

“All scruples were gone”

She was voted **Globetrotter of the year**, but could also have won the Globetrotter travel book award: The 37-year Helena Henneken from Hamburg travelled on her own through Iran for 59 days returning with a moving story. She told Johanna Stöckl all about it.



Photo: Helena Henneken

Helena has written a remarkable book about her trip to Iran.

Helena, why Iran?

In 2011 I met some Swiss people who had travelled through Iran. They talked with much enthusiasm about the country. At that time, like many others, I still believed

that Iran was simply too dangerous. But I got curious. I read books and learned a bit of Farsi. The more I learned, the more curious I got.

As a woman, did you never had scruples about travelling alone through Iran?

Of course I asked myself beforehand, if it was a good idea. Once I was there, all scruples were gone. And if Iran had overwhelmed me too much, I could always have travelled out by land, I had only booked the flight in.

Your picture of Iran before and after the trip?

Despite all my preparations, I did not really have a clue what to expect. Instead, I had many questions: How will it work out

as a woman alone? How much do I have to cover up? Am I allowed to speak with men in public? Once I was there, I observed a lot and went with the flow. I was overwhelmed and pretty much taken by surprise by the friendly hospitality.

Your greatest experience?

At the end of a very funny hiking day with 40 Iranians in the Kurdish mountains, I said for the first time: “I think I have to write a book about this...” At that, my local friends said straight away: “Yes, write a book!” And that’s how my personal project started.

One reads your book according to the Iranian tradition from right to left. How did you come up with the title “they would rock”?

A 16-year old Iranian girl said to me on my trip: “If my people lived in another country, they would rock!” This sentence put many of my experiences in a nutshell.

Helena’s book: “they would rock”, Globetrotter order number 24.52.53, 24,90 €. More about the author: helenahenneken.com.