

TABRIZ 2018




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Tabriz: An open-air museum of history, architecture



White statue of the Persian poet Khaqani in front of the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, Iran.

By Afshin Majlesi

Soaked in history and dotted with splendid vibrant historical sites, Tabriz is one of top tourist destinations in Iran, drawing hundreds of thousands of foreign and domestic travelers each year.

Visitors have at their disposal tours to a rich, matchless patchwork of Iranian history and architecture such as Azarbaijan Museum, Arg-e Tabriz, Poets' Mausoleum, Elgoli Park, Shahriyar House Museum, Municipal Hall, St Mary's Church, Qajar Museum, Constitution House, Khaqani Park, and Sarkis Church just to name a few.

The northwestern city is also famous for having a rich Azeri culture, hospitable people, ubiquitous carpet shops, abundant public places and efficient transport system.

Tabriz has long been a place of cultural exchange since antiquity. Its UNESCO-registered bazaar complex gives reference to the city's glorious past when it was a peak commercial center on the Silk Road.

The sprawling city was named a capital of Islamic tourism for 2018 by the vote of the inter-governmental Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2015.

In what follows, brief introductory notes for the Kandovan village, the Blue Mosque, and the Tabriz historic bazaar complex as three specimens of tourist attractions in East Azarbaijan province have been given.

The historic Kandovan, situated on the outskirts of Osku, epitomizes a modern troglodyte dwelling with homes being carved out on eroded rocks in the shape of stony ice-cream cones. Kandovan is highly reminiscent of Cappadocia, a historical counterpart in Central Anatolia, Turkey.

Masjed-e Kaboud (literary 'the Blue Mosque') has long been distinguished for the grandeur of its intricate blue tilework and calligraphy for which it is nicknamed. The ornament took artists about a quarter century to cover every surface.

Completed in c. 1465 it is remarkable for its simplicity, brickwork, and great size as well. The mosque survived a devastating earthquake in 1727. However, many parts of it caved in due to a quake struck later in the same

century. Many parts of the structure was rebuilt in 1973.

A labyrinth of interconnected covered passages that stretches for about 5 km, the Tabriz historic bazaar complex has been a melting pot of cultural exchange since antiquity.

The bazaar embraces countless shops, over 20 caravanserais and inns, some 20 vast domed halls, bathhouses, and mosques, as well as other brick structures and enclosed spaces for different functions. Its history dates back to over a millennium, however majority of fine brick vaults that capture most visitor's eyes date from the 15th century.

Tabriz has a long pedigree when it comes to its history. For centuries it acted as a buffer between regional powers, Persian and Ottoman empires in particular.

It became the capital of the Mongol Il-Khan Mahmud Gazan (1295–1304) and his successor. Timur (Tamerlane), a Turkic conqueror, took it in 1392. Some decades later the Kara Koyunlu Turkmen made it their capital, it was when the famous Blue Mosque was built in Tabriz.

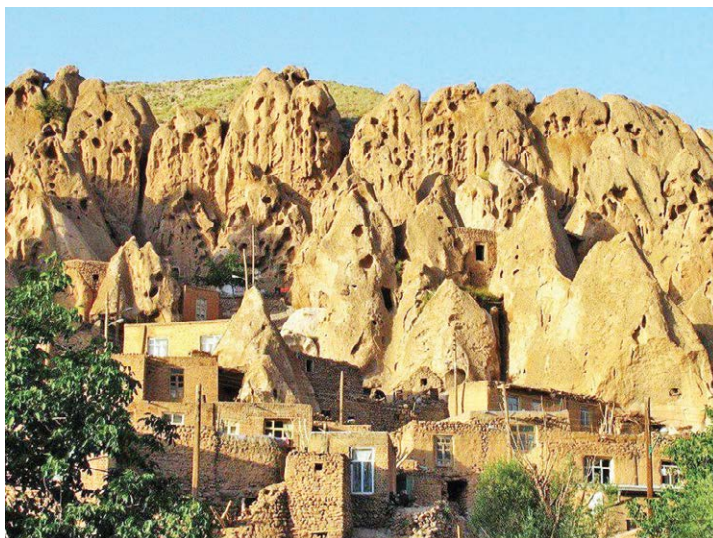
Tabriz retained its administrative status under the Safavid dynasty until 1548, when Shah Tahmasp I relocated his capital westward to Qazvin.

