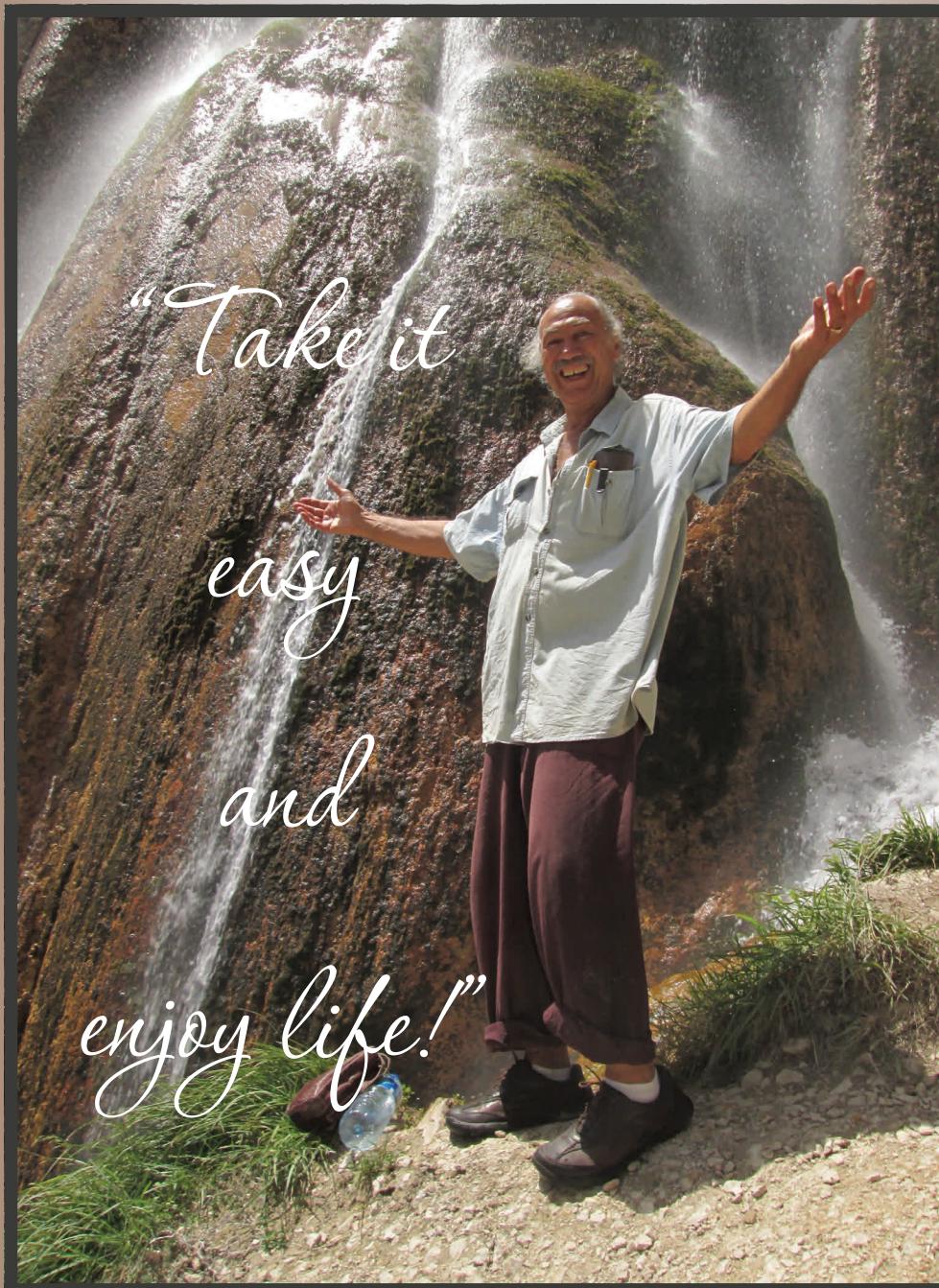


Hossein Rojhantab shares his philosophy for the transition to retirement through this two-part series he wrote that details a seven-month road trip through Iran.



SEVEN MONTHS IN IRAN - 2013

PART ONE OF TWO

Written by Hossein Rojhantalab

Hossein Rojhantalab, a Thin Films Engineer who retired in 2011 from Hillsboro spent seven months on a road trip through Iran. His fascinating journal details his trip and will be continued in the May News Flash.

