

Marge Thornton met this group of girls while in Iran. The locals loved to talk to Americans, she said.



PHOTO COURTESY MARGE THORNTON

Journey to Iran is fascinating, but it's good to be back in USA

Marge Thornton of Tempe writes about her recent trip to Iran.

I recently returned from a two-week trip to Iran with 20 other people on a tour arranged by Neighbor's East and West.

Iran is a country of 70 million people with 10 million of them living in Tehran. The Tehran traffic is absolutely terrible. Cars at intersections and pedestrians play a continual game of "chicken." Pedestrians cross anywhere so it is important to learn the technique! One must look forward and keep a steady pace, for if a driver thinks you see him, he will not stop. It took a lot of courage for me to attempt this, even though I grew up in Chicago!

The fact of how modern the country is, and how friendly people are was impressive. They have a very open tourist policy except for U.S., United Kingdom and Australian citizens, who must be with a guide. This is obviously because of the aggressive foreign policy of these countries. However, our guide was very free about telling us we could walk anywhere from the hotel in Tehran. He was more strict in Shiraz, a more conservative area, where he wanted to be with us at all times. A couple who did not accompany us on one of the tours was instructed to stay in the hotel.

Of course, Iran has much ancient history, and seeing the great structures built by Cyrus the Great, Xerxes and Darius I and 2 and their many other leaders was fascinating. The more primitive village of Abyaneh was most interesting, and the city of Isfahan is attractive with beautiful mosaic mosques. It is very green with many trees and bushes planted along all the streets, as well as many parks. In addition I learned about their great ancient craft of rug making and bought a 40-50-year-old rug that was woven by nomads. On a drive to a waterfall, we were able to see the nomads moving their herds of sheep and goats up to the mountains where



Tempe resident Marge Thornton dressed like a Muslim woman while in Iran. She said her hajib, or headscarf, felt hot.

the weather will be cooler in the summer.

What I enjoyed most were the children and young people. They were eager to practice their English with us and were most friendly. They would call out to us "hello" and "how are you?" and ask to take our pictures with their cell-phone cameras. We offered pictures drawn by children in the U.S.

I was complimented by two local guides at a museum on how "Muslim" I looked. If their weather had been cooler, the hajib (headscarf) would not have been too bad, but since the weather is similar to Phoenix, and we often had to walk in the sun, I felt it was very unfair to have to wear it. What struck me as even more unfair is that women had to be in the back of the bus!

In conclusion, I found people in Iran are not that different than we in the U.S. What is so different are the freedoms we have. I am most grateful to be an American.