

V.I.P. ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY:

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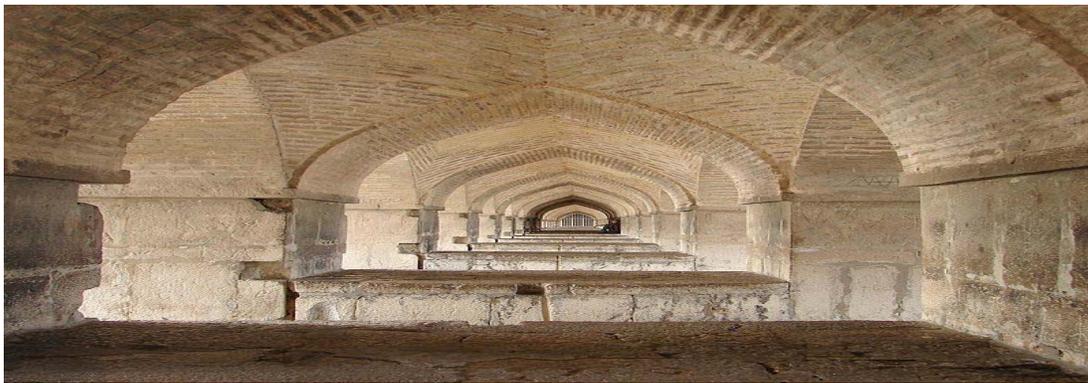
Iran might sound very familiar to everyone because of the political issues that exist between the U.S and Iran, but what is going on inside of Iran is really different and interesting. I'm going to introduce you to one of the oldest cities in Iran – Esfahan. It is known in the world for its unique and historical architecture, mosques, bridges and buildings. Esfahan is nicknamed “half of the world”, which means that to see it was to see half of the world. It was also a place for people all around the world to meet and exchange their cultures and ideas and goods. The golden age of Esfahan was during the Shah Abas Safavi's kingdom, which lasted from 1587 until 1629. By that time, Esfahan was known in the world as one of the largest cities with a population of half a million, 163 mosques, 48 religious schools, 1801 shops and 263 public baths. In this essay I'm going to give you details about the city and the architecture of the mosques, bridges and buildings.

Esfahan is the third largest city in Iran and one of the oldest cities in the world. Esfahan is located in the middle of Iran right on Dasht-E-Kavir (Desert Of Kavir). Zayandeh-Rood (life-giver) is the name of the river that splits Esfahan into two parts and it is the main reason Esfahan is built in the middle of the desert, and it was a summer retreat for most kings during the history because of the nice weather.



Khaju Bridge is the most famous bridge in Esfahan's history and was built in 1667 during the Safavi's Kingdom. Khaju Bridge is 132 meters long and 20 meters wide, and also includes 23 interesting arches with 21 larger and 26 smaller inlets and outlet channels. Khaju Bridge is not only a bridge but it is also a dam. On the eastern side of the bridge there is a high sill, which collects the water. What is amazing about this bridge is the unique style of architecture and tile work that it has, all of which is still viewable after three centuries. In 2008, through an

international vote, voters picked Khaju Bridge as one of the top ten most beautiful bridges in the world.



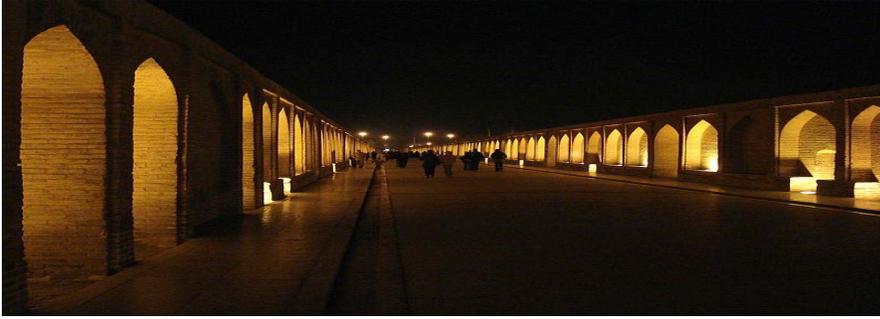
Pictures of Khaju Bridge

Si- O-SE-POL or Bridge of Thirty-Three Arches is another famous bridge of Esfahan also built in Safavi's Kingdome in the 16TH century.

