

Windgurus

Kitesurfers make the most of the element that sends many of us to hide indoors, wishing for calmer times.

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FORGIVE YOURSELF FOR THINKING the irony buried in the expression ‘go fly a kite’ is lost on the kiting fraternity. The cliché – by most accounts in reference to Benjamin Franklin’s famous electricity experiments – is a kind of manifesto they live by. ‘Oh yes, we will’ – they’re fully aware of the dangers, and they know non-kiters regard them with a kind of resentful annoyance. If you’re not jealous of someone who can harness and revel in that most loathed of natural elements then you’ve never spent more than 20 minutes in Cape Town in summer.

WATER

Kiteboarding is a lifestyle best described by what it’s not. It isn’t surfing, paragliding, wakeboarding, windsurfing, sailing or waterskiing, yet it has something in common with all of these.

From barrelling reef break to gin-clear tropical lagoon, inland waterway and purpose-built lake, the type of surface holds a pivotal sway in the style you ride. Waves are for carving; wind-chop and man-made obstacles ask for freestyle trickery. Open water is where you go as fast and as far as you can. The canvas may be different, but if you distil it down, it’s always a board and a kite and a rider on the water.

EARTH

Watch a good wave rider and you’ll notice their feet are always moving. Micro-weight adjustments influence the trim of the board on the wave. While



The Cape West Coast is to kites what North Shore (in Oahu, Hawaii) is to surfers. The prevailing summer southeasters mean that there’s good riding to be had on most days from late November through February. The warm, sunny blue skies are a novelty for visiting European pros and the icy water temperate hardly bothers them as they’re usually up above it

TERMINOLOGY

The terms kiteboarding and kitesurfing are often used interchangeably, but this isn't entirely correct. You won't find many boardriders complaining about the misinterpretation, but it's best to get it right. Generally, kitesurfing is more oriented to wave riding and carving, usually on strapless boards that resemble surfboards. Kiteboarding encompasses freestyle and performance riding – big airs and technical tricks on double-sided boards bred from wakeboarding

'Mowing the lawn' is the term used for cruising close to the wind, hard on the rail. For expert riders it's usually a time of quiet reflection in between frenzied maneuvers. To the less skilled it's as fast and good as it gets – the ride of their lives.



they're riding strapless, grounded to their surfboards by gravity and skill alone, freestylers spend as much time as possible in the air. Aided by bindings and foot straps, they prefer equipment that won't look out of place boosting off the wake behind a boat.

With the aid of man-made obstacles such as rails and kicker ramps, skateboarding, snowboarding and wakeboarding manoeuvres have been borrowed, mastered and improved. To the point that some may say riding a twin tip is finite. That there are no new variations to be invented. These doubters are proven wrong every day.

If the board brings the joy, it's the kite that provides the drive. While you (may) eventually settle on a board, a real rider will most probably never be satisfied with his or her kite. There exists a constant search for the perfect combination of drive, power, manoeuvrability, ability to depower and ease of setup. And, the nuances in shape, size, colour (sure, why not?) and configuration are so vast that the average is to own three. At least.

FIRE

Like most things worth doing, to learn how to ride a kite can be downright frustrating. The variables at play – from learning to ride with both your left and right foot forward (like a windsurfer) to where the kite needs to be to harness the most power (like a paraglider) – means you don't just wake up one day and decide you want to be a kiteboarder.

You don't simply show up at the beach as you would at the court, newly purchased racket in hand ready to become a tennis player. There's a frame of reference to master, a certain hierarchy to understand and ultimately fit into.

And it's dangerous. Dislocated shoulders, blown knees, rolled ankles. People have died.

Kiters then are made, not born. They're drawn to it from surfing, from wakeboarding, windsurfing and even sailing. Very rarely is it their first sport, most often it is the chief. Real riders know their place in the line-up and understand the flow. It's the reason you can go to a busy kiting beach on a semi-gale day and be amazed at how there are no big crashes. How they don't all get tangled up.

If they speak one language, they speak many. Kiting has fuelled travel to exotic locations most other adventure sportsmen have traditionally avoided. Trade winds and windy seasons are now embraced. The strip from Milnerton to Melkbosstrand in Cape Town is the centre of the kiting universe from December through February. And the vibes are good. Because above all, everybody loves the wind. □



As with most boardriding sports, style and self-expression are paramount. If you've mastered the technical moves, but can't pull them with style, you're more than likely to be eyed with contempt – even by less-skilled riders. The ultimate goal is to make something that's incredibly difficult look smooth and simple



Boys and their toys – the stakes may have changed and the medium be somewhat more variable, but at the end of the day, flying a kite is still all about having a laugh

Danger is relative to skill – the more horizontal (lower) a kite is to the wind, the more power it generates. Here, a kiter harnesses the power pocket to fly above the line of his kite

