

# “PADI Rescue Diver” course in Qeshm

Spring of 2010

Saturday

Ahmad took me to the airport. I drove. I usually do and let him take the car back. This time I also wanted to test and “play” with my new Iranian GPS, - it does the job, most of the time - so there was no chance for Ahmad today.

Ahmad and I know each other since 1974, when I came back to Iran. He was a waiter at the “Imperial Club<sup>1</sup>.” His specialty was Turkish coffee. “**Ahmad, dota gahve tork<sup>2</sup>**” we used to order, almost shouting.

Sometime after the revolution, when the club or at least its restaurant and clubhouse went down the drain, he came to work for me as a part-time driver, serving at home, doing errands, office boy, etc...

Ahmad is substandard at whatever he does. He is scared of everything but terrified by his wife; a phone call from her or even one of her appointees - one of their five children and now mostly the younger still live-in son, Jaber - is enough to give him a heart attack.

Ahmad is a liar and a small time thief. Still we like him and enjoy his company<sup>3</sup>. He has become part of the family.

I should mention that the Imperial Club in those days was one of the most exclusive and fashionable gathering places in Iran. You had to be part of, or have strong ties, to the elite to become a member.

As one of the known waiters from those days Ahmad wields power. If a young woman then and by now a lady of a certain age asks him: “Ahmad, you remember, I used to come to the club...” and Ahmad doesn't acquiesce, she feels that she has suddenly become a nonperson. Some of them insist and Ahmad remembers or pretends to, against an implied tip.

A friend thinks he looks like George Clooney<sup>4</sup>.

There was supposed to be a long (Thursday to Monday) weekend in Iran but the government changed its mind at the last minute and cancelled Saturday and Sunday. Its part of the charm of the orient: there always are surprises, it's never boring and predictable!

Af first, I was supposed to leave for [Qeshm](#) Friday to practice and hopefully pass my [PADI Rescue Diver](#) exam the next day. The administration's sudden change of plan and unfinished work made me postpone. I didn't really have to stay since the business that retained me, was for all practical purposes finalized. Still, I chose to remain in Tehran to see the deal fully wrapped-up with a properly signed contract and proforma invoice. With fluctuating exchange rates and especially different ways of interpreting them a problem could arise. In that case it is better to be “available” on the spot on short notice. Customers being “[prima donnas](#)” they need to be taken very good care of from close. On top of it the market was plummeting thus it was no time to take any chances.

Remaining in Tehran an extra day should have been a straightforward decision but it took me sometime to make my mind up. After the fact I wondered how I could have even thought of leaving without being totally at peace with the business “in the pocket.”

I didn't really mind shortening my stay anyway since having already completed the “[Emergency First Response](#)” exam and even part of the Rescue Diver in Sri Lanka<sup>5</sup> earlier this year, I only needed one full day to practice and hopefully pass the exam with my friend and newly licensed instructor Masoud.

I must admit that I didn't mind missing the hassle of hotel registration, choosing the room, etc... either. It would all be taken care of by Masoud. Thus when arriving, all I would have to do would be walking into the room.



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<sup>1</sup> Now called “The Revolution Club” it is still as popular as ever with the “upper classes”

<sup>2</sup> “Ahmad, two turkish coffees”

<sup>3</sup> See my “Kish Island” Report

<sup>4</sup> American actor

<sup>5</sup> See my report by same name

I booked the Saturday afternoon flight.

It was delayed. At the airport departure hall the wireless network - I am addicted to the internet, emails, etc... - did not work and the freshly squeezed fruit juice stand had disappeared. To top it all the "flying machine" was a [Tupolev](#) type which have a poor safety record in Iran. Nevertheless I made it safely to Qeshm. The air trip was uneventful, even pleasant.

I used to be scared of flying but now I am not that fearful even on our internal flights; I just avoid taking them whenever possible. I am not sure if it's for the poor safety record, second-rate service or just the lack of comfort and always fully booked flights as attested by Masoud's luggage described below.

Liszt's Piano concerto 1 & 2 from my iPod, [podcasts](#), finishing "[Passport à l'Iraniennne](#)" and talking to - more like interviewing - the young man sitting next to me who was also going on a diving trip and even some snoozing in between kept me busy during the almost 2-hour flight. Still, it was a relief when the plane landed.

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We had booked at the Sahel Talai<sup>6</sup> hotel. It looks and is designed as a motel with each room's entrance opening to a small terrace directly outside facing the beach. There is even a boardwalk. On weekends, the hotel charges local families a small fee to let them use it.

The hotel has the potential to be good but its not. It is "acceptable," offers decent food and has the great advantage of being on the sea front within walking distance from the Dolphin Dive Center. Cleanliness on the other hand is borderline.

Upon arrival I met my friends Masoud, Hooshmand and his nephew Payman freshly disembarked from Canada. Some or maybe most recently emigrated Iranians living in America (mainly the US but I found out also Canada) are a species of their own. It is beyond my writing ability to describe them. Suffice it to say that with Payman and of course Hooshmand who is always fun, we were set to have a good time. Their "Special English" conversations just made it so much more amusing.

In the evening, at the hotel's open air café and hangout place we met the hotel's flute playing gardener. With his turban and sculpted, craggy features, he looked like he had come from the set of Lawrence of Arabia.