During the next two centuries, Tabriz changed hands several times between Persia and Ottoman Empire. During the World War I, the city was temporarily occupied by Turkish and then Soviet troops.

The pace of modernization quickened in Tabriz when the World War II came to an end, its manifestation can be traced by the emergence of widened streets, high-rise buildings and public gardens adorned with fountains and pools.

All an all, Tabriz is widely deemed as a summer resort by domestic passengers due to its cold winters and temperate summers.

Located in the mountainous East Azarbaijan province, Tabriz is sandwiched between the looming Sahand and Bozqoosh peaks, meanwhile it is being cut through by some rivers such as Aji Chay (also called Talkhe-Rud).

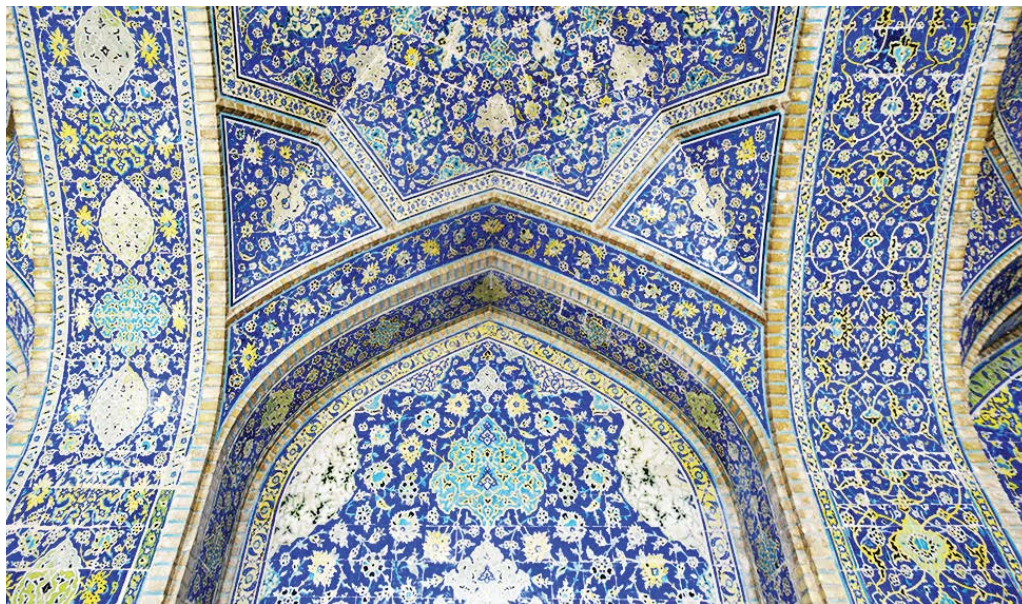


A view of Kandovan village in East Azarbaijan province



A view of Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex, which is a UNESCO World Heritage

Under visitors' eyes: Blue Mosque in Tabriz



The picture above gives details of the intricate tilework that embellishes interior of the Blue Mosque in Tabriz.

Blue Mosque, known as Masjed-e Kabud in Farsi, is one of the notable historic buildings scattered across the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz.

The mosque has long been distinguished for the grandeur of its intricate blue tilework and calligraphy for which it is nicknamed. The ornament took artists about a quarter century to cover every surface.

Completed in c. 1465 it is remarkable for its simplicity, brickwork, and great size as well. The mosque survived a devastating earthquake in 1727. However, many parts of it caved in due to a quake struck later in the same century. Many parts of the structure was rebuilt in 1973.

In the southern part of the mosque lies a time-honored mausoleum, itself a source of splendor. It is entirely covered with massive marble slabs on which verses from the holy Quran have been engraved with a background of fine arabesques.

