

Discovering Kerman Bazaar's history and architecture



Vakil Complex
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Iranica Desk

Kerman Bazaar is a national treasure of Iran and a must-see attraction in Kerman Province. Stretching from Arg Square to Moshtaqiyeh Square, it holds the distinction of being the longest bazaar in Iran. Constructed primarily after the 13th century, each section of the bazaar was built under the patronage of different city officials, resulting in a blend of unique features from various historical periods.

Noteworthy among the features of Kerman Bazaar is the presence of the tallest windcatcher, a globally renowned architectural element. The surrounding buildings of Kerman Bazaar, dating back from the Safavid period onwards, are intricately linked to the bazaar, offering visitors a rich tapestry of historical significance. It serves as an excellent destination for purchasing souvenirs and handicrafts specific to the Kerman.

Recognized as a national heritage site in 2001, Kerman Bazaar has withstood the test of time, embodying various historical epochs with its rich and valuable architectural style. Widely acknowledged as the largest and most extensive bazaar in Iran, it has historically been a bustling center for trade and commerce in the province.

Situated on the Silk Road, Kerman Bazaar played a pivotal role in driving the economic prosperity of the region. It facilitated the export of fabrics, copper utensils, and diverse handicrafts to countries like China and India, while also serving as an entry point for imported spices and fabrics.

Comprising a network of alleys and markets, Kerman Bazaar boasts interconnected buildings that constitute a significant portion of Kerman's historical structures. Each market features notable structures such as mosques and baths. The Vakil Mosque, Ganjali Khan Mosque, and Chehelsotoun Mosque are among the prominent landmarks named after their respective main bazaars, adding to the charm and historical significance of the area. Studying the unique architectural designs of these baths and mosques across different markets offers insights into the distinctive styles prevalent during their respective periods.

Kerman Bazaar encompasses various structures related to different markets and constructed during different periods. For example, the Ibrahim Khan Complex, known for its renowned buildings, includes a school, mosque, caravanserai, and bathhouse. Similarly, the Vakil Complex houses both a school and a mosque within its premises.

Kerman Bazaar has been a central hub for the trade of textiles, handicrafts, and copperware for a long time. It is widely recognized as the primary distributor of spices in southeastern Iran, offering everything from the famous cumin to Indian saffron. The Sarcheshmeh Copper Mine, located 50 kilometers from Rafsanjan, has also played a significant role in establishing the distinct reputation of Kerman Bazaar's copper artisans. Visitors can find special souvenirs and sweets from Kerman, such as kolompeh, abundantly available in this bazaar, while its herbalists' market is renowned for providing high-quality herbal medicines.

While exploring Kerman Bazaar, you will come across a central courtyard surrounded by various chambers. The bazaar includes covered spaces known as *timcheh*, each dedicated to specific goods and beautifully adorned with unique decorations. *Chaharsuq* or *chaharsu* also showcases a stunning space reflecting the authentic Iranian architectural style, serving as the intersection point of two main market streets.

The key feature of Kerman Bazaar's architecture is its simplicity. The repetitive design of large and small domes, regular rhythm, symmetry, and predominant earthy colors decorated with blue tiles characterize this architecture. The architectural structures of Kerman Bazaar do not have external facades, except for symbolic elements like windcatchers or copper tops on mosques and caravanserais. Before the surrounding fabric of the bazaar evolved into its current form, the rows of bazaar domes served as the backbone of the city. The city's bazaar was in harmony with the desert, with only minarets and windcatchers visible.

The straw layer on the exterior structure of the bazaar acts as insulation and reflects radiant heat. The high ceiling of the Kerman Bazaar creates a cool airflow inside the market. Additionally, the skylights in the domes help with ventilation and provide natural light. In some buildings, windcatchers are used for air circulation. Traces of oil paintings can still be seen on some parts of the bazaar ceiling. The large Kerman bazaar is comprised of various sections.

Naqarehkhaneh Bazaar

The Naqarehkhaneh Bazaar starts from Arg Square, featuring a large and tall roof adorned with tilework and several rooms upstairs. The architecture of this part seems to belong to the late Qajar period.