I must learn how to tie a turban properly. Its efficient and dashing looking.



The locals in Qeshm are Arabs.

Iranians dislike Arabs, some hate them; especially the Arabs from The Gulf<sup>7</sup>. For some reason that I cannot appreciate most of my compatriots feel superior to them. They have all kinds of reasons for it but I think it is really because we are lighter skinned and look more like our ideal which is of course the fair-skinned Western Man. Iranians abroad used to say they are Italian, Spanish, Greek or something - I wanted to be Franco-Russian. Most of us though have outgrown this pathetic disposition.

I like Arabs and consider them as brothers - or at least - cousins. Some Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptians are the most cultured people.

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We took a brief rest and went "downtown" first to an internet café and then to have a light dinner. At the second café I managed to access my email and even send a fax.

The dinner was at a new, and judging from the crowd, apparently very popular fast food restaurant. It was clean. The fare which seemed to be enjoyed by most of the young patrons was inspired by American junk food - worse and greasier. At least in my books that's as bad as it possibly can get.

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<sup>6</sup> Golden Shore

<sup>7</sup> Sorry friends, no time nor place to get into the polemic of Persian versus Arabian Gulf

So much the better for me since I am always trying to lose weight. It's been the most consistent and fairly successful endeavor of my life!

We got back to our hotel shortly before midnight and went to sleep; I with my podcasts to which I have become addicted along with The Net and Masoud, with whom I was sharing the large four-bedded suite type room, with his dreams.

I set the alarm for 7:30.

Sunday

We went for breakfast at 8. At the restaurant our friend Cambyse came to see us. He is an international type with an American "penchant." Apart from being an excellent skier, cook and first class host, he is also an experienced diver.

True to his perfect host attribute, he offered us espresso coffee made with the latest gizmo which looks and functions like a small bicycle pump but was actually an emergency "field espresso machine." I thought that having an espresso coffee freshly brewed in Qeshm with a portable apparatus is about as chic as you can possibly get!

Cambyse had come a few days earlier with his wife, daughter, Philippino nurse<sup>8</sup> and his own group of friends. I reminded me of "Comment peut-on être Persan?"<sup>9</sup>.

Cambyse went with his friends to a dive site which, I think, was on the other side of the island. Masoud, Hooshmand, Payman and I went to the nearby Dolphin Dive Center and off I was to practice the famous Rescue Diving.

Hooshmand played the role of the unconscious diver whose life I was supposed to save. Payman was assigned to be Masoud's assistant. His role was to hold on to the equipment which in a real life scenario I would just throw away. He, or better said we, managed to lose a mask and even a weight belt or two. Short as Hooshmand is and not fat either, I never would have guessed that he was so heavy. I found out the hard way, trying to carry him ashore. To paraphrase Lady Macbeth "who thought he had so much weight in him?"

By the time the practice and exam were over, I was fairly tired. I thought I heard Masoud say: "I am satisfied." I interpreted it as having successfully accomplished the exam but it could have been wishful thinking.

After practice, the underwater visibility was still poor. Being tired, we did not bother to go for an actual scuba-dive. Instead we rested, had a very good drink, prepared with "Absolute" vodka which Hooshmand had managed to "find" the day before. We had dinner, this time at the hotel's restaurant and retired to our rooms.

Monday

Scuba diving was prohibited since we were flying the same day and the "No Flight Time" after even a single dive of 10 or more meters deep is 12 hours.

Instead Hooshmand and I went jogging.

Later, at the dive club where we had come to settle our bill, we ran into another of our friends, Tezy. He must have been on a secret mission of some sort because he avoided us during our stay and even when we met him by chance it was short. Was he fearing we found out what secret mission he was on in Qeshm? Diving, it was not, building yet another atomic site?

Tezy is similar to Cambyse as far as being "a man for all sports" and an international type. But being from a former generation, instead of Cambyse's American penchant, he carries more of a British influence. He cultivates his English accent and even tells jokes in the original manner of speaking. Hardly anyone understands them but everybody laughs anyway. Some don't grasp the language and others don't appreciate English jokes. I tend to be of the latter.

Contrary to Cambyse, Tezy can better be described as the perfect guest rather than the faultless host. Leaving Tezy in peace, I went swimming with Hooshmand, Masoud and Payman.

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<sup>8</sup> Yes, some people still have nurses even after the revolution!

<sup>9</sup> Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*

Afterwards at the dive club's "bar" which was in reality just a small hut with a few cracked wooden tables and stools - they did serve cold drinks though - we met two lovely women. Open minded, charming and proper at the same time. No nose jobs either!<sup>10</sup> They were both natural looking and attractive. Teachers in Arak<sup>11</sup> of all places. We enjoyed their company and conversation...

The flight back was as uneventful as the one to Qeshm except that, we found out upon arrival in Tehran that the airline simply did not bother to load Masoud's luggage. The airline company did not inform him let alone say they are sorry - as though this was normal practice. All they had to say was that the plane was overloaded! Unpredictable yes; charming, no.

Masoud recuperated his bag the next day.

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I almost forgot, I did pass my PADI Rescue Diver exam.

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<sup>10</sup> Nose jobs, disfiguring otherwise pretty women have become almost a must in Iran

<sup>11</sup> Comparable to Akron, Ohio or Montélimar, France