



[Tour operators express surprise over the real image of Iran](#)

In a striking revelation that counters long-standing negative perceptions, 100 international tour operators from 25 countries recently visited Iran's ancient city of Isfahan and expressed their astonishment at the reality they encountered.

Their excursions, which were part of a five-day familiarization tour named "Isfahan Tour Operator Meeting," provided an opportunity for tourism professionals to experience Iran's Isfahan firsthand, challenging the tarnished global image of the country.

Organized by the Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture in close collaboration with governmental bodies and the private sector, the tour aimed to showcase Isfahan's historical grandeur, rich culture, and hospitality. It also facilitated business-to-business (B2B) meetings and discussions to enhance global tourism relations.

During interviews conducted on the fourth day of the tour, several operators shared their impressions, expressing surprise and admiration for Iran's hospitality, cultural vibrancy, and tourism potential.

Sharon from Cape Town, South Africa, admitted that her previous perception of Iran was vastly different from reality, saying that she did not expect such a beautiful city.

"I'm very happy to say that it's not like my previous imagination at all. We've been very privileged to be exposed to what is possible in Iran, and especially around here. We're excited to support you [the tourism industry]."

Adnan from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, admitted his expectations were low due to limited information about Iran caused by international sanctions. However, his experience in Isfahan left him pleasantly surprised.

"Well, to be honest, because of the sanctions we did not receive a lot of information from Iran. So, I did not expect a lot, but I am now surprised. I saw a lot of young people on the streets with smiles on their faces. The hospitality here is overwhelming, and Isfahan is a truly beautiful destination," he said. He also revealed that his company has already begun planning group tours to Iran, starting in May after [the lunar month of] Ramadan.

Alessia from St. Petersburg, Russia, echoed similar sentiments. "This has been an amazing experience. The historical buildings, the people's warmth, and the overall atmosphere have impressed me deeply. I believe this event will surely attract more Russian tourists to Iran," she stated. "I am so surprised and impressed by what we experienced in Isfahan. And I think that this event, for sure, will attract more tourists from Russia and all other countries."

"I would like to say many thanks to all the people who were involved in organizing the process and who made this event happen. And it's a possibility to explore such a beautiful city of Isfahan. It's really half of the world," Alessia said. "It's so beautiful. And I mean not only these historical buildings, monuments, this architecture. I mean people, their attitude, their stability, their friendship, their warm and welcome."

Karla from Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasized the impact of media stereotypes. "We often see Iran misrepresented in the media. This trip was a great opportunity to break those stereotypes. My opinion of Iran was always positive, but this visit reaffirmed it," she explained. "Your country is amazing, as I knew that before. So my opinion was the same, but [this tour] only reassured and reaffirmed me."

Sardar Muhammad from Delhi, India, who has visited Iran multiple times, described Isfahan as a piece of paradise in the heart of Iran. "It is my fifth trip to Iran. I know Tehran very well and it is a very, very beautiful city. But it's my first visit to Isfahan. It is a Jannat (a piece of paradise) in the heart of Iran. It is very, very beautiful."

Abbas Malik from South Africa also admitted his expectations were entirely different before arriving in Iran. "The people here are so kind and humble; it's a stark contrast to the image we had before," he observed. "It is my first time visiting Iran. And when I arrived here I see it is totally different from what we expected before. We see that people are so kind, nice, and humble; that's a big difference."

Katrina from Greece urged travelers to visit Isfahan, praising its breathtaking handicrafts and carpets. "Isfahan truly is 'half of the world,'" Katrina noted that she definitely encourages people in Greece to visit this beautiful city. "Moreover, Isfahan has very nice and hospitable people and delicious food; when I return to Greece, I will convince everybody to visit Isfahan to experience how beautiful it is."

A treasure trove of untapped potential

Muhammad Reza from Mumbai highlighted Iran's rich tourism offerings. "Iran is a beautiful and historic place, but it has not been marketed well internationally. It has the potential to be a top travel destination if promoted effectively," he noted, suggesting that Iran should use more multilingual promotional materials to reach a global audience.

“Iran is such a beautiful and a historical place. The sad part is that it has not been marketed well in the world. When it comes to tourism, it is like a good product, but the branding is not visible in that sense.”

“We, the tour operators from different countries, should try and do our best to tell what we have seen here with our eyes. Talk about the hospitality of the people. Talk about the food, the culture, the handicrafts,” Muhammad Reza said

“You know, I think the problem of the Iranians is most of their programs is in Farsi, which the world doesn’t understand. If they talk about Hafez, but in English so it’s going to help spread Iranian culture even more.”

“We must use it for marketing our products. Otherwise, it will remain within the four corners of Iran itself. So, if you want to outreach to the world, if you want to communicate the message of Iran and the message of love that Iran stands for outside the world, we need to use, you know, different languages and different mediums and platforms to reach out.”

He also talked about his experience of visiting a desert during the fam tour. “We went to Varzaneh [Desert], which was a very beautiful place. It was my first experience. I had never seen, you know, a desert and safari experiences like this. It was a very beautiful experience. Also, it was very interesting because we had people from many different cultures. Friends from countries which we have not seen before. Friends from Bosnia. Friends from Armenia. Friends from Thailand, and South Africa. And also co-workers.”

A new dawn for Iranian tourism

The testimonies of these tour operators highlight the stark contrast between Iran’s international image and the reality on the ground. Their experiences in Isfahan reinforce the need for a more accurate representation of Iran’s tourism potential

As these operators return home, their firsthand accounts may serve as a catalyst for change, challenging misconceptions and encouraging more travelers to explore the rich history, culture, and hospitality that Iran has to offer. Such events mark a significant step toward rebranding Iran’s image and establishing it as a key player in the global tourism industry