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## Building bridges through Science: David Mottershead attends international congress in Iran

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Making new friends from the Congress. (David is second from right).

As a result of an email I received on the 20th of June this year inviting me to speak at the Royan International Twin Congress (August 31-September 2) in Tehran, Iran, I was plunged into quite an adventure. The Royan International Twin Congress has been held every year since the first meeting in September 2000. This year's meeting saw the joint holding of the 17th Congress on Reproductive Biomedicine and the 12th Congress on Stem Cell Biology & Technology, both supported and organized by the **Royan Institute** in Tehran. This being my first trip to the middle east meant that a new and unusual experience was assured.



Ceiling of the Tomb of Hafez, Shiraz.

The meeting itself reflects the nature and makeup of the Royan (in Persian “royan” means embryo) Institute itself, which has Divisions devoted to reproductive biomedicine, stem cell biology and biotechnology. The congress itself has the two streams of reproductive biomedicine and stem cell biology running concurrently. This enabled one to pick and choose between both session streams, and although I found myself predominantly within the reproductive stream, I did cross over for a number of very interesting presentations within the stem cell stream as well. International speakers from across the world were in attendance (UK, USA, Austria, China, Netherlands, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, for example). Apart from Keynote Lectures and Award Lectures, there were the various invited speakers talks, short oral presentations, poster sessions and exhibitions. The sessions of particular interest to me were, Animal Biotechnology, Tissue Engineering in Reproductive Sciences, and Regenerative Medicine, Novel Discoveries.



Tombs of kings past, Naqsh-e-Rostam.

The conference organizers looked after the invited speakers extremely well, we were never short of food/refreshments at the venue and every evening we were taken to see sites in Tehran and out to eat, enabling us to experience the magnificent local cuisine. From my own point of view, the congress was extremely productive with good discussions/connections established between myself and two separate labs at the Royan Institute which should lead to ongoing collaborations. For all the invited speakers a 2 day tour of highlights of Iran was offered which I participated in, enabling one to experience the history of the country and see some amazing sites. First we flew South to Shiraz, a distance of 700 km. We arrived late and would not have time to get to know Shiraz well, but did visit the Tomb of Hafez, one of Iran’s famous and revered poets who lived in the 14th

century (1325-1389). Upon leaving Shiraz by bus we started our long trip back North to Tehran. Our first stop 70 kms from Shiraz was at a series of tombs cut into the cliff side where ancient kings were buried. The site is known as Naqsh-e Rostam and had a distinctly “Indiana Jones” feel to it, certainly it transported one back in time. Not far from this site we stopped at the ruins of the ancient city of Persepolis which was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC). Here various kings and statesmen from around the world would come to greet the Iranian king, a must see site on any trip to Iran. Finally we arrived at the city of Esfahan (also spelt Isfahan) about 300 km South of Tehran. Esfahan is the 3rd largest city in Iran at nearly 2 million people. The main attraction is the large Naghsh-e-Jahan square constructed between 1598 and 1629. Around the square are located three mosques and what seems like hundreds of shops selling the most beautiful craftworks. I could not do this area justice in this short visit, however, given the collaborative links which I believe will be established, it may well not be my last.



One of the mosques at Naghsh-e-Jahan Square, Esfahan.

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