

Features

Featured Local Events, Groups and People

Summer in Iran provides unbelievable cultural experience

Roya in Iran

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After their senior year in Iran, students take a placement test like the SAT to tell what universities they may attend. Getting a good placement means everything to their future. My 19-year-old cousin, Mooshgan, studied months in advance to get her placement of 310 out of the 2 million who took the test. Mooshgan is now going to Gazven University to become a dentist. My other cousin, Shagagh, got a placement of 517 and is now studying to be a business major at Tehran University.

One of the scariest things about Iran is the traffic. Always in gridlock, it's very much like the traffic in Los Angeles. Unlike Los Angeles though, there are no enforced traffic rules. The lanes painted in the streets are merely guidelines that no one chooses to use.

Driving is like a huge race, cars weave in and out and motorcycles nearly miss getting hit by a fast moving car. The streets sometimes narrow making for one huge traffic jam with everyone trying to move away at the same time.

Surprisingly, this type of traffic works for Iran because the number of accidents is way lower than one would expect. Driving tests in Iran are very hard and only the best drivers are allowed to obtain a license. It still was a stressful situation for me even when we just had to drive to the market 10 minutes away.

My whole trip in Iran turned out to be one amazing experience after another. My 22-year-old

cousin, Kavan, acted as our tour guide and took us to see the sights. We had the chance to explore the Shah's palace the way he left it before his exile. His mansion is filled with important and historical Iranian artifacts.

We also took many trips to the famous Tehran Bazaar. Equivalent to five Portland Saturday Markets, the Tehran Bazaar happens every day and is traditionally split into corridors. Historically the five corridors were for carpets, paper, spices, copper, and jewelry, but now include more sections such as those for clothes and food stands.

Kian and I had a mission to try out the fast food places. They did have traditional Iranian fast food such as kabobs, but Iranians also have a love for pizza and hamburgers. With no copyright laws in Iran, business owners just take two American restaurants and combine them. My favorite was one we went to called Superstar Fried Chicken. With the Carl's Jr logo, the fast food place was a true mixture of Carl's Jr and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Unlike the U.S., fast food restaurants are very clean in Iran and also very nicely decorated. It felt as if we were really in a true sit down restaurant and the fast food was of better quality better than what the American restaurants have. The "CocaCola" product they have in Iran was ten times better than here.

The real Iranian cuisine was also much better than what I was expecting. My grandmother would cook three meals a day and all of them were delicious. She is

known by friends and family as the one who can cook a good traditional meal that can bring people together.

the traditional montage, which covers the whole body with one long piece of black fabric. Having to

were presenting me with their silverware. With some persistence on my part, they kept the beautiful silverware and I learned the important lesson about complimenting something without saying you like it.