This bridge's design is double deck and it was made with stone. The length of the bridge is 300 meters (980ft) and its width is 14 meters (50ft). The Bridge of Thirty-Three Arches is also known as Allahverdi Khan, named after the general responsible for its construction. The lower level of thirty-three arches is surmounted by a second layer, with one arch above each of the piers and two arches above the lower single arch, giving it its name and rhythmic appearance (Esfahan.org, the official website of Esfahan).

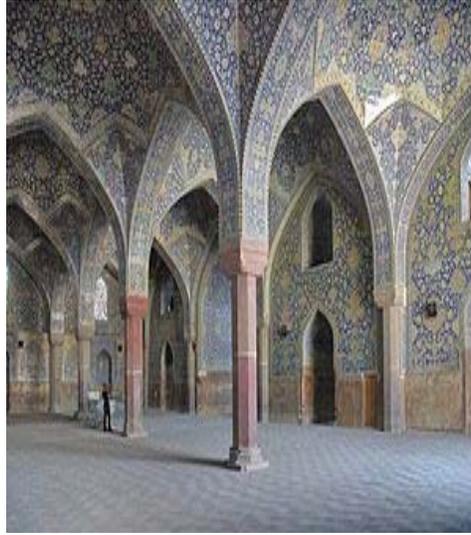
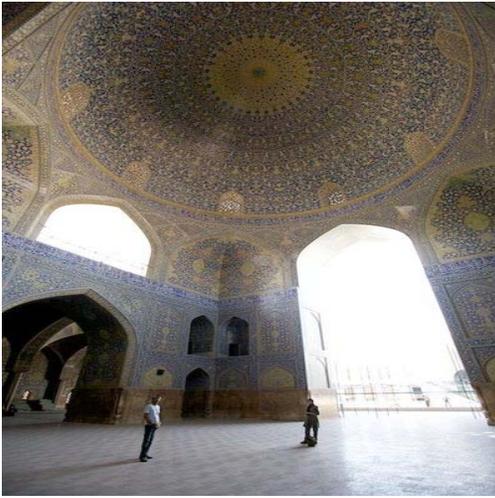
The lighting that the Bridge of Thirty-Three Arches has gives such a fantastic view of the city at night that you can see it from the other bridges and streets close to the river. Also, all of the bridges connect the north side of Esfahan to the south side. On some of them you can just walk across because of the age of the bridge, but they built the new bridges in town so that mainly cars cross them.





Bridge of Thirty-Three Arches

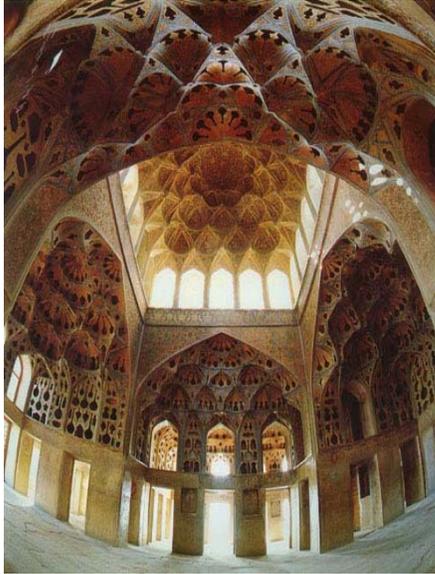
Shah Mosque, or Imam Khomeyni Mosque, is the most famous mosque in Esfahan. This mosque also was built during the Safavi Kingdom. It is located in Shah Square or Naghshe Jahan Square. This mosque was built by Sheykh Bahai and you can see a perfect example of the Islamic architecture of Iran in this mosque. The mosque and the Shah square are both registered on the UNESCO World Heritage site. The length of the mosque is 100 meters and its width is 130 meters. Shah mosque has a really unique design called the 4-IWAN style. You can see the handmade fine art in the next picture.



