

# Visit wonders of Varzaneh Desert

## Iranica Desk

Desert tourism is a popular and enjoyable activity in Iran due to the country's unique geographical features. Known as the "land of four seasons," Iran offers a diverse range of natural attractions including deserts, forests, waterfalls, seas, springs and lakes. During the cold season, areas such as deserts, which are challenging to visit in the hot and exhausting summer, become popular destinations for thousands of Iranian and foreign tourists.

Varzaneh Desert is an ideal location for desert trekking, walking on hot sand and recreational activities in Iran's largest desert recreation site. Visitors can also explore the natural and historical attractions of Varzaneh city and the international Gavkhouni wetland, as well as observe the unique vegetation and wildlife of the desert.



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## Location and size

Located near the city of Varzaneh in the eastern part of Isfahan Province, Varzaneh Desert covers an area of about 17,000 hectares and is situated approximately 10 kilometers from the city of Varzaneh, southwest of the international Gavkhouni wetland. One distinguishing feature of this desert is the diverse wind patterns that give rise to remarkable and extraordinary formations, including longitudinal, crescent-shaped, and pyramid-shaped sand hills, some reaching heights of up to 100 meters. The length of the sand dunes is approximately 45 kilometers, with varying widths from 10 kilometers near Varzaneh to one kilometer in the Jarqavieh Desert.

## Distinction between Varzaneh and Khara deserts

In the past, this entire area was known as Khara Desert because the sand dunes were part of the desert regions. However, this area is divided into two distinct parts: Varzaneh Desert near the city of Varzaneh and Khara Desert near the village of Khara.

Most of the sand dunes in Khara Desert, which are about 30 kilometers further from Varzaneh Desert, are fragile and not considered a suitable place for desert trekking and recreational activities. This part of the desert lacks tourist

facilities, and fewer people visit it.

Varzaneh Desert is located near the city of Varzaneh and takes its name from this city. The picturesque sand dunes and unique features of this desert, alongside Iran's largest desert recreation site, have made Varzaneh Desert one of the most famous and popular deserts in Iran. Varzaneh Desert is also known as Hassanabad Desert, and the reason for this name is the accessibility to Varzaneh Desert from Hassanabad, a village near the desert.



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## Wildlife and ecosystem

Due to its proximity to Gavkhouni wetland, Varzaneh Desert's rich plant and animal life are prominent and important characteristics. Its unique nature provides an ideal habitat for specific plant growth and a diverse range of beautiful and endearing animals. Unfortunately, in recent years, the decline in water levels in the Gavkhouni wetland and negative changes in the region's ecosystem have led to a significant decrease in the animal population, particularly migratory birds, across the wetland and its surroundings.

Foxes, ground squirrels, hares, wildcats, fal-

cons, horned vipers, and sand boas are just a few examples of the wildlife that call this desert home.

Exploring the sand dunes and hills of the desert is one of the most enjoyable activities in Varzaneh Desert. Walking barefoot on the hot sand and experiencing the unique tranquility and warmth of the desert along with observing the plants and animals of the area are unforgettable experiences.

Walking on the sand dunes and sandy hills is free, offering the opportunity to spend hours wandering the hot sands of the desert.

## Night photography and sky observation

Night photography and stargazing are among the top reasons for tourists to visit desert areas. The desert sky at night is a spectacular and incredibly beautiful sight that captivates photography and astronomy enthusiasts. Desert tours at night, observing the sky and

stars, and engaging in night photography are some of the best activities in the desert. While the days in the desert are filled with exciting activities and stunning landscapes, the nights offer extraordinary views of the sky and a soothing silence.

## Camping and overnight stays

Pitching a tent and spending the night in the desert is one of the most thrilling experiences to be had in Varzaneh Desert. If you plan to spend a night in the desert, make sure to bring camping equipment. Don't forget to light a fire and gather round it with friends or family to fully experience overnight

stays in the desert. When camping in Varzaneh Desert, remember two things: first, avoid camping in high places and try to set up your tent in the gullies; secondly, ensure that the fire never goes out. To build a fire, be sure to bring your own wood and avoid relying solely on desert wood.

## Best time to visit

Deserts are typically warm and dry, making it challenging for non-locals, especially during the hot seasons. It is not recommended to visit Varzaneh Desert in the spring and summer; however, autumn and winter are considered the best times to explore this unique landscape.

Autumn days in Varzaneh Desert offer pleasant temperatures with relatively mild nights, making it an ideal time for a visit. Winter days in Varzaneh Desert are cool and enjoyable, although the nights can be quite cold, with temperatures dropping as low as -10 degrees Celsius. Therefore, if you plan to stay overnight in the desert during winter, ensure you have the necessary equipment and warm clothing.



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## City of Varzaneh

The majority of women in Varzaneh, a historical city, wear white chadors instead of black ones, while most men prefer white clothing. This distinctive feature has earned Varzaneh the nickname of the "White-clad City" of Iran. If you are visiting Varzaneh Desert, be sure to explore this city, located just 10 kilometers from the desert, and take in its unique historical and natural attractions.

## Historical attractions

**Jaame Mosque:** The Jaame (Grand) Mosque of Varzaneh is a significant historical and religious site, dating back to the Timurid era. It is believed that the mosque was originally a fire temple and was later converted into a mosque. Featuring two *shabestans* (prayer rooms) in the east and west of the mosque, a 20-meter minaret, and intricately tiled

mihrab (prayer niche), this mosque has been a site of fascination for centuries. Over the past 500 years, Iranian artists have decorated and renovated the mosque several times, making it a must-see for tourists.

**Historic bridge:** The historic bridge of Varzaneh, spanning approximately 500 meters,

is situated over the Zayandeh Rud (River) in the northern part of Varzaneh city. It is the final bridge over this river before reaching the Gavkhouni wetland. The bridge was constructed in two stages, with part of it dating back to the Seljuk period, and another part built during the late Qajar period.