



Into the Wild

New wildlife experiences immerse adventurers in Iran's conservation efforts




The storied cities of Isfahan and Shiraz. The timeworn ruins of Persepolis. Powder-dusted ski pistes near Tehran. Iran has no shortage of alluring sights to fill a traveller's itinerary, but a new initiative promises visitors a look at the country's wild side – guiding them deep into Iran's most scenic frontiers for a first-hand glimpse at the nation's burgeoning conservation efforts.

"There is hardly any other country in the Middle East where a traveller can still see animals in such a high diversity and number," says Dr. Mohammad Farhadinia, a conservation biologist at the University of Oxford. Across the far reaches of Iran's lush terrain, he's tracked gazelles, urial sheep, bezoar goats, ongar, brown bears, Asiatic cheetahs, Persian leopards, 500 species of birds and much more.

Throughout the world, indigenous species are under constant threat; in Iran, there are less than 35 Asiatic cheetahs and 850 Persian leopards in the wild today. Concern about these numbers led Dr. Farhadinia to start the Future4Leopards Foundation in 2013, introducing advanced anti-poaching methods and technology while working with communities to engage them in the importance of conservation. Now he's partnering with Visit Our Iran to introduce sustainable and eco-friendly tours and experiences across the country's stunning natural landscapes.

You may have chased the Big Five in African national parks and followed tigers and snow leopards in India, but unique wonders await in Iran's wilderness. For the first time, travellers can meet conservationists, join rangers on horseback on their daily patrols and hike and stargaze on emerald steppes that have been virtually untouched by tourism. Wildlife enthusiasts will traverse the pristine Golestan, Turan and Tandoureh national parks on a nine-day itinerary; camp along the shores of the Caspian Sea in pursuit of the Persian leopard; or hike through Hyrcanian forests in the mist-shrouded province of Gilan.

Efforts like these are essential to protect Iran's majestic animals. "Conservation-based tourism is priceless for efforts to promote wildlife conservation in Iran," says Dr. Farhadinia. "They engage people with conservation and give them the privilege of coexistence with animals." visitouriran.com 



Clockwise from top left: A leopard at Tandoureh National Park; panoramic vistas in Golestan National Park; Persian ibex and wild goats spotted in Tandoureh National Park; wildlife ranger Peiman Moghaddas rides through Tandoureh National Park

WORDS: SARAH KHAN. PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF VISIT OUR IRAN