

First HOLIDAY

DHAKA TUESDAY JULY 1, 2008

PACKAGE TOURS

GALAXY Holidays
quality at home & abroad

Taj Caselina, 2nd Floor, 25 Guleshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
Tel: 9888055, 9885671 Fax: (880-2) 8815551
E-mail: holidays@galaxybd.com

BANGLADESH



COASTAL TREAT An underwater adventure

THE island was just waking up with a bright sun smiling on the eastern coast. We came out of our bungalow to a gush of chilly winds. Out on the beach it was a green heaven turning into gold. We stood on there on the sand and watched the transformation of the island. The bluish pale of the night fast receding and the outstretched sea reflecting the sun in its every lap. Then the light caught the Kewra and coconut plantation and so have to learn the signs to talk to your buddy. Then he told us what to do in case of an emergency. We tried to learn as much as possible and were quite satisfied with our half an hour's lesson.

"Now you put this around your waist," Atiq handed us

I had a weird feeling inside me -- I was nervous; actually I was scared to tell you the truth. But at the same time I felt an adrenaline rush in my veins. My instructor -- in diving terms they are the buddies -- held my hand tight and led me to the water's edge. I tentatively stepped out and then I was waist deep in water, he stopped and asked me to take a dip just to get acclimatised to the idea of breathing underwater.

I put the mask on and then took a dip. I could not have been there for more than three seconds by which time I must

Fresh oxygen was filling up my lungs. Ah! How sweet it is! I will be okay now.

I held Atiq's hand and dipped down. And wild panic gripped me again. I could not breathe; I could imagine all the serpents rushing towards me. I was dying. I was expecting salt water to fill up my mouth any moment and then I would die! What a shit head I was to try this!

I scrambled to the surface and inhaled fresh air deeply. No! I can't do it! Impossible! Scuba diving is not for everyone. I took off the mask and started walking towards

took a deep breath and slowly immersed myself in water. I sat there on the seabed and looked at Atiq. He shook his head reassuringly and signalled with his fingers that everything was fine. As we sat there like this for ten seconds or so, the initial panic slowly drained out of me. I felt relaxed.

Atiq signalled to crawl along the seabed. I slowly stretched myself and inflated the vest. I was now floating just a feet above the ground. I remembered the James Bond movie Thunderball where Sean Connery did his outstanding underwater feat. I paddled my flippers and amazingly I was effortlessly moving forward. I looked forward and saw an amazing world unfolding before me. Amid the dead shells was lying an anchor. The chain had run straight up and then vanished as visibility came down to zero.

Then I saw the brilliantly coloured seashells moving slowly on the sandy bottom. And I almost had a heart attack as a huge red crab came running towards me with its long pincers open. Fortunately, Atiq quickly moved in and scared away the attacker. More crabs lurked in the sand and looked at us with rounded eyes set on antennas.

I could now feel a sharp pain in my ears and signalled Atiq about my discomfort. He held his nose to indicate that I should close my nose and blow in. It worked like magic. I was now growing bit bolder and felt a strange kind of exhilaration. I inflated my best a bit more and wanted do a little bit of climbing. I slowly flipped and kept the air bubble coming out of my mouth just above my head. I had to be

very careful now, otherwise I could die from nitrogen bubble developing in bloodstream. I was overcome by this wonderful feeling of weightlessness, as if I was floating in the air. I looked down and saw Atiq coming after me. He looked like a huge shark slowing flapping towards me. I shivered thinking of a shark attack. But then Atiq was no shark.

Then I released vest air and slowly dropped down to the bottom among a cluster of live seashells. Atiq lifted one and prised open its shells to me the soft inside. And then the fishes appeared -- a small school of yellow and orange coloured fish moving in short bursts. We watched these wonderful creatures come all over us and then dart towards the blurry distance.

I was now feeling very thirsty; my mouth was blotted dry. My heart was crying for water. Now I knew this happened because of continuously breathing through mouth. And my back was almost to the point of snapping from the heavy weight of the oxygen tank. I was under water for almost half an hour.

We slowly swam following the seabed. I could see the anchor, this time a little further to the left. A little later, I could feel that I no longer needed to swim; I could resurface to the earth's environment -- that wonderful dome of oxygen, nitrogen and all other gases; and breathe freely. My wonderful experience was coming to an end, and I regretted that humans are not born amphibian.

Story: INAM AHMED
Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



the weight belt. It was heavy -- must be around 10 kg or so. Human bodies tend to float once in water, so you need this to keep yourself under water. Then we put on the vest -- it's a complicated thing with lots of tubes going in and coming out of it. And with the vest came the oxygen tank.

I was almost floored with the weight of the tank now. "Shit! I'll break my back," I thought aloud and kept my back upright to avoid any disk slip. Then I slipped on the mask and was ready for the water.

not have breathed in more than twice. And then an unknown panic gripped me. It seemed that instead of oxygen from the tank, water would gush into my mouth. It was unreal to be breathing underwater. I can't do it, I thought wildly and popped out of water. I was panting with the effort of being underwater for three seconds! "Do it again," Atiq insisted. "The panic is temporary. Try to bear with it and you will be ok."

I hoped it would be ok and so slipped on the mask again.

the beach. "Where are you going?" shouted Atiq. "Come back." "I can't. It's not for me," I said without bothering to look back.

A firm hand gripped me. "Okay, you don't have to run away!" Atiq said. "Just for a last time. Then you can quit." He dragged me from behind.

I stopped. Ok. But for the last time. No more try after this one. But why can't I do it if thousand others can? I imagined the grinning faces of my friends. The humiliation. I held Atiq's hand grimly,

