



# Iran Risk Rating 2

(Risk Rating 1-4)

## General Information:

**Capital:** Tehran  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Calling Code:** + 98

**Language:** Persian  
**Time Zone:** UTC + 3.30  
**Drives on the:** Right

### Currency: Rial (IRR)

Debit and credit cards won't work in Iran. There are no cash machines that accept UK bank cards. It is usually not possible to change travellers' cheques. You should bring enough hard currency with you (\$US or Euros). It is illegal to change money on the street.

## Country Overview

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to:

- within 100km of the entire Iran/Afghanistan border
- within 10km of the entire Iran/Iraq border
- the province of Sistan-Baluchistan
- the area east of the line running from Bam to Jask, including Bam

After years of economic and political isolation, renewed negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear status and capability have lifted the sanctions on the country. That said, Iran has given strong support to revolutionary and militant groups within the middle east, creating distrust among its neighbours.

As part of an agreement with world powers, in January 2016, international sanctions were lifted after the Iranian government agreed to limit its nuclear capability. Iran and the current President Rouhani are keen to encourage foreign investment into the country. However, international trade is likely to remain slow, as concerns over international terrorism, militant backing and financing and a potential breach in the nuclear deal could still levy renewed sanctions on the country. Saudi Arabia Sunni regime still remains doubtful over Iran's commitment, and are increasingly concerned that the lifting of sanctions will allow the Iranian government greater influence throughout the region.

Tehran has given support, particularly military advisors to the government of Syria in their fight against both "Free Syria" uprisings, and also Daesh (formerly known as Islamic State). It has also leant considerable support to Houthi rebels fighting in Yemen, leaving Iran and Saudi Arabia engaged in a 'proxy war' of sorts.

Iran has a history of civil unrest relating to disputed elections and a struggling economy, however the 2013 election of moderate Hassan Rouhani has somewhat dispelled those tensions after a peaceful election process. In November 2011, hundreds of demonstrators, alleged to have been member of the paramilitary Basij force, stormed the UK diplomatic compound. There have also been demonstrations outside the Saudi Arabian embassy, protesting the mistreatment of Iranian pilgrims and the death in early 2016 of a prominent Shi'a cleric.



# Iran Risk Rating 2

(Risk Rating 1-4)

## Crime

There have been reports of crimes, including attacks and robberies, targeting foreign visitors to Iran. Men, either in cars or on motorcycles have snatched bags and other belongings from the street or through open car doors and windows. Visitors have reportedly been robbed after the motorcycle taxi they've been riding has turned off into a secluded area.

Some criminals impersonating police officers in plainclothes have also attempted to commit robberies. It is recommended to ask for identification from someone who approaches you claiming to be a police officer and request the presence of a uniformed officer, and to not hand over any documents or cash.

The border areas along Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq are particular hotspots for insurgent activity, and there are frequent skirmishes between them and the Iranian security forces. Militant groups as well as organised criminal gangs and drugs smugglers have previously been involved in the kidnapping of Westerners in these border areas. Kidnappings of Westerners have also occurred as a result of political tensions. Several Iranian-American citizens have been arrested and detained, and at times charged with espionage. Those taken by Iranian authorities may have been on the correct side of a border area, particularly in the Kurdish region, and have been forced into crossing the border "illegally".

The smuggling of narcotics to and from Iran is the most predominant crime in the country. With Afghanistan – the world's largest producer of opium – along with Pakistan both being neighbouring countries, Iran is a major conduit for narcotics smugglers, with drugs destined for the middle east and Europe.

There are high level of corruption and fraud within Iran, both in business and in politics. With the government playing a prominent role in all areas of the economy, officials are rarely held accountable as there is an insufficient or independent judiciary to investigate corruption. However, President Rouhani has pledged to target corruption since coming into power in 2013, and there are signs that this is slowly coming into effect.

In early 2015, former vice president, Mohammed Reza Rahimi was jailed for five years on charges of corruption. It is worth mentioning however that some investigations into corrupt official may be politically motivated. In March 2015, a month after Reza Rahimi was jailed, the son of the former Iranian President Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on charges of embezzlement and fraud. It is alleged these charges were levied on his son as a result of Rafsanjani's support of the reformist 'Green Movement' political party.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) are widely believed to be untouchable when it comes to investigations into fraud, corruption and smuggling. The IRGC are known to be involved in economic areas including construction, telecommunications and oil and gas, and are known to operate companies with deep ties to the military.



