

Experience living history in Isfahan’s bazaars

Iranica Desk *Isfahan, a city celebrated as a living museum of historical treasures, offers far more than its iconic landmarks like Imam Square (Naqsh-e Jahan Square), the Grand Bazaar, magnificent bridges, and opulent palaces. It also boasts an impressive collection of local bazaars, each possessing a distinct urban identity that reflects the specific characteristics of its surrounding region. These bazaars, tangible manifestations of Safavid urban planning that continued to evolve through the Qajar era, stand as a valuable legacy, vividly illustrating the dynamic urban life of those bygone periods. Among these, Aliqoli Aqa, Bidabad, Dardasht and Hassanabad bazaars emerge as the most historically significant markets. Intimately nestled within the hearts of neighborhoods that share their names, they showcase exquisitely designed chahar su (intersections), gracefully crowned with towering domes. These intersections serve as welcoming guides, leading visitors through captivating rows of shops. Today, these shops function as vital centers for both the production and sale of local handicrafts, while also continuing to diligently meet the everyday needs of the local residents who depend on them, IRNA wrote. Exploring Isfahan’s smaller historical bazaars provides a valuable dual perspective, revealing both the lively hustle and bustle of neighborhood residents engaged in purchasing their daily necessities — highlighting the bazaars’ enduring vitality — and the exquisite display of handcrafted goods carefully curated for the enjoyment of tourists. Distinct and independent from Isfahan’s expansive Grand Bazaar, these smaller ones reside within the very core of the city’s ancient neighborhoods, adding to their unique charm. Their appeal as prominent tourist attractions lies in their compelling showcase of urban planning and architectural design, deeply embedded within the rich historical fabric of Isfahan. This experience is further enhanced by the presence of adjacent mosques, traditional bathhouses, and historical water fountains, all thoughtfully opened to welcome and accommodate visitors.*



Aliqoli Aqa Bazaar
● google.com

Aliqoli Aqa
Aliqoli Aqa is recognized as one of the most beautiful and comprehensively designed local bazaars in Isfahan, serving as a cherished relic of the Safavid era. Its stunning and elongated *chahar su* gracefully guides visitors through rows of shops extending in all directions, many of which have remarkably maintained their original functions and purposes. Some diligently supply the essential needs of local residents, while others proudly offer a diverse array of handicrafts and unique antiques. In addition, the Aliqoli Aqa Bazaar prominently features a large and historically significant *saqqakhaneh* (public drinking place), adding to its cultural richness. A visit to this exceptional local bazaar is simply not complete until you have had the opportunity to approach the historic entrance of the Aliqoli Aqa Mosque, beautifully adorned with elegantly swaying willow branches. Adjacent to the mosque lies the Tomb of Abu Mas’ud Razi, also known as Abu Mas’ud Khanqah, celebrated for its exquisite and rare mosaic tiles dating

back to the ninth century AH. Furthermore, immediately adjacent to the Aliqoli Aqa Bazaar, you’ll discover a beautiful historical bathhouse bearing the same name. This bathhouse has been thoughtfully repurposed and now serves as the Anthropology Museum of Isfahan, adding yet another layer of cultural depth to the area. The Aliqoli Aqa Bathhouse showcases stunning seven-color tilework and intricate *moaraq* (mosaic) styles that date back to the Safavid period, while its captivating wall paintings preserve remnants from both the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, offering a fascinating glimpse into different periods of Iranian history. When you visit the Aliqoli Aqa Bazaar, you’ll encounter a remarkable collection of historical and aesthetically pleasing features, all thoughtfully commissioned and built by a prominent and influential figure of the Safavid era named Ali Qoli Aqa. His vision and patronage have created a lasting legacy that continues to captivate visitors today.



Aliqoli Aqa Bathhouse
● MEHR



Bidabad Bazaar
● neshan.org

Bidabad
The Bidabad Bazaar derives its distinctive name from the neighborhood in which it is strategically located — a neighborhood that, long before the bazaar’s establishment, was widely recognized and admired for its abundance of massive and remarkably sturdy willow trees. Before one even enters the bustling atmosphere of the market itself, the historically significant Seyyed Mosque comes into view, standing as a testament to the area’s rich cultural heritage. This exceptional mosque is widely regarded as the finest example of Qajar-era architecture and tilework in the entire city of Isfahan. It was meticulously constructed by a prominent and influential cleric who resided during that era. The Seyyed Mosque boasts an impressive architectural design, featuring four grand *ivans* (vaulted spaces that open onto a courtyard) and a stately clock tower that adds to its overall grandeur. The mosque is also adorned with extensive and intricately detailed tile decorations, in which the color red is prominently and pur-

