

"My gift of the year 2018 was to share some strong moments in Iran with extraordinary people"

Géraldine Fasnacht in Iran

November 2018, Verbier - Géraldine Fasnacht, the high-flying sports legend, triple champion of the Verbier X-Treme in snowboard freeride and wingsuit pilot internationally reputed, travels the world in search of the most beautiful peaks. She rushes them down with precision and expertise, on her snowboard or in her wingsuit. From Antarctica to Greenland over Baffin Island, the wide-open spaces inspire her: *"I love adventure and discovery, living in the wilderness and being as close to the elements as possible, that's my inspiration. Getting out of my comfort zone, being totally self-sufficient during my projects and expeditions, far from civilization, in extreme temperatures, that's my source of energy. Every trip is different. I discover unique cultures and stories. These are experiences that make me grow and allow me to come back with a greater awareness of myself and of what surrounds me."* The bird woman adds: *"It's in the great outdoors that I feel in my element. Feeling the conditions, choosing my line by following the curves of the relief with sunlight, composing with nature - this is my life! Every day I am grateful being able to live such intense moments and that is why I like to share them with others."*



Iran

In former times Iran was a rich and free country thanks to the development of heavy industry, railways, art, spices and culture. The women did not wear veils and the men dressed like westerners. Everything crumbled during Shah's reign. *"Iran is a teeming country, where you feel a real thirst for change. The Iranians and especially the Iranian women, with whom I had more contact, exert an extraordinary power to succeed in living their dream. They show so much courage and determination to try to make a difference. They are exemplary role models."* Captivated by Iran over recent years, its millennial culture, its historical heritage, its varied landscapes and its inimitable refinement, Géraldine believes that *"this multifaceted country is undoubtedly deserving of our attention."* In addition to this, Géraldine is fascinated by the country's numerous summits, some higher than 4,000 metres, such as Mount Damavand, Alam-Kuh and Savalan. *"Iran is considered to be one of the most mountainous countries in the world, it is a real playground for an athlete like me who climbs, flies and rides."*



The people

Drawing inspiration from the people around her, Géraldine explains, *"I am very fortunate to have met and shared some very special moments with many Iranian who have powerful and memorable stories. Regardless of their gender, beliefs and social status, what they share is genuine and sincere. Iran is a real human heart stroke".* Despite the extraordinary exploits Géraldine has achieved around the world, she explains that *"it's not only my sporting feats that help me grow, but the inspiring encounters made during my adventures that shape my path and the person became."*





Conferences and sharing

When Géraldine was invited to give a talk in Tehran about her story and the opening of the mythical summit of the Matterhorn in a wingsuit, as part of the Bisotun International Rock Climbing Festival, she inspired many women to believe in their dreams: *"It is a great honour to be able to give a talk at one of the major mountain events in Iran. I shared my experiences with people from all walks of life. Our cultures are very different but our values are so similar."*



A few days later, in the town of Kermanshah, where *"The Bird Woman"* made the first wingsuit jump in Iran in 2010, Géraldine had the immense privilege of being named *"Honorary citizen, the Bisotun Bird"*. *"I will never forget the traditional Iranian ceremony held at the heart of a magnificent UNESCO World Heritage site, at the foot of the summit of Bisotun. I was welcomed like a princess in Kermanshah."*



The wingsuit flight from the top of Bisotun

When you fly in a wingsuit nothing can be left to chance. *"It is essential that you spend a day acclimatising when you arrive in a country such as Iran. You need to give your body some rest after a long journey, and to adapt so that everything is perfect for the day of the jump."*

The big moment has arrived for Géraldine and her team at 2:30 am the following morning. They must make their way up a steep incline of 1,200 positive meters, in order to reach the summit of the Bisotun. *"It was essential that we leave so early in the morning so that we would have time to find the perfect launch spot for the wingsuit flight. Furthermore, due to the very strong thermal winds that appear as soon as the sun rises, we had to be ready to jump at 10:30 am at the latest."* The thermals play an enormous role in our wingsuit flight.

After walking for several hours in the dark and then in the fog, Géraldine arrives at the peak. *"We could barely see anything, there were a lot of clouds. But we knew that they would disperse when the sun appeared and it started to warm up. So, we had time to find our starting point with the laser and calculate our starting distances for the pressurisation of our wing. Once we had defined this point and the line of flight with Simon, my friend and wingsuiter cameraman, we took the opportunity to rest for a few minutes and eat something before starting to prepare and concentrate."*





As expected, the weather cleared around 10:30 am. We hear Géraldine count down "3, 2, 1, go"! The "bird woman" flies for one minute and thirty seconds of pure happiness in a breath-taking landscape.

When she lands, Géraldine says, *"The jump from the top of the Bisotun is magnificent. I shared it with my friend Simon; it was fabulous. We had an extraordinary welcome when we landed as men, women and children, rushed towards us with their eyes full of wonder."*

"For me the wingsuit is a mountain sport that is meant to be shared. No matter where I jump in the world, I meet passionate people who are curious to find out more about my world."

Freedom

Géraldine draws her energy from the heart of nature. *"I often say that in the mountains I feel alive and free. Often when I am in nature, I stop for a few minutes to contemplate the birds, listen to the sound of the wind and breathe in the fresh air. It's so invigorating! In Iran, I met an extraordinary woman, Zohré, 31, a professional climber who is also passionate about the great outdoors and nature. One day we went to the mountains to climb the "Eagle Route" of the Bisotun in an attempt to repeat the historical flight I did for the first time in 2010. Dressed in sports gear without her headscarf and with two plaits framing her happy smiling face, Zohré said to me: "In the mountains I am free". It was then that I really understood the extent to which the word "freedom" has a different meaning for Iranian women."* Géraldine adds: *"In the mountains there is no cheating, no matter where we are on the planet, we have the same values, passion and freedom. Cultural barriers fall away; we are at one with ourselves and the nature that surrounds us. We can share real and genuine moments with the people who come with us on the journey. Nothing else matters here."*

Today, back in Switzerland, Géraldine explains: *"I feel so fortunate to have share these privileged moments with people who fascinate me with their generosity and human values. Iran will always be on my list of the most beautiful places I had the chance to visit."*