Shah Mosque/Imam Khomeyni Mosque

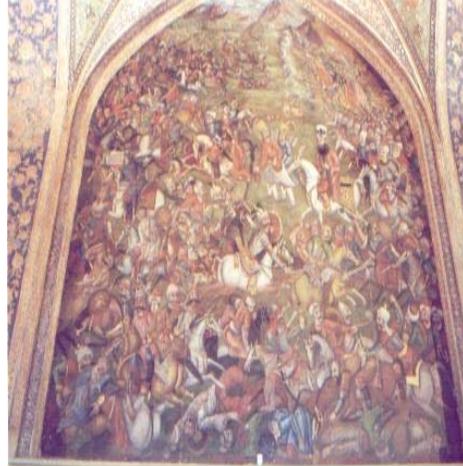
Ali Qapu is one of the most amazing buildings that Safavi built in Esfahan. Ali Qapu is also located in Naghshe Jahan Square. Ali Qapu was built in the 17th century and the name of Ali Qapu means “The high gate”. This is the place that Shah Abas Safavi made for himself to watch polo matches from the balcony and the place that he used to stay for the summer in Esfahan. The place is decorated with designs painted on the external plaster at the rear and elaborate tracery on the ceiling. The lower floors are uninteresting and not as decorated as the higher floors and were used as quarters for guards. The security of the upper apartments was further enhanced by the uncomfortably steep and narrow stairways which run up and down within the building. The coolest thing about this building is that you can talk through the walls

from the 1st floor to the 7th floor. All the designs inside this building are also handmade. Ali Qapu is 48 meters high. The last floor is the music floor, and when music is played there you can hear it throughout all the floors.



Pictures of Ali Qapu

Chehel Sotoun is another historical building, which was built during the Safavi's Kingdom when Esfahan was the capital of Iran. The name means "forty columns," inspired by the twenty slender wooden columns supporting the entrance pavilion, which, when reflected in the waters of the fountain, are said to appear to be forty. This place, similar to Ali Qapu, has a lot of painting and ceramic panels. Chehel Sotoon was also built during the Safavi's Kingdom in the year 1647. The following pictures display the handmade fine arts.



Chehel Sotoun/Forty Columns

Hotel Shah Abbas is the oldest hotel in Esfahan. Shah Abbas Safavi built this hotel for his guests who came from other countries to visit his kingdom so that they could have a nice place to stay. The design of the hotel is really old and unique, and it is similar to Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotoon. It has a lot of paintings on the walls; the hallways, stairwells, and even the beds are reminiscent of 300 years ago.



Hotel Shah Abbas

Hotel Aseman, or “Sky Hotel,” is one of the newest and tallest buildings in the town, and it has a modern design. Aseman hotel is a

collection of extensive recreational facilities and has an area of nine thousand square meters. The hotel has a height of more than 40 meters and consists of thirteen floors with 100 rooms, which was necessary according to latest standards. This hotel also has a very nice glass design on the last floor, which contains the hotel's restaurant, and it really gives you the best view of Esfahan from one of the tallest buildings in the city.



Hotel Aseman/Sky Hotel

Other than the very uniquely styled mosques, Esfahan also has a few churches because of the city's Armenian population. The oldest church of the town is Vank Church which was built in the 17th century, and it has huge domes and arches and high ceilings. There are several paintings inside of the church, and the lighting design is amazing because of how it illuminates the paintings.



Vank Church

The biggest changes that have occurred in Esfahan's architecture have occurred over the centuries, as seen by comparing buildings of the past to more recent ones. If you just take a trip into the town you will see new construction projects every five minutes. A lot of people are rebuilding their old houses into apartment complexes, but because Esfahan is a historical city, Esfahan's government does not let the people build the apartment complexes more than five stories high. Throughout this paper, I have shown a historical and architectural perspective of Esfahan and how the old city is changing into the modern city.