posefully used to embellish depictions of vases and scenic landscapes. The construction of the Bidabad Bazaar is believed to be roughly contemporary with the construction of the Seyyed Mosque, suggesting a period of significant development and architectural innovation in the area. The owners of the shops, in addition to diligently supplying the daily necessities of the neighborhood residents, also actively engage in the sale of locally produced handicrafts, contributing to the preservation of traditional arts and crafts. Furthermore, some of the rooms within the bazaar are specifically designated as handicraft workshops, providing a dedicated space for artisans to practice their skills and create their wares. The Bidabad and Aliqoli Aqa bazaars are conveniently located on the same axis, allowing tourists to easily and seamlessly access one from the other, further enhancing the overall visitor experience and encouraging exploration of the area’s diverse cultural offerings.



Seyyed Mosque
● tashimnews.com

Dardasht
Dardasht is widely considered to be one of the oldest and most historically significant neighborhoods in Isfahan, boasting a remarkable array of historical monuments and landmarks that attest to its rich past.



Dardasht Bazaar
● google.com

However, the local market of this vibrant neighborhood stands out as one of its most captivating and beautiful features, inviting tourists to immerse themselves in the heart of the city’s historical and ancient fabric. The initial construction of this bazaar is believed to date back to the Deylamite and Seljuk periods, indicating a long and storied history. However, what we observe of it today is primarily reflective of the architectural styles and influences of the Safavid and Qajar periods, showcasing the evolution of design and craftsmanship over time. Within this vibrant bazaar, visitors can discover a wide selection of Isfahan’s renowned handicrafts, including intricately designed *qalamkar* fabrics, known for their distinctive patterns and vibrant colors. The bazaar’s path eventually leads to the Dardasht Minarets, architectural marvels that stand as testaments to the region’s historical significance, as well as the tomb of Sultan Bakht Agha, a revered figure in local history. The two beautiful Dardasht Minarets are the surviv-

ing remnants of the grand gate of a once-magnificent school that flourished during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Al-Muzaffar, showcasing the architectural splendor of the era. The outer surface of the dome of the tomb of Sultan Bakht Agha is adorned with exquisite decorations consisting of turquoise and lapis lazuli tiles set against a backdrop of meticulously arranged bricks. This intricate design, in its harmonious connection with the Dardasht Minarets, presents a visually pleasing and captivating tableau that showcases the glory and architectural achievements of different historical periods. The Dardasht Bathhouse is yet another historically significant and visually spectacular building within this vibrant bazaar and is thoughtfully open to welcome tourists and visitors. This bathhouse, also known as Aqa Mo’men, was originally constructed during the reigns of Shah Safi and Shah Abbas II by a person of the same name, highlighting the role of individual patronage in the creation of these cultural landmarks. Continuing along the path of the Dardasht Bazaar, visitors will eventually reach the Atiq Jaame Mosque, a site of immense historical and cultural significance that is also proudly registered on the World Heritage List.



Dardasht Bathhouse
● borna.news



Hassanabad Bazaar
● imna.ir

Hassanabad
Hassanabad Bazaar stands as one of the oldest and most historically significant covered markets in Isfahan, representing a vital part of the city’s cultural heritage. It served as the southern gate of Isfahan during the eighth century AH. Among the ancient and well-preserved sections of this historic market, a long *chahar su* still stands as a testament to its rich past. However, due to urban development and the construction of modern streets and residential buildings, it has become physically separated from the continuous and interconnected structure of the bazaar. This historic structure extends all the way to Naqsh-e Jahan Square, establishing a vital connection between these two significant landmarks. It also features a number of caravanserais and chambers, many of which now serve as workshops and sales outlets for local

handicrafts, contributing to the preservation and promotion of traditional arts and crafts. The Rahimeh Khatoun Caravanserai, located within this market, is a particularly noteworthy site, serving as a dedicated space where talented handicraft artists create and showcase their diverse range of handcrafted goods. Within the Hassanabad Bazaar, visitors can also discover the revered shrine of Imamzadeh Ahmad, a cherished relic from the Safavid period, along with a beautiful *saqqakhaneh* (public drinking fountain) situated adjacent to it. Researchers have identified a total of 19 local bazaars in Isfahan up until 1971, based on careful analysis of historical documents. However, by the 2000s, this number had decreased to 15, highlighting the challenges faced in preserving these vital cultural and economic spaces in the face of modernization and urban development.



Hassanabad Bazaar
● imna.ir