

Kandovan

December 19 - 21, 2007



Recently my friend AliMo N brought some hotel brochures for us. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the one for the hotel in [Kandovan](#)¹. Other friends had mailed me photos of the hotel project a couple of years back but I never thought that it would actually be built. A five-star hotel in the middle of nowhere, at the end of the world!

I wanted to take pictures for the greeting-card that I send to friends for the New-Year, plus the area has good ski touring possibilities that I thought may be interesting to further investigate; we had had a quick look last year that was promising (see my "[Sahand](#)" report). That, added to the excitement of seeing this intriguing new hotel was more than enough to get me going. I invited AliMo N, Hooshmand L and Kaveh EM to join me.

We packed the old Patrol with clothes and equipment for a long weekend including touring skis, sealskins and of course cameras and other toys such as laptop computers, GPS, walkie-talkies and most important the iPod which I couldn't wait to test with the new powerful speakers just installed on the patrol and off we were...

The village of **Kandovan** is about seven hundred kilometers North-West of Tehran. It is off the [Tabriz-Urmia](#) road, above [Osku](#). The place is well known and well indicated. Most of the locals can give you directions. So, although it is a long way from Tehran, it is straightforward to find once you have reached Tabriz.



Kandovan is famous because the settlement is built into the volcanic rock from the nearby Sahand volcano. To a lesser extent it is known for its mineral water source believed to have therapeutic effects on the liver and kidney.

There are various tales about **Kandovan**; some dating back to pre-islamic times, others to the 13th century AD during the Mongol injunction in Iran. None, I think, are reliable but whatever the true history of **Kandovan** may be, the village and hotel are both unique² and very interesting architecturally. The nature in the area is also winsome: green and cool in the summer with creeks, streams, rivers, lush pastures and high mountain ranges all around.

¹ Bold, underlined, blue font indicate hyperlink

² I understand there are only two similar places in the world, one in Turkey and one in Brazil



In winter **Kandovan** is very cold with abundant snow. Early in the morning, I could hardly resist more than a minute or two to take photos without gloves!

We stayed at the **Kandovan Laleh Rocky Hotel** as it is officially known. An attraction in itself, it has four rooms and six suites for a total of ten, all hand carved into the rock. The suites even have jacuzzis! Rates, which vary according to the season, are reasonable by European standards but very high for the ordinary Iranian.

As very often in Iran it could have been a great hotel but its not; even-though it is much better than anything I expected. The staff was friendly and the

service acceptable. The food ok too. Were it not in Iran it could have been a lovers' retreat but with no wine, music, dancing and all the restrictions put on women's wear chances, at least for the foreseeable future, are slim...

We had a good time just exploring the surroundings, taking photos, etc... and then being able to rest in a clean, well heated hotel.



I hear that Mr. Sabet³, who is an accomplished hotel chain manager and owner of the Dariush Hotel in Kish (see my "[Kish Island](#)" report) among others, is taking a stake in the hotel. If this is true there should be improvements implemented in the **Kandovan Laleh Rocky Hotel** soon. Inshallah!

Before returning to Tehran we had an excellent Kebab dinner in Sardrud⁴ which is just a few kilometers from Tabriz. The next day having bought some local cheese, walnuts and honey we drove back fairly fast to Tehran to make it on time to two "[Yalda](#)"⁵ parties at which we were invited.

³ Mr. Sabet owns and manages hotels in Iran, Germany and the Canary Islands

⁴ The best Kebabs in Iran are from the Azerbaijan (this region) and Khorasan provinces

⁵ Yalda is the longest night of the year. It is one of the favorite old pre-Islamic Iranian traditional feasts. Family and friends and very often party goers celebrate and have a good time through the night. It is our version of New-Year's eve

We reached Tehran at 10 p.m. just on time for the first event!
The first one at Hooshmad's, was informal with his family and friends of differing types and of all ages.
The second one somewhat "high society" at one of our "taghouti"⁶ lady friend's with our usual circle of acquaintances and a few ambassadors and diplomats thrown in for good measure.
Although tired after a ten-hour drive, we had a good time at both.

Contact

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Photos

Page 1:

- Typical Kandovan dwelling
- Shepherd herding his flock home at dusk, in the background the hotel lights

Page 2:

- In one of the suites
- The result of 2 days "work" that I used for my greetings card. The "process" left no time to even put on the touring skis!

Thank you

- Mr. Oskuei for the information on **Kandovan** village and the hotel.
- Fred G and Masoud G for proofreading and editing.
- Saman M for formatting.
- AliMo N, Hooshmad L and Kaveh EM for their company.

J-M Houtcieff

⁶ In everyday language it has the connotations of the old regime, chic, high class