Coppersmiths Bazaar

The Coppersmiths Bazaar (Mesgarha Bazaar) is one of the renowned and ancient sections of the Kerman bazaar, offering a variety of copper utensils and objects. Upon entering this bazaar, the first thing that captures your attention is the metallic appearance of the market along with a unique sound. The exquisite copper utensils, each with its distinct design and pattern, give a traditional charm to this market. Here, you can purchase simple copper utensils, enameled items, and various other shapes and objects as souvenirs of Kerman.

Qeisariyeh Bazaar

Another prominent section of the vast Kerman Bazaar is the Qeisariyeh or Zargari Bazaar, also known as "Ibrahim Khan Bazaar". Ibrahim Khan, a ruler of Kerman during the Fat'hali Shah period, constructed beautiful buildings and works in the Islamic architectural style during his reign. This market serves as one of the gold trading centers in Iran, attracting a large number of buyers, sellers, and tourists. With 47 active jewelry shops, this traditional market offers a delightful experience even for visitors not intending to make a purchase.

Ganjali Khan Complex

The Ganjali Khan Complex stands as one of Iran's architectural masterpieces and a landmark of the Kerman Bazaar. Built between 1596 and 1619 during Ganjali Khan's rule over Kerman and completed by his son, Ali Mardan Khan, this complex is situated on the old market of the city and represents one of the most prominent examples of Safavid architecture. Surrounding Ganjali Khan Square, its market connects various functions of the complex, including a school, caravanserai, mosque, mint, mosque, and water reservoir. The mosque or prayer hall of Ganjali Khan, located in the east of the square next to the school, features an area of 27 square meters and showcases a small museum of architectural decorations from the Safavid era, such as stucco work, tilework, calligraphy, painting, and intricate engravings. The Ganjali Khan Bathhouse is considered one of the architectural masterpieces of the country, with all spaces beautifully designed like cut crystals.

The intersection of two market alleys is called *charsuq*. In the past, due to the intersection of two market alleys at the location of Ganjali Khan Charsuq, this place was considered the most important and busiest point in the city. The interior view of the *charsuq* is adorned with plasterwork and oil paintings, and even though 400 years have passed since their creation, they have still maintained their beauty.

Hindus Caravanserai

The Hindus Caravanserai was rented by the English people in the second half of the nineteenth

century and was handed over to the Hindus. Since the Hindus settled there and engaged in trade, it became known as the Hindus Caravanserai. Indian merchants used to sell items such as spices, pepper, cardamom, etc., in this caravanserai, which led to its reputation as the Hindus Caravanserai.

Ekhtiari Bazaar

Another part of the Kerman Bazaar, which starts from the southern end of Ganjali Khan Bazaar and extends to the beginning of Vakil Bazaar, is the Ekhtiari Bazaar. This narrow market can be considered the oldest part of the bazaar, and it is important due to its location between Ganjali Khan Bazaar and Vakil Bazaar. Some elements present in this part of the bazaar include the Chehel Sotoun Mosque, Golshan Caravanserai, three small markets, and at the end of it, the traditional Vakil Bathhouse.

Vakil Complex

The founder of the Vakil Complex was Mohammad Ismail Khan Vakil al-Molk, who ruled Kerman from 1865. This complex is located east of the Ganjali Khan Complex and a short distance from it along the main bazaar and includes a bazaar, caravanserai, bathhouse, and mosque. The Vakil Bathhouse is considered one of the beautiful Qajar-era bathhouses in the city of Kerman and is located near the Ganjali Khan Complex. The Vakil Caravanserai, with two floors, is one of the main and important elements of the complex, and noteworthy features include the windcatcher and clock tower.



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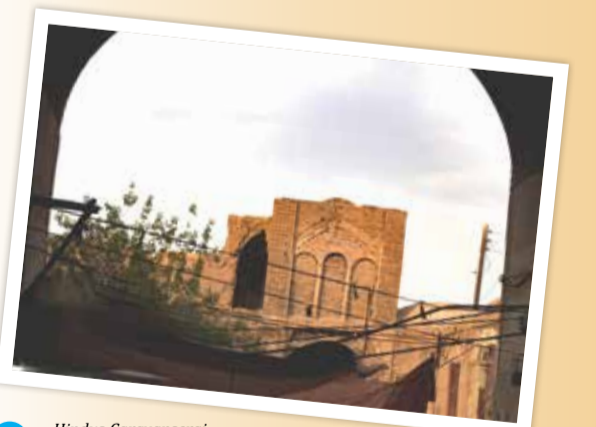
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