

cover story

Qualified instructors from Austria fly down specially to Oman to enable this unique sport for the disabled



Diving No Disability

Handicapped divers prove their mettle and their class at the Fifth Dive Challenge in Muscat, organised by the Oman Disabled Divers' Association

Disabled divers made a real splash and proved once more that they are equal to the best when it comes to scuba diving. Over 40 handicapped divers made over 70 dives over the course of three days in an event on October. It all began in 2009, when diving expert and instructor Stefanie Tier suggested that a diving event be conducted for the disabled in Oman, Tariq Al Khabori, a known champion for the cause of the disabled, and now at the helm of the Oman Disabled Diver's Association (ODDA) couldn't imagine the disabled swimming, leave alone diving. Though it did require quite a bit of convincing, the two of them, with generous sponsorships and support from various quarters, have conducted many diving events for the disabled.

The Oman Dive Challenge for Disabled with the support of the International Disabled Divers



Diving for the Disabled

These diving events has meant a lot for the disabled who have participated enthusiastically in the events. With the development of equipment and techniques, diving has become accessible even to those who are not in top shape, as well as to the disabled.

Besides, experts vouch for the therapeutic value of diving. In many countries diving is already part of therapies for handicapped people. It is believed that "in water activities" have a positive influence on the body and boosts mental and physical fitness. Through this therapy post-accident depressions can be healed and disabled people motivated to get back to social activities, say experts.

Stefanie Trier, one of the founding members of this programme and a diving instructor, said, "During my tenure as an instructor, I have come across some very dedicated handicapped students. One of them had only one leg. Although I was doubtful in the beginning and thought that he will not be able to keep up with the other students he surprised me by becoming the best student during the course. They are all extremely disciplined and eager to put up high level performances." This experience motivated her to become a diving instructor for disabled. Members of the International Disabled Divers Association, who come twice a year to Oman to participate in the event are fully committed to the cause. Most of them sacrifice their annual holidays to travel to the Sultanate to teach disabled people diving.



Tariq Al Khabori

The man behind ODDA puts in his own time and efforts and has been involved with various charitable causes for decades now

Association has been a great success and taking the risk has been worth it for them. They recently completed the fourth Oman Dive Challenge for the disabled. On March 13 this year, an international team of dive instructors, doctors and a full crew arrived in Nizwa to give an opportunity to the disabled to try their luck at diving at Golden Tulip Hotel's pool.

Oman Dive Centre in Muscat hosted the first Dive Challenge for Disabled in 2009. Thanks to its huge success, the Ministry of Sports egged them on take it to different cities in Oman. So the team took the event to Sur and Salalah in 2010. The three-day event in Nizwa, the first to be held in 2011, too received tremendous response. The best part was the appreciation the team received from president of the Austrian Society for Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine. Dr Roswitha Prohaska, who was taking part for the second time in the Dive Challenge for Disabled as a diving and hyperbaric medicine consultant, said, "The sports festival for disabled in Nizwa was a great experience for me. We don't have such big events for handicapped in Austria. During the Dive Challenge in Nizwa our team had

58 people in the water. The participants included blind, paraplegics from polio, from accidents, and those handicapped due to other diseases."

The event was a big success for the participants and for the supporting team also. The handling of the disabled divers was managed in a very professional way, and even the diving instructors learnt a lot about the 'Diving with Disabled' projects.

Dr Roswitha also presented the outcome of the diving events at the next congress of the EUBS (European Underwater and Baromedical Society) to be held in Poland in August this year. Impressed about the sports activities and the empowerment of the disabled, she says, "I would be really happy to present these activities to the European Medical Societies."

Tariq, also team coordinator, Oman Dive Challenge for Disabled and manager, Gulf, International Disabled Divers Association has been putting his heart into conducting these diving events across Oman. His efforts and initiative over the past years will see the ODDA being formed soon. "Inspired by events in cooperation with European diving organisations,



The group after the handout of certificates at the diving event held in Sahar



The handling of disabled divers is managed in a very professional way, and the instructors also learn a lot in the process



The fact that people with disabilities enjoy diving as a recreational sport, irrespective of their handicap, has fascinated other countries too

the association is now under formation and the permission will come through soon," says Tariq.

"Holding of the diving events has meant a lot for the disabled who have participated enthusiastically in the events. With the development of equipment and techniques, diving has become accessible even to those who are not in top shape, as well as to the disabled." Tariq hopes to have an instructor for disabled on a permanent basis in Oman. "The demand for scuba diving is so high that I am sure this person will be busy over the entire year," he says.

The fact that people with disabilities are able to enjoy diving as a recreational sport, irrespective of their handicap has caught the fascination of those in other Gulf countries too.

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