# Iran Risk Rating 2

## (Risk Rating 1-4)

Although Iran has fallen victim to cyber-attacks, it is also suspected of involvement in such operations abroad. In January 2013 there were reports that financial institutions in the US were requesting help in responding to an intensifying number of cyber-attacks originating in Iran. The cyber-assault began as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks that became increasingly advanced as the campaign wore on. More than 10 top US banks were affected according to press reports. Israeli leaders have also complained of incessant attacks linked to Iran against banking, water and power infrastructure.

### Terrorism

The main terrorist threat to Iran are several Sunni Islamist extremist groups. Tehran has previously laid blame at Pakistan and the Taliban, saying they are supporting militant groups operating inside Iran. The Jundallah group has a presence in the south-eastern region of Iran, namely in the Sistan-Baluchestan Province, and elsewhere in the Balochistan areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The group's agenda is for the government of Iran to recognise the rights of the Baloch minority in the country. Jundallah have previously targeted mosques and members of the security forces. In May 2009 the group claimed responsibility for the bombing of a mosque that killed 20 people in the area of Zahedan. In 2010 they struck again in the same area, targeting the Revolutionary Guard, killing 28 people.

A separate Sunni militant group in Iran is Jaish al-Adl. The Islamist group is known to operate in areas close to the border with Pakistan. In April 2015, militants attacked an area in Negur that killed eight border guards, before fleeing back into Pakistan. In February 2014, militants kidnapped five Iranian border guards and took them into Pakistan. The Pakistani government warned Tehran not to pursue the kidnapers into their territory.

Security forces are the main focus of attacks from militant groups, and are predominantly targeted when working in border regions. In March 2015 security forces present near the city of Sarbaz came under attack as militant gunmen stormed the area and set off bombs, killing two officers and wounding another three. Although no group took responsibility, the attack signified an increase in tensions and militant activity beyond the usual cross-border shootings.

There are a number of militant groups operating in the Kurdish region of Iran. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) have previously clashed and in May 2015, Iran was considering deploying several thousand soldiers along the Iraqi border in response.

The Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) have also been active in targeting Iran, and have previously used bases in northern Iraq as staging areas. The group have been responsible for the death of a number of security personnel in the past, and have attacked targets in western Iran. Attempts at a ceasefire in 2012-13 failed, and in October 2013 six Iranian soldiers were killed in clashes between Iranian security forces and the PJAK in the province of Kordestan. This all came after Iran launched a major operation targeting PJAK bases inside Iraq.

### Civil Unrest



# Iran Risk Rating 2

## (Risk Rating 1-4)

Iran has a history of civil unrest, mostly relating to political tensions and international events, particularly those to do with the West.

The June 2009 presidential elections saw the most significant number of protests since the revolution of 1979. Protests were largely orchestrated and held by young and liberal supporters of the opposition, and subsequently became known as the Green Movement. The demonstrations were peaceful to begin with and at their height attracted roughly two to three million supporters, almost all in Tehran.

The Green Movement managed to continuously organise demonstrations for up to six months, utilising social media. Throughout this time, a heavy-handed approach by the security and paramilitary forces and the repression and detention of key protest leaders somewhat hindered their success and they struggled to keep the movement alive into 2010.

In February 2011, a number of demonstrators gathered in Tehran's Azadi Square to protest against the government. Police and paramilitary groups proceeded to use force to break up the group and resulted in the death of several civilians. These demonstrations continued for several more months in 2011, spreading to other parts of Iran including Shiraz, Rasht, Kermanshah and Mashhad. These protests were fuelled by the Arab Spring movement. Throughout the Green Movement's protests, they alleged that more than 100 people were killed as a result of the security forces' tactics.

Although Iran restricts demonstrations against the government, it supports large-scale protests targeting foreign interests. In November 2011, hundreds of militant students described as members of the paramilitary Basij forces stormed the UK embassy in Tehran and another British diplomatic compound in the north of the city. Police used tear gas to disperse crowds and made some arrests but initially stood by, as they have in other political demonstrations against foreign interests. Annual demonstrations occur on nationally significant days, such as the November 2013 protest that saw 10,000 people mark the 34th anniversary of the seizure of the US embassy. These state-sanctioned protests are usually peaceful, but with the burning of flags and effigies of Western leaders common.

Unpaid wages, working conditions and contracting terms are common instigators of civil unrest in Iran. Public and private business workers frequently strike and protest. In July 2015 over 500 workers from a cement company in Khoozestan went on strike after they alleged their employers had not paid their wages for more than three months. Protests of a similar nature are reported near-daily, again due to unpaid wages or other benefits. In May 2015 thousands of workers took part in May Day protests in Tehran, calling for improved conditions and claiming that foreign nationals were putting them out of work.

