

Hengam Island: Home to wild dolphins



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Many people worldwide are familiar with the beautiful architecture and ancient past of Iran, but only a few know about its rich wildlife.

From cheetahs to dolphins, many animal species are endemic to Iran and can be observed while visiting the country. Hengam Island, in southern Iran, is one of the best locations for that. It's a small island famous for the many dolphins that inhabit the water part of the year. In this article we'll show you why you should definitely add Hengam Island to your travel list.

Where is Hengam Island? Hengam is a tiny island in the Persian Gulf, close

to Qeshm Island, Hormuzgam Province, two kilometers from Shibderaz village and Kandaloop port. Hengam extends in an area of 36.6km, so approximately the same size as Hormuz Island. However, the two islands are very different, surfiran.com wrote.

Hengam has only two small villages and almost no cars, which makes it particularly peaceful. With crystal clear waters and sandy beaches, the island's coast is a paradise for those who want to enjoy the beauty of the sea. In Iran, Hengam is well-known for one thing in particular: its dolphins. The sea shore hosts several species of dolphins that come for mating from fall

to spring. Among these species, the most commonly found in Hengam waters is the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin, a small-sized dolphin with a long rostrum.

This species is unfortunately listed as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). These dolphins usually live in small groups of five to 15 individuals, and are very playful. That's why they can be easily observed in the bay of Hengam.

If you decide to go on a boat excursion in Hengam to observe dolphins, here are a few facts to have in mind:

Dolphins are talkative. They communicate with

a large variety of sounds and each dolphin has a distinctive whistle.

To breathe, dolphins need to come to the surface, but they have the ability to hold their breath for up to 10 minutes.

Like apes and humans, bottlenose dolphins are one of the rare species to be able to recognize themselves in a mirror. Research has demonstrated that they are highly intelligent animals.

When they sleep, dolphins turn off half of their brains and keep one eye open to stay alert and regulate breathing.

The beauty of Hengam resides in the fact that it has remained widely untouched, even though things are changing at a

fast pace. However, until now, most parts of the island are uninhabited, leaving plenty of space for the fauna and flora to flourish.

Besides dolphins, one of the most iconic animals of the island is its endemic gazelle. This species is called Jabeer, or Chinkara, also known as the Indian gazelle. This species can indeed be found in India, and also in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This beautiful animal is of small size, usually a 20 kilogram gazelle is about 65cm long. Both males and females have horns.

These gazelles live in arid regions, and thus are able to live on very few plants and water. Not only are they capable of not drink-

ing for long periods of time, but they also have the capacity to drink salty water. They are pretty shy and avoid human habitations, but in Hengam, you can easily observe them up close, as they roam freely in nature, far from houses and constructions. Other notable animal species on Hengam Island are the Egyptian lizard, and the Hawksbill Sea Turtles, also present on the shores of Qeshm Island, where they come to lay eggs from April to early June.

But even during the day, Hengam's shores can shine: on "Silver Beach," one of its most famous beaches, minerals make the sand grey, shiny and heavy. Unfortunately, in-

creasing visits from tourists and lack of protection have caused a decrease in the amount of silver sand.

When and how to see dolphins on Hengam Island?

Dolphins are one of the main attractions of Hengam Island, a lovely spectacle. They are visible in Hengam as soon as the temperatures drop, around October, and until late March. The best time of the year to watch dolphins is in winter, during the mornings, when the probability of seeing pods is high. Of course, stay flexible as it also depends on the weather. In case of strong winds making a lot of waves, it's usually not possible to see dolphins.

A great era in Iranian history

One of the characteristics of Iranian history is its clearly discernable periodization into large distinct sections, which are easily distinguished from one another and each of which displays a unique character. In the preceding millennia, individual periods had already been terminated or inaugurated by a national collapse. In this light we have to imagine the entry of the old Aryan population into the northeastern regions, a process which, together with the teachings of Zoroaster, gave the plateau for the first time a historically concrete form. In

a similar way the rise of the Median and then Persian-Achaemenid state signified an inner transformation, even if it triggered changes only within the Iranian population. Even more evident is the caesura introduced by Alexander the Great's invasion. In this case an element intruding from outside appropriated political power and was determined to make a bid for cultural leadership as well. It required a long, hard political struggle for the Iranian people to create their own national government in the guise of the Parthian state.

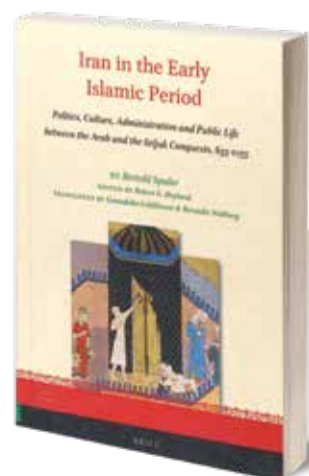
The demise of the Parthian state and the onset of Sassanid domination (224 CE) brought about another important internal change for Iran. This transformation had a linguistic dimension and was linked to the restoration of Zoroastrianism, which was able to hold its ground against Christianity and Manichaeism, and yet it did not, and did not wish to, eliminate the linguistic and cultural inheritance of the past in terms of language and culture, as had been the case in previous political ruptures. The Arab invasion of the lands settled by the Ira-

nians was therefore not a novelty within the context of the history of the Iranian plateau. Alexander's Macedonians and Greeks had been foreigners who had already succeeded in taking possession of Iran; The Iranian people had already therefore had to hold their own, nationally as well as culturally. However, the penetration of the Arabs meant more for Iran than previous ones. For the first and only time in the course of their history the Persians gave up the true heart of their oriental culture (and indeed any

culture): they gave up their religion in order to follow the teaching of the Prophet Moḥammad (PBUH). Thus, the great era in Iranian history that took place in the seventh century became the most important and truly decisive one in the long history of this people and its country. It divides the Middle Iranian period from the new Iranian one. It left its mark on the face of the people, and by asserting themselves as a national unit and an independent cultural entity, the Iranians had to re-define and delineate anew their whole being in the

symbols of this new faith of the God.

Such a renewal process does not happen in one day. The Persian nation needed several centuries in order to find its new self, to create a space for itself in the framework of the Islamic nations, and to find entry into the emerging community on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, whose constitutive element was Islam. By following this religion, Iran was able to spread parts of its ancient culture in a new guise far beyond the confines of the Persian language area.



The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, 'Chronological Overview of Political History', from a book entitled, 'Iran in the Early Islamic Period', written by Bertold Spuler, published by Brill.