein Wahid Khorasani	Shuhada Street, Alley 33, No. 21	3774 2445	http://wahidkhorasani.com
Ayatullah Jafar Subhani	Shuhada Street	3774 3151	http://imamsadeq.org/
Ayatullah Abdullah Jawadi Amuli	Shuhada Street, Alley 19	3783 9283	https://javadi.esra.ir/

EMERGENCY & OTHER USEFUL

CONTACTS

	Telephone Number	Website
Police	110	https://www.police.ir/
Ambulance	115	http://115.ir/
Fire and Rescue	125	https://125.ir/
Electrical Emergencies	121	https://www.qepd.co.ir/
Water Emergencies	122	https://www.abfa-qom.ir/
Gas Emergencies	194	http://www.nigc-qpgc.ir/
School of Islamic and Occidental Studies	3291 8185	https://www.sios.ac/
Directory Enquiries	118	https://118tel.ir/
Prayer Times and Speaking Clock	119	https://www.time.ir/
Qum Municipality	3770 3199	https://www.qom.ir/
Railway Information	139	
Road Traffic Information	141	https://141.ir/
Holy Shrine of Lady Masumah (s)	371751	https://www.amfm.ir/
Jamkaran Mosque	3725 6060	https://www.jamkaran.ir/