Mahmud Ghazan, who was the seventh ruler of the Mongol Empire's Ilkhanate, made Tabriz his capital in the late 13th century.

In 1392, the city was taken by a Turkic conqueror named Timur (Tamerlane) and some decades later the Kara Koyunlu Turkmen chose it as their capital. The Blue Mosque was built under their rule.

Tabriz retained its administrative status under the Safavid dynasty until 1548, when Shah Tahmasb I who enjoyed the longest reign of any member of the dynasty, moved his capital westward to Qazvin.

During the next two centuries Tabriz changed hands several times between Iran and the Ottoman Empire.

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the mosque have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

■ **"Masterpiece of Iranian decorative tilework"**

The blue mosque has been restored with great craftsmanship. Only small parts of the original decoration remain, but the quality of the work, the finesse of the designs and the range of colors used is exceptional. (Wim Antwerp from Belgium, visited September 2016)

■ **"Beautiful with nice nearby park"**

From the outside it looked first a bit disappointing but the interior is beautiful and worth the entrance price. The park next to the mosque is also a nice place. (Ellisveen from the Netherlands, visited April 2016)

■ **"Very nice and old mosque"**

Oldest mosque in Tabriz, very nice architecture and courtyard. Price for foreigners: 6x locals. (Ana L. from Sweden, visited March 2016)

■ **"Impressive reconstruction"**

This mosque was all but destroyed in an earthquake in 1779, but has been well reconstructed (and work continues). The original tile work is very impressive, in particular the shine of the glaze which the reproductions struggle to replicate. (PeterC489 from London, visited September 2015)

■ **"Colorful Mosque"**

Very nice building, with a very nice front facade, although not very well conserved! When I visited it we were the only persons there! (Rui Cardoso from Portugal, visited May 2015)

Tabriz historic bazaar complex: A melting pot of tradition, trade, and culture

Tabriz historic bazaar complex, a labyrinth of interconnected covered passages that adds up to about 5 kms, has been a melting pot of cultural exchange since antiquity and once a hot spot on the ancient Silk Road.

The bazaar, which has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, embraces countless shops, over 20 caravanserais and inns, some 20 vast domed halls, bathhouses, and mosques, as well as other brick structures and enclosed spaces for different functions.

Tabriz is the capital of northwestern province of East Azarbaijan.

The history of the Tabriz bazaar dates back to over a millennium ago, however majority of fine brick vaults that capture most visitor's eyes date from the 15th century.

Most mazes and passages offer certain commodities such as carpets, metalwork, toys, clothing, jewelry, and kitchen appliances, traditional spices, herbal remedies and natural perfumes.

One can also bump into colorful grocery stores, bookbinders, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, coppersmiths, tobacconists, tailors, flag sellers, broadcloth sellers, carpenters, shoemakers, and knife-makers.

There are several divided carpet sections across the bazaar that enable visitors to watch or buy hand-woven Persian carpets and rugs with different knot density and other features.

The bazaar was also well-known and prosperous during the 13th century when Tabriz became the capital of the Safavid Dynasty (1501–1736).

The city lost its status as capital in the 16th century, but remained important as a commercial hub until the end of the 18th century, with the expansion of Ottoman power. It is one of the most complete examples of the traditional commercial and cultural system of Iran.

By the way, the city distanced its heyday as the capital was transferred eastward to Qazvin in the 16th century, but the bazaar remained vital as a commercial hub more or less.

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the ancient bazaar have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

■ **"The most authentic bazaar I've been to"**

Tabriz bazaar is not only huge and interesting from the point of view of architecture but it's the most authentic bazaar I've ever seen. Shops are meant for locals, not tourists and there are very few which sell souvenir. (Egoissimo from Cluj-Napoca, Romania; visited September 2016)

■ **"Nice bazaar if you get there on time!"**

Loved the brick work. Shops were your typical shops. We wanted to come for carpets but almost all of them were closed by the time we arrived. I would certainly go back - at a more appropriate

time of course. (AbleDanger from Annapolis, Maryland; visited November 2015)

"Get lost in the miles-long alleys of the Tabriz Bazaar and rest in one of the remaining caravanserais"

Bazaar of Tabriz is unique in that unlike Isfahan, it operates primarily as a local "shopping mall" for local people, tourists being minority there.

