



DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES ABOUT IRAN

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Thanks to the Western media and its immense influence on us, we picture Iran as an extremist/horrific country. In reality, it is quite the contrary. These are some misinformation on Iran which people seem to believe.

Iran is an extremist/hostile country: Most people I know are adamant about this specific stereotype. They have a horrific picture of Iran painted in their minds that says going to Iran is equivalent to walking into a war field. Reality begs to differ. Iran is a peaceful and safe country. I've been there 5 times in the last 6 years, and haven't had any reason to feel threatened. Same goes for their people. All Iranians I know are friendly and hospitable. They might seem a little proud at the beginning but once you break the ice, you'll be like a brother to them. The most notable part of their character is that there is nothing fake in their affection unlike many other *advanced* countries.

Iranians are Arabs: Iranians are as much Arabs as Koreans are Japanese. Technically, "Arab" refers to any of the largely nomadic Semitic tribes inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula. Iran is not among the seven countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, their culture and most importantly, their language is completely different from that of the Arabs. In Bangladeshi literature, we see *Aarbi Farsi* always go hand in hand, most probably due to the similarity in their alphabets. But in reality the two languages are plenty different. Arabic is a Semitic language while Persian is Indo-European. In fact, Bangla is more closely related to Persian than Arabic.

Women are mistreated: Among all the stereotypes, I found this one the most absurd. A friend once told me that Iranian women are not allowed to drive (that's Saudi

Arabia, folks). I've probably seen more female drivers than male on the streets of Tehran. Yes, they have to wear head scarves. But that's pretty much it. When it comes to education and employment, women are in no ways behind men. According to UNESCO world survey, Iran has the highest female to male ratio at primary level of enrollment in the world among sovereign nations, with a girl to boy ratio of 1.22:1.00. Those of you who follow the Facebook page Humans of New York might know Leila Araghian, one of the two architects of the Tabiat Bridge in Tehran which has become a cultural and physical centerpiece of the capital.

Blazing heat: The reason behind this is probably because people think it's completely a desert. Yes, Iran is a big country and it does have desert. But in most cities, the weather is tolerable, if not perfect. In fact, it snows in plenty of places including the capital which is surrounded by mountains. It is particularly chilly in the mountainous cities. And even though the temperature might reach 40 in summers, due to the weather being extremely dry, it does not get very uncomfortable.

Iran is war-torn: A surprising number of people seem to believe that this is true. Majority of the people who are under the impression, seem to think Iran is/was at war with the US. That's Iraq, people. And another bunch of people believe it's due to the Iran-Iraq war. The Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988 and Iran has recovered from it pretty nicely.

Iran is not a tourist destination: This isn't exactly a stereotype but this should be addressed. The most common reaction from people when I ask them to visit Iran is, "Morte?" Now, for reasons stated above, the odds are against you dying if you visit Iran. Especially

for history enthusiasts, Iran is a must-see. The historical sites include Persepolis, Naqsh-e-Rustam and the tomb of Cyrus the Great from the pre-Islamic age. And from the post-Islamic time there are numerous mausoleums of great personnel including Sheikh Sa'di, Ibn Sina and Hafez, and some of the most beautiful mosques in the world. Among the Asian countries, they are the only ones who have managed to preserve the ruins and relics of the great Persian Empire. All the historically important places in Iraq and Syria have been demolished thanks to prolonged



warfare.

I, personally, would choose Iran over countries like Singapore or Malaysia any day. But, for obvious reasons, we do not have any direct flight to any of the cities in Iran, which makes the ticket price comparatively higher. But in the end, it is completely worth it.

There is, however, one stereotype about Iran which is completely true: Iranian women *are* beautiful.

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