### Natural Disasters

Iran sits in an area on top of several fault lines, where earthquakes can occur regularly and result in fatalities and destruction of property. While the majority of earthquakes are small, and cause minimal loss of life, a high-magnitude quake can result in a large number of fatalities. In August 2012, two earthquakes in northwest Iran killed 306 people, however deadlier quakes in the past have killed thousands. In 2003 a magnitude 6.6 struck near the southwest city of Bam, killing over 26,000 people and almost entirely levelling the city. Similarly, in 1990, a 7.4 magnitude earthquake



# Iran Risk Rating 2

## (Risk Rating 1-4)

hit northern Iran, close to the cities of Rudbar and Manjil. Fatality figures for this even range between 35,000 and 50,000.

Water supplies are under increasing pressure in Iran. In January 2014, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani characterised the nation's rapidly falling water supplies as a national security issue. Climate change, inefficient use and growing depletion of groundwater supplies have seen available sources of water decline.

### Health & Wellbeing

The medical facilities in Iranian cities is adequate but is poor in more rural areas. As a result of sanctions, there has been a shortage of pharmaceuticals, however this may ease as sanctions were lifted in early 2016. Many of the health professionals speak English. It may be necessary to have cash at hand in order to receive medical treatment in hospitals and clinics.

Pollution is a major concern in Iran and has had serious consequences on human life. In 2012, the Iranian health ministry reported that up to 80,000 premature deaths were caused by serious pollution.

The UN's Development Programme has previously stated that up to 5% of Iran's population live in areas affected by malaria, and up to 16% in areas that have a high risk of tuberculosis. However these are predominantly in the Sistan-Baluchestan Province, rural areas in Fars Province, as well as southern, tropical parts of Hormozgan and Kerman Province.

High rates of intravenous drug use and social stigma related to sexual behaviour are contributing to rapidly rising rates of HIV in the country.

### Local Travel

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to:

- within 100km of the entire Iran/Afghanistan border
- within 10km of the entire Iran/Iraq border
- the province of Sistan-Baluchistan
- the area east of the line running from Bam to Jask, including Bam

British nationals need a visa to travel to Iran. These are only available from Iran's diplomatic and consular missions. The application process for an Iranian visa can be long and unpredictable.

Although the standard of roads in Iran are good the country has high rates of road accidents. Take great care when travelling by road, including by public transport and when crossing streets. If you're involved in an accident, no matter how minor, don't leave the scene. Wait until the police arrive to make their report. The Iranian authorities sometimes set up informal roadblocks both in cities and on main highways. They are often staffed by young and inexperienced officers. You should always carry your identification with you and avoid getting into disputes.

The European Union has highlighted a number of concerns about air safety oversight in Iran. Since April 2010, the State carrier Iran Air has been subject to operational restrictions in the EU and only 14 Airbus A300, eight Airbus A310 and one Boeing 737 from their fleet have permission to operate



# Iran Risk Rating 2

## (Risk Rating 1-4)

to/from the European Union. The restriction was put in place because Iran Air had been unable to demonstrate that a number of aircraft in its fleet meet international safety standards.

Many areas of the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf are highly sensitive politically. The waters around the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs in the southern Persian Gulf are particularly sensitive and are militarised. In 2005 a British couple who anchored at Abu Musa were detained and French and German nationals were imprisoned for entering the waters near the island. In November 2009 a group of British sailors were detained for a week, along with their yacht, after accidentally sailing into Iranian waters in this area. A similar incident involving US sailors occurred in January 2016 after accidentally drifting into Iranian waters.

## Laws & Customs

- Local laws reflect the fact that Iran is a Muslim country in which Islamic laws are strictly enforced.
- You should respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions at all times and be aware of your actions to ensure that they do not offend other cultures or religious beliefs, especially during the holy month of Ramadan (6<sup>th</sup> June – 5<sup>th</sup> July) or if you intend to visit religious areas.
- You should dress modestly. Islamic codes of behaviour and dress are strictly enforced. In any public place women must cover their heads with a headscarf, wear trousers (or a floor length skirt), and a long-sleeved tunic or coat that reaches to mid-thigh or knee. Men should wear long trousers and long-sleeve shirts.
- There are additional dress requirements at certain religious sites. Women may be asked to put on a chador (a garment that covers the whole body except the face) before entering.
- Women should take extra care, particularly when travelling alone or with friends of the opposite sex.
- Relationships between non-Muslim men and Muslim women are illegal, although few Westerners have been prosecuted. If a Muslim woman is found in a relationship with a non-Muslim man, she may be sentenced to be whipped.
- The import, sale, manufacture and consumption of alcohol in Iran is strictly forbidden on religious grounds, with exceptions only for certain recognised Iranian religious minorities (not foreigners). Penalties can be severe.
- Unmarried partners and friends of the opposite sex travelling together should be discreet at all times in public. Iranian hotel managers could insist on seeing a marriage certificate before allowing any couple to share a double hotel room.
- Photography near military and other government installations is strictly prohibited. Sensitive government buildings and facilities are often difficult to identify. Take extreme care when taking photographs in any areas that are anything other than very obvious tourist attractions.
- Using a laptop or other electronic equipment in public places can be misinterpreted, especially if it contains photographs. You may be arrested and detained on serious criminal charges, including espionage. It's better to ask before taking photographs of people.