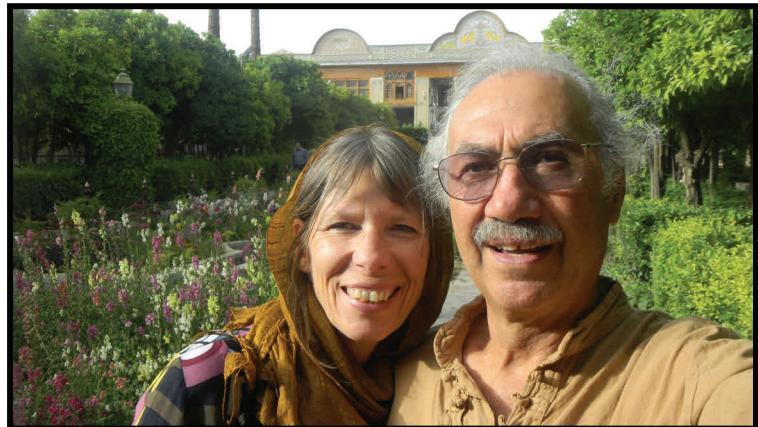
Background

I left Iran after I graduated from high school to pursue a higher education in the US. My high school friend, Yadi, and I, at the ages of 18 and 19 respectively, arrived in Berkeley, California in 1964.

I went back to Iran after I obtained a PhD in Chemistry in 1976 and worked as a professor at Ahwaz University until 1977 and then at Shiraz University until 1982. Along with three other professors, I opened a publishing company in Tehran, where we translated and published popular science books. In 1985 I returned to the US and worked as a Post Doc at the University of Oregon doing surface science research. I joined Intel in October, 1988 in Lithography and moved to Thin Films in 1991.

I met my wife, Tami in 1994 in Portland (at the Waterfront Blues Festival). She's a nationally-recognized [contemporary jewelry designer](#) and a linguist, and quickly developed an interest in Iran. For many years we planned to take a trip there, so she could meet my family and experience a bit of my homeland. I had visited Iran three times between 1985 and 1999, but I had not seen much of Iran before our trip.

Iran is a big country: 2.35 times bigger than Texas. It is the seventeenth largest country, by size and by population, with seventy-five million people. I wanted to show Tami the whole country, and also spend quality time with my family and many friends from high school and college. I have nine sisters and one brother who, along with my ever-extending family, now add up to a whopping three hundred, plus! Tami and I designed our dream trip that would take more than seven months. Of course, this kind of excursion would never have been possible while we were still working. So we put it off until I retired in 2011. Meanwhile, Tami studied the Persian language, Farsi, through PSU, PCC and Pimsleur Language CD's. In 2012 Tami retired and obtained her Iranian passport and we visited Iran from March 3, 2013 to Oct 5, 2013. What a trip! We shot nearly 10,000 pictures and movie clips in Iran and have shown three slide shows already in February. The story of our incredible journey begins here.



Tami and Hossein at Narenjestan [orange orchard], Shiraz

Our Arrival

Tami and I arrived March 3 and were greeted by my brother, my sister and their families. Passing through customs was quite easy as our plane was the only one. The hour drive to my sister's house was quite educational as I got my first glimpse of the new Tehran after my absence of fourteen years. Since it was Tami's first visit to Iran, we needed time to acclimate culturally, and also for Tami to meet my family of several hundred people. We stayed at Kourosh, a hotel-apartment in the northern part of Tehran close to the

home of my sister and were able to visit much of the family and old friends in the first week. My high school friend had arranged for us to spend one week in a fancy resort on Kish Island. We met people from all parts of Iran vacationing there. Kish Island is a very popular and modern tourist destination. Most people spoke some English and were quite interested in both of us. They would engage very quickly, and invited us to stay with them in our future travels. By the end of the week, we had invitations to sixteen different provinces of Iran. That week helped us ease into the Iranian culture and Tami had practiced her Farsi to feel comfortable to go solo.

