

A Gem of a Discovery

Tehran's Treasury of National Jewels is a showcase of opulence

By Durriya Dohadwala

Mention Persia and beautiful carpets, mystical poets and Scheherazade come to mind. But after visiting Iran three years ago, I now have a new, glittering image to add: the Treasury of National Jewels in Tehran. Owned by and located in the Central Bank, the museum houses a mind-boggling array of loose gems, ornaments and artefacts that showcase the wealth and opulence of the dynasties that ruled Iran from 1500 CE. Jewellery, swords and tableware are all encrusted with precious jewels and displayed with a sort of nonchalance that can make you forget that alarms will go off if you touch the showcases.

Without a doubt, my favourite piece was the Darya-i-noor (which translates to the 'Sea of Light') diamond. At 186 carats, it is the largest pink diamond in the world and was brought to Iran from India by Nader Shah in 1739 as a spoil of war (together with the famed Koh-i-noor or 'Mountain of Light' diamond). While the Koh-i-noor found its way back to India, and then eventually to Britain to be part of the Crown Jewels, the Darya-i-noor remained in Iran. It was worn by different rulers at different times as an armband, a brooch or a hat decoration depending on the fashion of the time.

The most astounding item in the museum is a jewel-studded globe which, at 110 cm, stood almost as tall as my seven-year-old daughter! Set entirely in precious stones, the globe was commissioned by Naser-o-din Shah in the mid 19th century to make use of and preserve the loose jewels in the treasury. The seas and oceans are set in emeralds, the land masses are made of rubies and spinels, while the shapes representing Iran, Great Britain, France and some parts of South Asia are encrusted in diamonds. In total more than 51,000 gems and approximately 35 kilogrammes of gold were used in the globe's decoration.

Just as you exit the Treasury, you see the Naderi Throne. Constructed of 12 separate pieces of wood to make it portable, it is covered with gold and encrusted with 26,733 jewels. It is engraved with a lion, dragons, ducks and trees. A peacock tail adorns the back rest, so it has often been mistaken for the Peacock Throne of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. Verses written on the throne date it to the second Qajar king, Fathali Shah (1797-1834). The question that naturally arises, is why is it called the Naderi throne? Not, as you might think, for Nader Shah, who ruled the Persian Empire in the mid 18th century. Rather it refers to the Persian word 'nader', which means 'unique'.

The collection is a treasure trove for gem and jewellery enthusiasts. The only thing missing – a souvenir shop for take-home mementos!

Museum of The Treasury of National Iranian Jewels
Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
Ferdowsi Avenue, Tehran, Iran
Saturday to Tuesday from 2:00 to 4:30 pm
Photos of the collection can be viewed on the website of
the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
www.cbi.ir/page/2091.aspx



Treasury Tehran sign

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