

LifeStyle

Babak Alimoradian Businessman and athlete

“If you can, follow your passion and do what you love for a living”

Babak Alimoradian talks to SUR in English about his youth in Iran, Germany and the USA, and life in Marbella

ANDREW FORBES MARBELLA

Like many on the Costa del Sol, Babak has experienced the recent frustrations and adversity of working in the stagnating real estate sector. Yet for him, the challenges of a slowing economy were to be the catalyst for a major career change and a renewed determination to realise his dreams.

Babak has gone on to create his own adventure activities business based in Marbella; win the Junta de Andalucía's CADE Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award; and also become a European Champion in 'Brazilian jiu jitsu' martial arts in this year's Lisbon Championships.

Iran

Born in Iran to a Persian father and German mother; Babak spent his early years in Tehran, the capital of the vast Eurasian country, before moving to Germany during the Iran/Iraq War.

"I was seven years old when we moved. My two brothers and I grew up in the town of Karlsruhe (Baden Württemberg); mainly raised by my mother since my father kept his business in Iran and was travelling much of the time. I think growing up between these two profoundly different cultures made me want to go out and explore other cultures and countries" explains Babak.

USA

He was to have that opportunity to further widen his horizons when he won a wrestling scholarship at Boston University, to study Business. At 19 years old, he left home and moved to the USA to study and compete in wrestling. Babak had always excelled in sports from an early age, being a member of the German national wrestling team and later he became an acclaimed wrestler in the USA. But it was his business studies that were to continue to shape his future.



EUROPEAN WINNER. BABAK AND FELLOW COMPETITORS AT THE BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU CHAMPIONSHIPS IN LISBON. A.F.

"After I finished my bachelor degree in Boston I decided to move to Spain where I wanted to get a MBA from a Spanish university" continues Babak. His father had bought a home in the fashionable Marbella of the 1980s and Babak had visited Spain for family holidays and fell in love with the area. Although he knew no Spanish, he wanted to study in Madrid; so he enrolled in a language school for six months. "and this is where I met my Norwegian wife!" Babak adds.

Spain

After completing his MBA in 2002, Babak and his new Norwegian wife relocated to Marbella. Now with a family of two children, a son of eight and daughter of four, Babak is fully integrated into yet another culture. "I speak German, Persian, English and now Spanish fluently and already our children are fluent in English and Spanish and also speak some German. Travelling to visit the family in Germany and Norway is always one of the highlights of the year for the kids and they switch from one language to another with and ease. But they are still so young, so they do not consciously think about the different cultures of their family life; the most important things for them are to

know what games they can play and what new toys there are!"

This cultural melting pot is increasingly more common in Spain and Marbella and Babak believes it as a strong advantage for his family. "I see it as a blessing and a great advantage for them to be able to tap into such a diverse cultural backgrounds; and to have the ability to communicate in most parts of the world is a chance to set themselves apart in the future once they enter the job market."

Real estate

Babak's career in Marbella almost inevitably involved the world of real estate. During the boom years he worked for one of the largest

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real estate firms in Spain, selling dream homes to foreign investors. He explains, "There was a great buzz on the sales floor; deals were happening every day, and the company was celebrating its success with many social events; and obviously the money was good too! But things kept declining after the global financial crisis, and we saw the market drop by 90 per cent. It was impossible for the company to adapt at the same rate and as a result the company could not cover its costs anymore which resulted eventually in its bankruptcy."

Like so many professionals in the real estate sector, Babak persevered, not imagining a career outside the sector, yet with increasingly more time spent doing nothing in the office without clients, and ever-decreasing take-home salary he knew it was time for a radical change.

TeamXtreme

"I had just come back from a seminar by one of the world's best motivational speakers, Anthony Robbins" says Babak. "I was taking a run on Marbella's *paseo marítimo* and the inspiration to create my business just came to me."

Finally Babak was to find a way to combine his love of sports; his keen interest and aptitude at busi-

ness and his love of Spain and the outdoors. He established 'TeamXtreme', an adventure activities business offering experiences from canyoning to skydiving. "The Tony Robbins 'Unleash the Power Within' seminar came just at the right time. There were twelve thousand people in the audience and Robbins coached us from nine in the morning into the small hours of the next day, for four consecutive days. The energy was amazing and it just fired up my natural enthusiasm" confirms Babak.

He used his business skills to research what support was available in Marbella for new start-ups; he discovered CADE, and prepared and presented a business plan and secured a free office and business support.

"Some of the things that were difficult in setting up the business included the amount of bureaucracy involved and also the time things sometimes took to get done!" jokes Babak. The business has had a successful first year and Babak was recognised as Young Entrepreneur of the Year by CADE.

Babak's energy and enthusiasm continues unabated and he recently competed in Lisbon at the European Championships for 'Brazilian jiu jitsu'. He travelled to Portugal after a rigorous training and diet programme with his fellow team members. "I had already competed at national championships in wrestling and the preparation for this tournament was very similar, with technique and fighting practices complemented with running and weightlifting to improve strength and cardiovascular ability. In addition I had to lose 10 kilograms for the competition which meant I had to follow a pretty strict diet and I exercised twice a day for the last four weeks. In addition to winning the Championship for his category, his colleagues from 'Marbella Team Draculino' also celebrated success; Andrea Claire won a gold medal and Matt Henderson a Bronze.

Babak puts his positivity down to his ability to focus his energy on things that he can change. "I try to avoid reading the news too much; as it is mostly so negative and instead I try to focus on my sphere of influence which is my family, friends and business where I feel can make a difference; and I am looking forward to what life will continue to bring here in Marbella."