Tehran

Mid-March brought snow to Tehran and gave us a sense of the winter in Tehran. Iranian New Year begins on March 21st, the first day of spring, and is a major holiday when schools are closed for two weeks. Iranians prepare for the New Year for months. We participated in family celebrations and Tami learned about "Haji Firouz". We watched as Tehranis busied themselves shopping for the holidays, engaged with street musicians, and generally welcomed the coming of the spring.



Hossein and Tami in Velenjak, Tehran

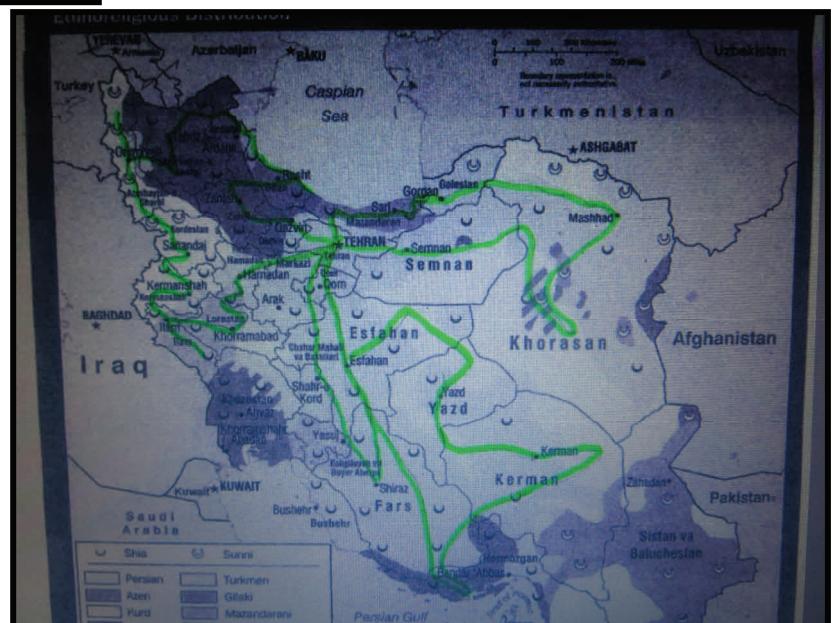
We made three major road trips to take advantage of the climate and fruit season of different regions in Iran. On each trip we would drive to a major city, check in to our hotel and then make day trips to explore the province's historical and nature sites. We strolled through the cities and towns to meet people, hear music and taste their food.

Map of Iran. The green line shows the 16,500 miles driven by Hossein and Tami on their various road trips.



A day in the Tehran Bazaar

We bought a brand new Peugeot 405 for \$8,500 including insurance cards and warranty repair documents, drove 16,500 miles across Iran and then sold it for \$6,000. We felt quite safe throughout our trip and found major auto repair shops in the cities. Tami wore a loose, colorful scarf and purchased colorful loose cotton dresses in various bazaars across the country.



Deep South, Center

On this trip we explored eight major provinces of Iran and witnessed the continuous New Year celebrations and joyous people in the streets, parks, river banks, picnicking everywhere! As Tami says, "If you see a tree on the highway or alongside the road, look for an Iranian family picnicking under it". The roads were amazingly solid and wide. We often drove on two- and three-lane highways or paved off-roads. If we chose to see a more remote historical site, we drove on well-maintained gravel or dirt roads. The road from Abadeh to Darab was quite spectacular. We drove along Tashk and Bakhtegan salt lakes, and through blooming citrus orchards and Lurish dwellings in the Zagros cascades. The road signs are in Farsi and not driver-friendly, but people are quite helpful in providing directions. In Darab we met Zoroastrians and visited some of their ancient sites including a stone fire temple in a desolate village. On the way back we were invited to walk through a private citrus orchard in full bloom—intoxicating! In addition, we were given a bag of orange blossoms that fragranced our car for several days.

Hormozgan

On March 30, nine days into the Persian New Year, we arrived in Bandar Abbas [port of Abbas] in the Persian Gulf, full of Iranian New Year vacationers camping in colorful tents, kids cavorting in the parks and music playing everywhere. My 27-year-old nephew joined us and we took a car-ferry to Gheshm Island and stayed nine nights with a local family of five. The father and brother were fisherman and the daughters owned and ran a souvenir shop selling island-made crafts. We drove to each of the 'seven wonders of Gheshm', sailed among leaping, squealing dolphins and marveled at the beauty of the island. We swam regularly and freely in the lovely waters of the Gulf, until Tami was stung by a sting ray--an extremely painful experience. Needless to say, we became a bit more careful about choosing a swimming hole for the rest of our stay there. Bandar Abbas is a lively, dynamic beach city, with great music, a lengthy bazaar, a huge fish market and great restaurants. A day trip to Minab, and then, off the next day, heading northeast to the historical city of Bam via beautiful Ruddan and the 11,200 foot Jebal Barez pass.



