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# Under water all are fit, take the plunge

Scuba diving is being introduced to the disabled for the first time in Oman with the active involvement of the International Association of Handicapped Divers

**T**HERE is a new exciting activity in the process of unfolding which will in due course open up vistas of opportunities for the physically challenged in Oman with the additional promise of a new life. Scuba diving is being introduced for the first time with the active involvement of the International Association of Handicapped Divers (IAHD) for the benefit of the differently abled who did not have any such facility hitherto.

Tarek Jawad Al Khabori, who has been appointed as Oman's IAHD representative, says: "It is a matter of great significance that Oman is the first and only country in the Middle East that has been chosen for this programme."

Sporting activities have long been known to have far-reaching healing and restorative effect on the body as well as the mind of those who practise it. For those who are physically challenged sports plays a larger and more important role since it helps to build a person's self-esteem. One such sport which has immense value for the disabled is diving.

Diving can be such fun, a sport where you can really make a splash. Unlike springboard diving which is a pure sport that calls for a high degree of training and discipline, scuba diving is more about fun, relaxation and adventure. This is where you can plunge right inside the belly of the ocean and immediately enter the panoramic world under the sea and get a close and intimate view of the fascinating marine life, waiting to be explored.

A diving instructor at the Oman Dive Centre, Stefanie says that diving is one of the best sports that handicapped people, especially those who have lost the use of their lower limbs, can take up and enjoy.

Stefanie, who has been an instructor for a long time in Oman, explains: "For the disabled, diving is good for the body as well as for the mind. On the one hand it strengthens the muscles of the body. But more than that it does wonders for a person's self-confidence and it gives them a positive, never-say-die attitude."

Looking into the many positive aspects of introducing scuba diving among the disabled in Oman, Stefanie and Tarek Jawad Al Khabori, who has been tirelessly working for the welfare of the handicapped since 1985, decided to do something about it.

With her past experience of working with handicapped divers and her close links with the International Association for Handicapped Divers (IAHD), the first step for Stefanie together with Tarek was to get the IAHD involved in this project. Within a short time Oman was hooked onto the IAHD network and Tarek has been given charge as the IAHD representative for Oman.

Armed with this new position and responsibility, Tarek wasted no time in getting the necessary official approval from the Ministries of Sports and Social Development. And this in turn has led to the staging of the first Dive Challenge here in Oman.

A seven-member IAHD team of divers, instructors and a doctor arrived in Oman on March 16. They



Stefanie Trier

include Miriam Prumer (physiotherapist), Daniel Zuidema, Thorsten Wolf, Dirk Wondrak, regional manager, IAHD for Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Turkey, Olof Winkler (handicapped diver), Robert Patzker (handicapped diver) and Dr Rudolph Bermer (doctor).

Bermer says he is here as part of the team because the Oman government wants to be absolutely sure that everyone who goes in for scuba diving is perfectly fit.

On Tuesday, March 17, the seven-member team began their first session of interaction at the Oman Association for the Disabled for people keen on taking up scuba diving as a sport and pastime. Ahmed Ahmedi, Director of disabled sports, Ministry of Sports, and the president of the Oman Association for the Disabled were also present for the introductory programme.

Stefanie says that with IAHD support they plan to make this kind of interaction with the disabled in Oman an annual event. "Who knows, in the future, we may be able to introduce some sort of competitive events also."

In earlier times when Jacques Cousteau, the famous diver and sea explorer, started to make scuba diving popular, it was considered as an extreme sport activity. Nowadays, diving is one of the most common recreation activities practised all over the world among the young and old.

Following the motto 'Scuba Diving for All' they will introduce the underwater world to the disabled in Oman.

During this week there will be an IAHD Pro-Training course, conducted by Pro-Trainer Dirk Wondrak from IAHD team Germany. From March 17 until 19 he will teach scuba diving professionals (instructors, course directors, dive masters) how to instruct people with a disability.

The course is very practical and instructors will have the opportunity to dive with people with a disability, to fully experience the challenges one will encounter once they become a certified IAHD professional.

In Europe scuba diving for the disabled is already part of a therapy. The physical effect alone is not important.



Dirk Wondrak

Oman Tribune



The seven-member IAHD team from Germany along with local representatives of the Oman Association for the Disabled.