



Fourth **Dive Challenge** in Oman

An international team of dive instructors, doctors and helpers came to Nizwa to give handicapped people the chance to try out diving in the pool of the Golden Tulip Hotel Nizwa.

The first dive challenge for disabled was held in March 2009 at the Oman Dive Center in Muscat. Due to its great success and the immense interest the Ministry of Sports asked the dive challenge team to organise such events on a regular basis in different cities of Oman.

Sur and Salalah have been the destinations during 2010 and this year the dive event was held in Nizwa from March 13 to 16. The 'father' of the team is Tariq Al Khabori who is supporting the society of disabled people since 1984. Due to his continuous efforts and initiative over the past years the team will soon be organised in the ODDA "Oman Disabled Divers Association" inspired by former events in cooperation with European diving organisations. This association is now under formation.

Diving was considered as dangerous sport, but nowadays

scuba diving is one of the most popular water sport activities in the world for young and old. In many countries diving is already part of therapies for the handicapped as 'inwater activities' have a positive influence on the body and empowers the mental and physical fitness. Post incident depressions can be healed and disabled people motivated to get back to social activities.

Stefanie Trier, one of the founding members, and diving instructors says: "During my long time of teaching I came across some handicapped students. One of them had only one leg. Although I was skeptic in the beginning and thought that he will not be able to keep up with the other students I was very surprised that he turned out to be one of the best students during the course; extremely disciplined and eager to do all exercises in high performance." This experience motivated me to become a diving instructor for the handicapped.

All team members are cutting their annual holidays to travel to the Sultanate to teach disabled people diving. When asking Gundula

Blohm, Kathleen Bates and Tom Wyssenbach, instructors who are coming on a regular basis, what motivates them to participate, the answer is: Seeing the total joy and excitement in the eyes of the handicapped under water and after the dive.

Meeting people who never thought in their entire life that they will once scuba dive and getting the possibility to discover the beautiful underwater world of Oman is pure satisfaction. Not only the inwater training but also the qualified and competent surface assistance is very important for the handicapped.

Saif Al Rawahi and Nina Gail are helping the participants with enthusiasm to get their equipment prepared, they do surface briefings and bring the disabled safely in and out of the water. They are also taking care of the handicapped after their water experience and are giving help and explanations if needed.

A key team member is Dr Roswitha Prohaska who is also a dive instructor and president of the Austrian Society for Diving and Hyperbaric medicine takes care



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of safety and allows only people in the water who went through a medical check-up and questioning. Depending on her evaluation, up to three dive instructors are taking care of one disabled diver. Mentally retarded, blind, deaf as well as paraplegics can join the event as long as there is no contra indication existing. Andrea Blinzler, a physiotherapist working in Muscat, is also part of the team and eager to improve the life of the handicapped in Oman with water therapies.

During the first day in Nizwa the team had 25 disabled people in the water. Instructors are in the pool from 10am till 4pm with only a short lunch break to make sure that all handicapped are able to experience the feeling of moving in three dimensions and to forget a while about their handicap. When asking the team members about their objectives for the future the

first wishes coming up are to have a proper association and to continue the education.

The aim for this year is to get disabled into the open sea who are really keen on taking a complete diving course. The fun should not be limited to the pool experience. Stefanie, who is working for Art Marine in Oman, a company organising charter tours on luxury yachts, has obtained permission from her company to use one of the luxury yachts for a snorkel and dive excursion.

The boat is fitted with a hydraulic platform which will make the access to the water very easy. Numarine, the Turkish manufacturer of this yacht, designed also a 78 ft boat fully accessible for people in wheelchairs, equipped with lifts instead of stairs and specially designed bathrooms.

"Our aim is to have an instructor for disabled on a permanent base

in Oman," says Tariq Khabori, the demand in scuba diving is so high that this person will be busy over the entire year. Gundula Blohm who was working in Salalah in a dive center for a year is smiling. She loves the country and its people and would be more than willing to quit her job in Germany to move back to Oman and see the smiles in the faces of disabled when experiencing the fascinating underwater world. The spirit is moving from Oman to the neighboring countries. Tariq Khabori was already invited by senior officials to establish water activities for the disabled people in their countries.

The dive challenge in Nizwa would not have taken place without the financial support of local companies and the team as well as the society of disabled people in Oman is very thankful to Oman LNG, Millennium, National Bank of Oman and Oman ORIX Leasing for their contribution.