Shib-Deraz, our dwelling in the fishing village in Gheshm Island in the Persian Gulf

Kerman

Dashte-Lut Bam is a small historical city whose mud citadel or Arg, is the largest in the world and is under reconstruction from the 2003 earthquake. We spent a day there, wending through the mud pathways of the Arg, marveling at the destruction of the quake, and admirable efforts at reconstruction. The huge citadel was prominent in the Zand dynasty (1750 - 1794), and included residences, government buildings, a bazaar site, as well as public squares. Next day, we drove to Kerman. Our visit to Bam left us with a fascination for Args, and we visited many smaller



Bam Arg in Kerman Province

ones throughout Iran. My sister and her family joined us in Kerman and with them, we lounged at Baghe Shazdeh in Mahan, picnicked by the waterfalls in Ryan, and visited several museums. Other highlights included the Moayedi Yakhchal, an underground ice house, a Zoroastrian fire temple and museum, and the copper bazaar, home of copper utensil artisans. In Ganj-Ali Khan square, we toured several old hammams, (traditional bath house) now restored into wax museums and tea houses, serving tea, ghelyan (hooka), a favorite of young women and men. We had lunch at Ganj-Ali Khan hammam and were entertained by two musicians singing and playing old traditional Iranian love songs. We drove to Shahdad into the desert near Kerman, and photographed the natural sandstone formations in the Kaluts, and dipped in the Sirch hot

springs. Our hotel in Kerman hosted many Europeans, some travelling by motorcycle, and even a tour group of Americans, some of the very few we encountered in our time in Iran. And, it was in Kerman that we were first introduced to the wonderful architectural feature used in all desert regions of Iran, called badgir, or "wind catcher". It's a natural air-conditioning device, a tower with a series of louvers and vents, sucking air down into rooms below, cooling them without anything mechanical or motorized. We were to see many more of them in Yazd, our next destination. On the way there, we visited the historical stone cave village of Meymand dating back to 12,000 BC, and visited the cave-home of an elderly resident, who proudly served us tea prepared on her electric stove.



Badgirs [wind catchers] in Kerman

Yazd

An oasis in Dashte-Lut, Dashte-Kavir, this is an ancient city dating back to 3000 BC, which contains several UNESCO sites. It is comprised mostly of mud buildings which tend to stay cool in the fierce heat of the summer months. Many of the dwellings from the age of the Qajar Dynasty [1785 - 1925] have been transformed into 'riads', or guest houses, with lavish open-air courtyards, fountains splashing musically into lovely tiled pools. We visited several tile makers who were maintaining the ancient style, we toured the bazaar, restaurants, hammams, and caravanserais.

Yazd is known for the talents of its gold craftsmen, and the gorgeous traditional style of their work. Tami couldn't resist, and bought a beautiful pair of earrings, to complete her outfit of locally made cool cotton clothing suitable for the desert. We drove to the Meybod Arg currently under excavation, with artifacts dating back to 8,000 BC. Another highlight of the area is Chak-Chak, a historic Zoroastrian fire temple, perched in a small cleft in the Zagros Mountains. A fascinating site, the temple is cherished by believers worldwide, who come by the thousands in early June, to celebrate the light of an oil lamp that's been burning continuously for generations. We visited a water museum and learned about ingenious water transport and storage devices: the 'ghanat' and 'ab anbar' both of which we saw often as we drove further into desert areas.



Ghelyan smoking in a restored Hammam



Gurest living and dining area, Garmeh

From Yazd we drove to Ateshouni in Garmeh village and stayed three nights in a 800-year-old house owned and operated by the inimitable Maziar. He has reconstructed this old mud and stone mansion in the rocks into a simple and elegant, rough-around-the-edges guest house. Maziar hosts tourists from all over the world who come to take part in his one-of-a-kind desert experience. Included in the price is room/board, trips to a dry salt lake and the sand dune where Maziar builds a fire and plays his didgeridoo into the night.