# Iran Risk Rating 2

## (Risk Rating 1-4)

- Penalties for importing and possessing drugs are severe and enforced. Many individuals convicted of drug offences, including foreign nationals, have been executed.
- If arrested suspects can be held without charge and aren't always allowed quick access to legal representation. In the past, consular access has been very limited.

### Business

International sanctions relating to Iran's nuclear programme have largely prevented international business and investment in Iran and has largely contributed to the decline of the country's economy. However, with the lifting of sanctions in January 2016, economic conditions are expected to improve, however regulatory challenges relating to government interference are expected to remain. There also remains uncertainty, as sanctions could be reintroduced if it's found Iran as reneged on the nuclear agreement.

There is also concern regarding Iran's support of terrorist activity. In research conducted by the US State Department, it was reported that Iran had provided over \$200m in finance and equipment including weapons and training to groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It also states that Iran's support for militant groups extends as far as Africa, Asia and Latin America.

There is significant interest in Iran's economy, particularly the energy, automotive and airline sectors. Iran plans to encourage foreign investment into Iran by introducing attractive contracts aimed at international oil and gas companies. However, it is widely known that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has strong ties to the energy sector, prompting further fears of corruption. Although President Rouhani has had some success in limiting the IRGC's involvement in oil and gas, they continue to strengthen their presence in construction and engineering circles, with many contracts going to companies with ties to the military.

Representatives of a western company may be subject to particular attention. Western business people travelling to Iran should take appropriate steps to protect commercially sensitive information (including password protection of electronic devices (minimum 4 digits) and not taking unnecessary information with you). Electronic devices may be screened by customs officials on arrival and departure. Individuals involved in commercial disputes with Iranian companies or individuals have been prevented from leaving the country pending resolution of the dispute.

### Business Tips

- Iranians may be initially suspicious of Western companies and their representatives.
- Iranians prefer to do business with those they know and respect, therefore they expect to spend time cultivating a personal relationship before business is conducted.
- Appointments are necessary and should be made 4 to 6 weeks in advance.
- It is a good idea to avoid scheduling meetings during Ramadan as the need to fast would preclude your business colleagues from offering you hospitality.
- Written materials should be available in both Farsi and English.



# Iran Risk Rating 2

(Risk Rating 1-4)

## Standing Travel Advice

- Take increased security precautions against robbery and street crime.
- You should carry a photocopy of your passport for identification. Make sure you have included emergency contact details.
- Anti-government protests and social unrest could occur with the potential to cause travel disruption.
- Foreign events can trigger demonstrations, particularly those focussed on the west. Western travellers may find themselves the focus of attention in this case.
- At present the British Embassy can only offer a limited consular service. If routine consular assistance is needed while in Iran, contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on +44 20 7008 1500. If emergency consular assistance is needed, including an emergency travel document, contact the Swedish Embassy in Tehran.
- There is an underlying risk of both small-scale opportunistic and large-scale terrorist attacks by Islamist extremists.
- Minimise time spent in the vicinity of likely targets; these include cultural and religious sites, government and military buildings, military facilities, Western embassies and foreign commercial assets. Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Privately driven vehicles (4x4s) are suitable means of transport for business travellers.
- While the quality of roads is good, driving standards are variable and accident rates are high. You can self-drive if you are very familiar with local conditions. If you are involved in an accident, immediately report the incident to the police and do not move the vehicles until police officers have arrived at the scene.
- Be aware of the potential cultural sensitivities, which could be cause for concern.
- Watch and read news about the destination and region prior to travel.
- Be vigilant in public areas and places that attract foreigners and Westerners - embassies, hotels, restaurants, bars and businesses.
- Look out for anything suspicious. Report it to the local authorities immediately – many terrorist attacks are foiled by the vigilance of ordinary people.
- Try to avoid routines that make you an easier target – vary the time and route of your regular journeys.