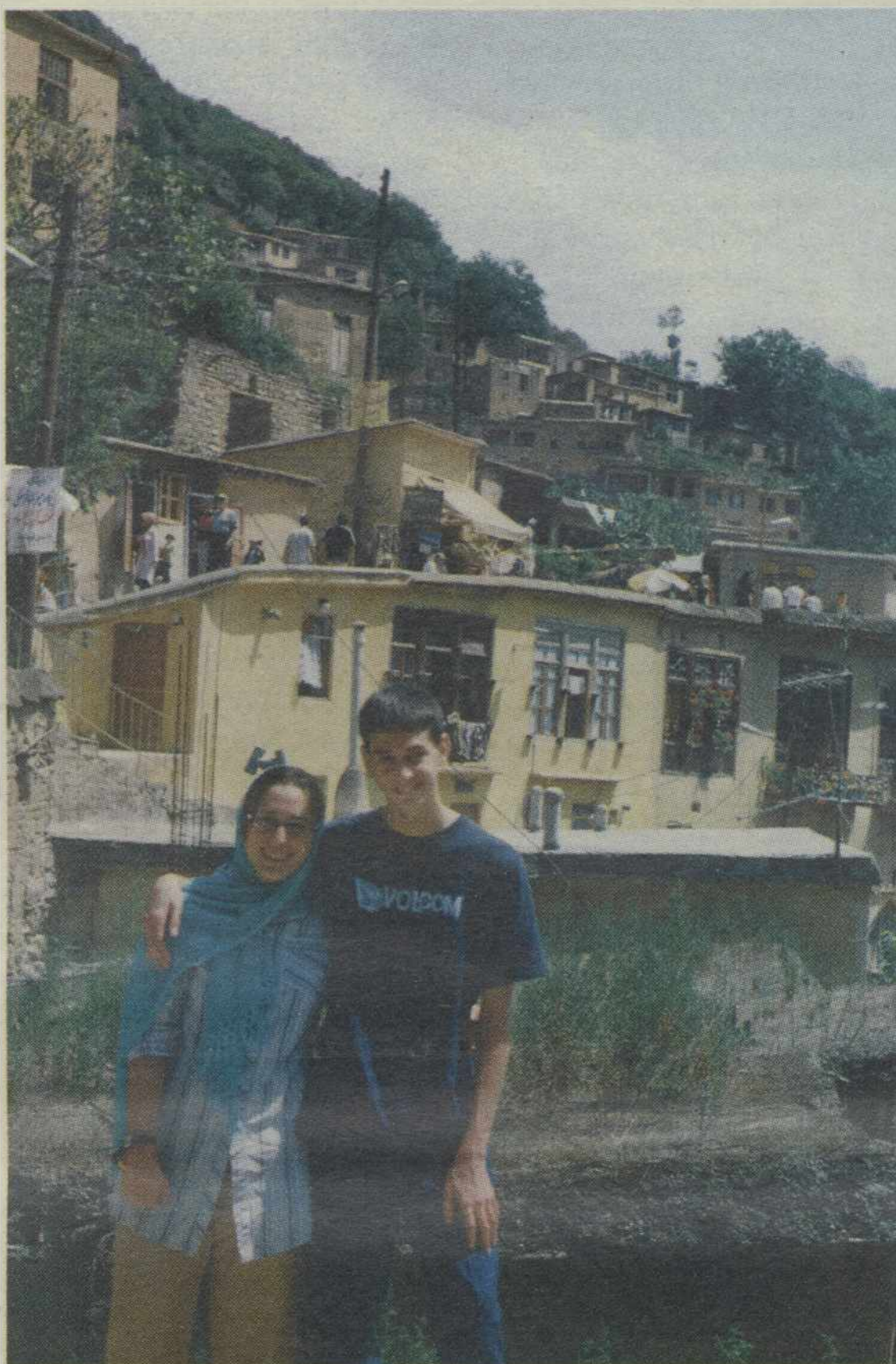
Not once did I ever feel threatened or that I was in any type of danger in Iran. Although the extreme government owns the country's television stations, Iranians like my grandfather own satellites, which broadcast news from the massive Iranian population in Los Angeles. It's these new programs where they get unbiased news programs about the war in Iraq, the United States, and their own country of Iran.

They have music programs just like MTV but featuring Iranian and Arabic artists. Though they weren't meant to be humorous, Kian and I loved watching the videos and had a good laugh about how they portray American life.

The most memorable part of my 18-day stay in Iran was visiting the birthplace of my dad, grandmother and grandfather. The village of Elizeh is about a four-hour drive away from the capital of Tehran. Tucked away in the mountains and right along a river, the town of Elizeh is famous for its olives. Although most of the olive trees were damaged by an earthquake years ago, the olive business is still in full bloom.

Like other civilizations of the past, many Iranians take the name of their birthplace as the second part of their last name. Take for instance my full last name "Ghorbani-Elizeh" the Elizeh stands for the birthplace of my dad. Kian and I loved hearing about these old traditions and stories of my father's childhood and seeing exactly where they happened.

Moving to the United States as an 18-year-old, my dad has accomplished more than he ever thought he could. Going to Iran allowed me to understand where I come from and to meet the family that I always knew I had. While most will travel to the beach this spring break, I hopefully will be going back to Iran with my Iranian family. Again, I will enjoy the country that accepted this American with open arms.



Roya and Kian Elizeh stand outside the main street in the village Lajon. It was the first time traveling to Iran for the siblings and they both hope to visit their family again soon.

Photo submitted by Roya Elizeh

The fruit in Iran is very fresh and is much smaller than the fruit we have in the United States because they don't use any type of chemicals.

Tea is the coffee of Iran and at every meal it is offered to drink. Although it is said that the tap water is safe to drink in Tehran, my grandmother still boiled it because she didn't want us to get sick.

Walking allowed me to see the different types of people in Iran and also gave me a first hand experience of seeing how people lived. Little girls under the age of nine are not required to wear a montage and scarf, but would if their family happened to be very traditionally based. The women wear

constantly hold it together, the traditional montage is usually not worn by teenagers and women of the "new generation." Fashion is very important to the modern Iranian women and there are many four story malls in which to shop.

The people of Iran were always so nice to us. Street vendors would chuckle when we'd try to speak Farsi and everyone we visited tried to make us feel at home. A custom we learned was that when you have someone visit your house, you must return the favor and visit them at their house.

Another custom is that if you mention you like something of theirs, they will immediately offer to give it to you. This got me in trouble once when we went to visit my second cousin's house in the city of Rasht. I mentioned that I liked the silverware and before you know it, the family had it wrapped it up and



Most street circles in Tehran, Iran have their own mosque. The mosque of the Kachj Circle is known for its beautiful architecture. Iranians pray in their mosque up to five times in a day. The most common times of prayer in the Mosque are at sunrise, noon, sundown and around 10 p.m.

Photo by Kian Elizeh