Kashan

We stayed in a ‘sonnati’ house, a traditional house with courtyards and fountain, and visited several other elaborate ones that are open to the public as museums. The bazaar was stupendous, and the historical lush gardens of Baghe-Fin were refreshing and lovely. We visited Tepe Sialk Arg, a UNESCO site dating back 5,500 BC verified by skeletons and many sundry unearthed artifacts. We drove to Niasar and visited rose water factories, also a Sassanid-era fire temple, and a Parthian-era cave temple. A group of mixed-age women tourist musicians treated us nightly in the guesthouse courtyard, performing old love songs.



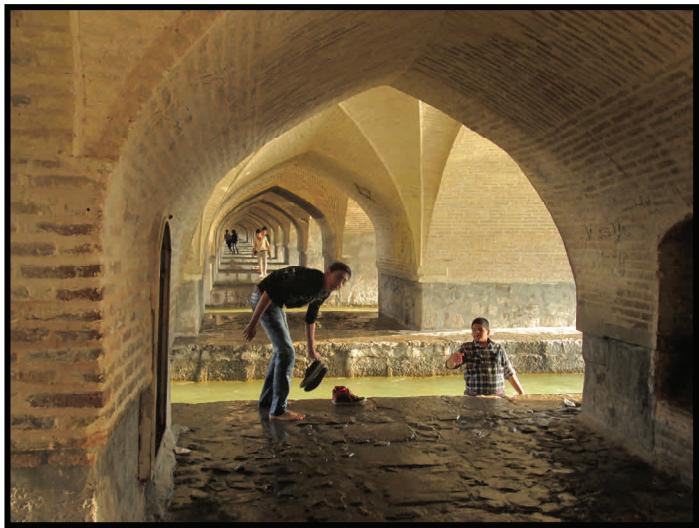
Spice factory in Kashan Bazaar

Esfahan

During our first stay in Esfahan, we sat in the evening by the famous Zayandeh Rud which means Breeding River, as underground water bubbles along the river bank, just a wide, dry bed at the time, as the water was being diverted to thirsty Yazd. But for our second stay the river was full of life-giving water. During both visits to Esfahan, we enjoyed walking along the many tree-lined boulevards, taking in Persian gardens, multiple historical bridges, and everywhere, meeting hundreds of people on and under the bridges and the surrounding parks. Esfahan is full of historical sites, including the huge plaza, Naghshe Jahan, “portrait of the world”, its expansive bazaars and the amazing ‘music room’ on the sixth level of Ali-Ghapou, a Safavid-era castle.



Meidane Naghshe Jahan

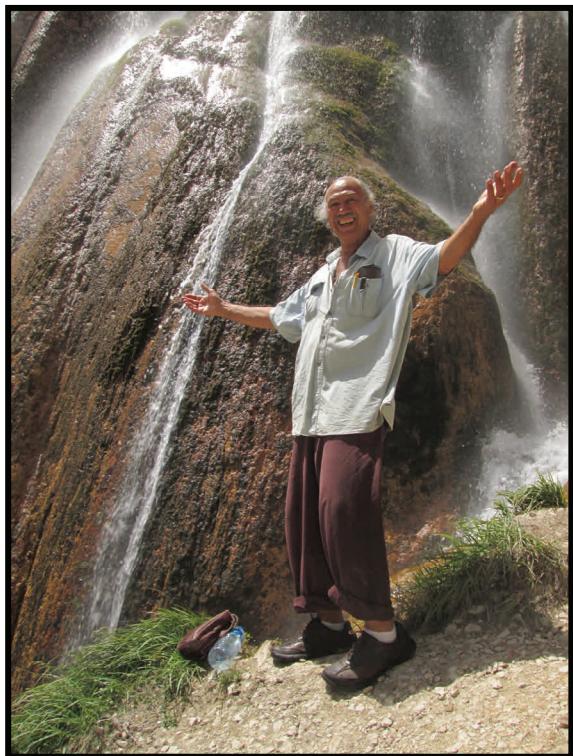


Under Siosepol [thirty-three arch bridge]

We shared a debilitating cold in Esfahan, and resorted to getting treatment at the local hospital. The equivalent of a mere \$12.00 covered the cost of wellness for us, including medications and shots!