You can spend hours there enjoying cultural observations, if you are interested in them, or simply walk down the alleys only to realize that you actually don't know whether you have been here already or not... (DariusSk from Lublin, Poland; visited August 2016)

■ **"Beautiful bazaar with lots of good stuff to buy"**

The impressive bazaar is probably the best reason to visit Tabriz. It's beautiful, and you can buy anything here. As a tourist it's fascinating to experience the great selection of nuts, dried fruits, mountains of tea, spices in abundance - you feel like buying it all. (Mogeltoft from Copenhagen, Denmark; visited July 2016)

■ **"Beautiful bazar, worth a visit"**

Beautiful bazar, with a lot of vendors, from shoes to carpets to dried fruits and nuts you will find everything. (Yasmin A. from Zurich, Switzerland; visited July 2015)

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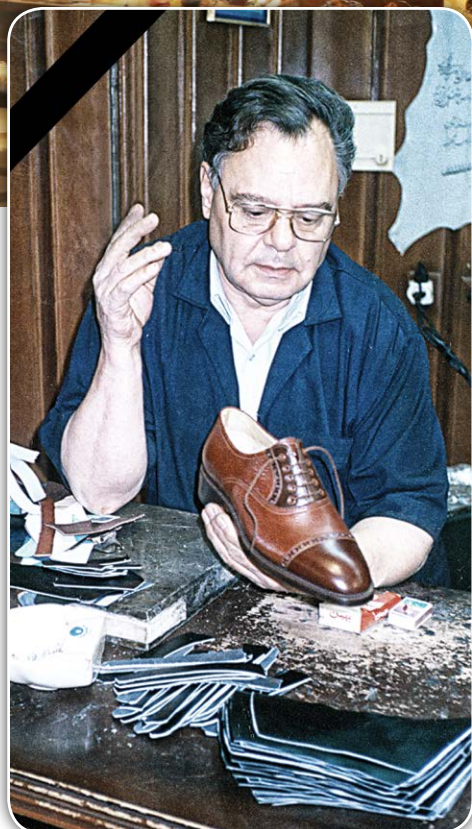
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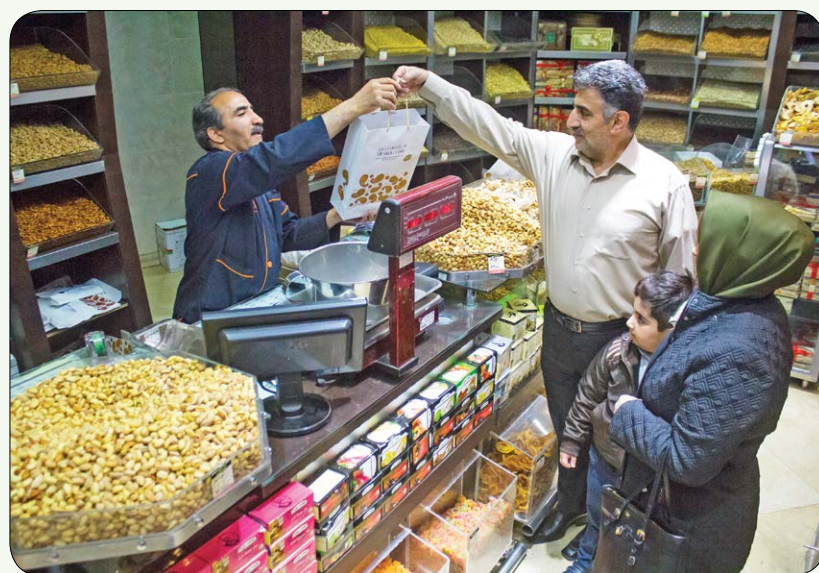


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