

Feeling low on the road, in Iran

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Kirsty has told me the name of a man who had sorted out her trip to Masuleh from the little bus terminal in Rasht, and as I asked the first pointy faced bus ticket guy for "Rasser" he merely started giving me directions to other Iranian cities. I resorted to caveman like tactics of my name pointing and then his name pointing... nope. Neither he nor his unhelpful friend could understand the most basic of human communication skills.

I asked the times of the Esfahan bus. 5pm. Could I leave my bag here as I wanted to go to Masuleh for the day? –Nope-. Cave man tactics again resulted in him pointing outside saying No11. I looked out, everything was closed. I went for a pee. On my return he was on the phone. And, doing his best to ignore me. I went to a different office.

Success, I could get a ticket for 70,000 to Esfahan tonight. But failure, I could not leave my bag anywhere. A taxi to Masuleh would also cost me 70,000?!! I was getting completely pissed off. My stomach hurt, I was tired, and I wondered why the hell I wanted to see a bloody green hilled town in the first place. I wanted to see men in Jilabi's and great tasting Tagine! I was starting to dislike the nonexistent Iranian hospitality & with the prospect of lugging my backpack around the little green town had lost all interest in the country.

I bought a ticket to Esfahan and wandered back out into the dawning day. I sat on the steps of the bus terminal where the sun was starting to shine. I watched the pack of taxi drivers by the exit of the car park, scurrying around their yellow vehicles looking for prey. Would I pay 7-8 Euro just for a quick day trip to a village I had lost interest in, or would I just sit there and sulk. Yes, I would do the latter.

Iran was grating me the wrong way. Single female no problems, single male on a budget...problems. Who gave a shit, no one noticed me, no one approached me as I sat on the steps. If this had been Turkey countless people would have come up to ask if I was alright. I looked through the guide book and cursed it for each one of its flowery descriptions of Iranian hospitality, sights and experiences. It was that anticipation that was getting to me more than anything else. My first decision - no longer would I read my guide books "the world is wonderful" descriptions.

I mapped out my route through Iran, taking into account my lack of excitement. Esfahan would make or break it for me. If it was bad, then I would head straight for the Pakistan border. I wanted ancient charm like that of Maroc, and what I was getting was far from charm.

I moved over to a little old man's food stall and ate a miserable greasy cold burger. I moved only three times that day: once to eat, once to avoid an incoming bus and once to move out of the sun. Nine hours later, with 2 more to go, I moved only back to the miserable burger joint, and cringed as I hurriedly washed it down with a Bibsi cola. I showed the old man my seat number and asked him to translate the Farsi writing. He typed into his greasy calculator and the display showed 44. The rear seat of the bus... Why me today?

It really was one of those things about having a bad day. So what else to do, but nothing. Let the deity controlling my day pass by. Do nothing, sit and wait for it to be over. However this was having other effects on me; too much time. I was being confronted with reality. I had failed to find a home in Europe, Language barriers. The obvious was a slap in the face for my own failings. Surely now I should be having fun? Free from the commitment of security and a 24/7 job. Yet the truth was that I was getting pretty miserable. I knew I would enjoy Iran a lot more if I was travelling with someone. I usually did enjoy travel more with someone else around. I longed for that now. For sure I would not be sitting here in a sulk if there was someone else here too.

For the first time I thought about chucking it in, getting a ticket to Thailand, or the Philippines and escaping my solitude. I was tired, my thighs were still on fire, and in a way I was very bored. I was losing interest in travelling. The thoughts of trekking in Pakistan made me shudder. I never really wanted to go to India. And Nepal seemed like an age away. As for finding home ... I didn't even want to think of that today.

I had enjoyed myself when travelling alone, no doubt. But in the 9 hours of purposeful solitude at the bus station I had met not one single traveller, and no one spoke to me that did not want my money. Since Portugal, on this leg of the trip, I had only travelled with 1 or 2 people for a couple of days, no more. Yet if I had, I would not have been able to search for a home like I had. Having said that, would it have made a difference?

6pm came, and I finally stood up as the sun began to dip low in the near cloudless sky. I began the confusion of asking where my bus might leave. And after directions from the equivalent of Seinfeld's "Soup Nazi" I found the bus to Esfahan. But Iran's cruelty continued, seat 44 was indeed at the rear of the bus, and it was full of boisterous male students.

I squeezed into the seat second from the left window, and was given the customary complimentary drink of juice and a packet of glow in the dark Cheese Balls. I struggled to sleep, sandwiched between two jostling students; but as the day closed, my theory on doing nothing on a bad day came to fruition. My luck started to come back. With the sheer darkness of pre dawn surrounding the bus, the kindness of a stranger brought about a complete change to my travels in Iran.