Shiraz

Hossein got nostalgic in Shiraz remembering his years of teaching at Shiraz University as well as historic novels read during his school years. Tami went wild in Persepolis and Pasargad which took the entire day to visit. Shiraz is a city well known for its famous poets and historical sites, and for its stature as capital of several dynasties dating back to 2000 BC. We visited Hafez' and Saadi's tombs, Bazaar-Vakil, Baghe-Eram, and gorged ourselves on local cuisine, including several lovely different eggplant dishes.



Margoon Waterfall, near Shiraz

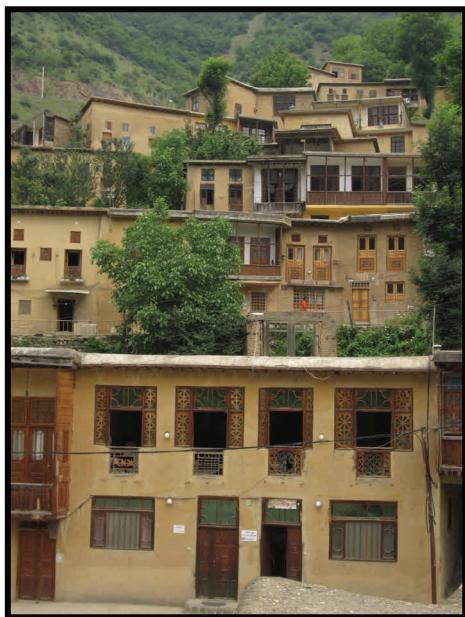


Persepolis, Shiraz

On our last day we paired up with Hossein's old-time friend, Hossein, and we strolled through old town alleys, visited a classic old hotel, ate famous Shiraz-style 'faloodeh', a frozen noodle snow cone, doused with super-sweet lemonade made from freshly squeezed lemon juice. The next day Hossein drove us to Shahre-Kurd, on the way stopping at Margoon, Yasuj, Chelgerd and Koohrang waterfalls.

Tehran, Caspian Sea, and Ghazvin

Back in Tehran, we stayed at Kourosh Hotel again. By this time, Tami had gotten her bearings around the neighborhood and loved the fresh coffee made in the hotel and served with our lavish breakfast of fresh fruit, omelet, and the usual variety of dates, olives and flatbread. Tehran was like home away from home, and we spent our time mostly with family and friends, at parties and in the great outdoors. One day, we climbed into the Darband neighborhood, and the Alborz mountainside. We hiked with my brother to the twin waterfalls and were again serenaded by nightingales, as we had been in the gardens of Kerman, Yazd and Shiraz. We drove through the Alborz cascade to Chalus and Noshahr in Mazandaran province and enjoyed the particular cultures of the Caspian Sea region.



Massouleh Village in Gilan

Once in Ghazvin, we strolled through the streets, museums, and the bazaar, and we conversed with old merchants in some of the most beautiful ‘caravansarais’, or caravan resting places. We returned to Tehran and were treated generously by friends and family and took in some evening picnics in city parks.



Tami and her new baker friend in Javaherdareh village

On the sandy beaches of Chamkhaleh, another old friend joined us with his darling twelve-year-old son and we sailed to lagoons and a quarter of a mile into the sea to swim in the deep pristine water, referred to as the ‘Big Caspian’. The four of us drove to Javeherdareh village where an old woman baker respectfully suggested that Tami should ask Obama to lift the sanctions. Later, we purchased delicious pomegranate paste.

On the way back to Tehran, we stayed overnight in the picturesque village of Masouleh on the hardest beds known to man! On our way to our final destination of Ghazvin, just east of Tehran, we walked through an open-air museum of beautiful old wooden cottages moved to the site to preserve them, from high in the mountains of Gilan province. These dwellings are noteworthy because building with wood is such an exception to the norm of concrete and/or stone everywhere in Iran.



Bazaar in Ghazvin

PART TWO WILL CONTINUE IN THE NEXT NEWS FLASH. IF YOU CAN'T WAIT, HOSSEIN IS GLAD TO SHARE HIS STORY AND CAN BE REACHED AT 2013iranroadtrip@gmail.com.