

# Countries Of The World: Iran

By National Geographic Kids, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.25.18

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Level MAX



Image 1. Downtown of Tehran, the capital of Iran. It is the most populated city in Iran. Photo by: Getty Images/Samuel W Stearman.

Iran (pronounced ee-RAHN) is situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia and the Arab states of the Middle East. This country was formerly known as Persia. Its strategic position — and its access to the Persian Gulf in the south — have made Iran an important country throughout its history.

Much of Iran is cut off from the outside world by a beautiful but often lonely landscape. High, rugged mountains create a barrier with Iran's neighbors in the west. The eastern region is covered by a barren, salty desert.

In Iran's north, a narrow, fertile strip borders the Caspian Sea. In the south, lowlands rim the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Most people in Iran live along the edges of a high plateau that runs through the middle of the country.

## Nature

Not long ago, Iran was home to many lions, tigers and other big cats. Unfortunately these sleek hunters are now very rare, and some species have gone extinct. Only a handful of Asiatic cheetahs

and Persian leopards remain.

Iran has several reserves and parks where wildlife thrives. One, called Kavir National Park, is located in the north-central region. It is known as "Little Africa" because its plants and animals resemble those of Africa. This park is home to Iran's only cheetahs.

Iran's mountains in the north and west have dense forests that offer habitat for brown bears, wild goats, wolves and leopards. The country's central plateau is home to deer, gazelles, hyenas and jackals, among other animals.

### People And Culture

Strong religious beliefs have been part of Iranians' lives for thousands of years. Almost all Iranians are Muslim, or followers of Islam. The religion is central to daily life in Iran.

Iran has a long history of scholarship that has created a rich culture of art, literature, poetry, music, cuisine and architecture. Ancient Iranian thinkers wrote influential texts on philosophy and medicine. It was an Iranian mathematician who invented algebra. Iran's universities are among the most respected in the Middle East.

### Government And Economy

Iran's government is controlled by a religious figure called the supreme leader. This leader is appointed by a group of Islamic clerics called the Assembly of Experts. A president, elected by the people, is second in command.

Iran has extensive oil reserves, but its economy was hit hard by a trade ban imposed by the United States in 1979 after the Iranian Revolution. The revolution led to the overthrow of Iran's monarch, or shah, who the United States had supported.

Allegations that Iran supports terrorism and a belief that it is developing nuclear weapons have led to further isolation in recent years. The United Nations (UN) imposed international sanctions on Iran in 2006. A sanction is a penalty, like a trade ban, that the UN imposes if a country does not follow certain international rules. These sanctions were lifted in 2016 after Iran entered a deal with six world powers.

### History

Iran is one of the oldest nations in the world. Its history dates back tens of thousands of years. The country's first great city, Susa, was built on the central plateau around 3200 B.C.



In 559 B.C., the Persian Empire arose in southwestern Iran and conquered the Mesopotamians and Egyptians. The empire eventually extended from the Mediterranean Sea to what is now Pakistan. It was conquered by the Greeks in 330 B.C.

Around 260 B.C., nomads called Parni ousted the Greeks. They ruled for some 500 years. The Sassanids came into power in A.D. 224, and in A.D. 642, Persia became part of the Islamic Empire. In 1501, the kings, or shahs, of the Safavid Empire began their reign.

In the late 18th century, foreign powers, including Russia and Britain, took control of parts of Persia. In 1921, a Persian army officer named Reza Khan took control and sought to end outside influence. In 1935, he renamed the country Iran. His son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, became shah in 1941.

In 1979, many Iranians who felt Pahlavi was corrupt forced him to flee. This is known as the Iranian Revolution. It ended the reign of the shahs in Iran.

Since then, religious leaders have ruled the country. The first was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose ten years in power were marked by a long war with Iraq and tensions with the United States and many other nations. Khomeini died in 1989, but those tensions have lasted to the present day.



## Quiz

1 Read the section "History."

Select the paragraph from the section that explains who has maintained leadership in Iran since the Iranian Revolution.

- (A) In 559 B.C., the Persian Empire arose in southwestern Iran and conquered the Mesopotamians and Egyptians. The empire eventually extended from the Mediterranean Sea to what is now Pakistan. It was conquered by the Greeks in 330 B.C.
- (B) Around 260 B.C., nomads called Parni ousted the Greeks. They ruled for some 500 years. The Sassanids came into power in A.D. 224, and in A.D. 642, Persia became part of the Islamic Empire. In 1501, the kings, or shahs, of the Safavid Empire began their reign.
- (C) In the late 18th century, foreign powers, including Russia and Britain, took control of parts of Persia. In 1921, a Persian army officer named Reza Khan took control and sought to end outside influence. In 1935, he renamed the country Iran. His son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, became shah in 1941.
- (D) Since then, religious leaders have ruled the country. The first was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose 10 years in power were marked by a long war with Iraq and tensions with the United States and many other nations. Khomeini died in 1989, but those tensions have lasted to the present day.

2 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *Strong religious beliefs have been part of Iranians' lives for thousands of years.*
2. *Ancient Iranian thinkers wrote influential texts on philosophy and medicine.*
3. *It was an Iranian mathematician who invented algebra.*
4. *Iran has extensive oil reserves, but its economy was hit hard by a trade ban imposed by the United States in 1979, after the Iranian Revolution.*

Which two sentences together provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that Iran has made important contributions to the world?

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 2 and 4

3 Which sentence from the article is BEST supported by Map 2 at the end of the article?

- (A) Iran (pronounced ee-RAHN) is situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia and the Arab states of the Middle East.
- (B) Most people in Iran live along the edges of a high plateau that runs through the middle of the country.
- (C) Iran's mountains in the north and west have dense forests that offer habitat for brown bears, wild goats, wolves and leopards.
- (D) Iran has a long history of scholarship that has created a rich culture of art, literature, poetry, music, cuisine and architecture.

4 Examine Map 1.

How does the image contribute to the reader's understanding of Iran?

- (A) It persuades readers to help the Persian leopards, which are dying out in Iran.
- (B) It provides more information about Iran's major cities and the major exports.
- (C) It shows the names of the countries and seas that share a border with Iran.
- (D) It shows where Iran is located and other important facts about the country.

## Answer Key

1 Read the section "History."

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- (A) In 559 B.C., the Persian Empire arose in southwestern Iran and conquered the Mesopotamians and Egyptians. The empire eventually extended from the Mediterranean Sea to what is now Pakistan. It was conquered by the Greeks in 330 B.C.
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