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Chill out



On wings of wind

COVER STORY
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On wings of wind



Carl with a friend.

Qatar is ideal for kitesurfing as its wind conditions allow for the sport throughout the year. Places where kites usually fly are Fuwairit, Wakrah and Zekreet

LLEWELLYN FLORES

DOHA

IT is around 11 in the morning on a weekend, and a brisk wind is sweeping the Fuwairit beach. Going by the number of kites flying, things seem just the right for kitesurfing.

Kitesurfing (aka kiteboarding) is a surface water recreational sport that employs a kite to harness the power of the wind and a board to cruise on water. It became popular in the late 90s, and is considered a young sport.

The colourful kites blend with the surroundings as naturally as a flock of seagulls does. Moving gracefully in the sky they seem so serene seen from afar.

When a kitesurfer cruises up close however, the sense of calmness from seeing the kites is replaced by a fascination and wonder about how it would feel to step on the board, pull on the kite and be carried by the wind.

Kitesurfers can be seen in different water locations in Qatar. *Chill Out* decided to talk to a few and get some idea how the sport fares in the country.

On the beach we met Carl and Jolynn. Carl used to windsurf but in 2001 had to move to a town located in the inland parts of South Africa. There was not enough wind to windsurf in the area and after reading about kitesurfing in a magazine, went out and got his first kite and taught himself how to kitesurf. He claims it is his favourite sport and he would drop anything to do it. He has been surfing in Qatar for about four years.

Jolynn is from Holland and a much younger kitesurfer who she had been surfing in Qatar for about three years. She says the sport is an addiction.

Off the beach and behind his office desk in Wakrah, we met with Ovi who has been engaged in the sport for over 10 years and has been kitesurfing in Qatar for about seven. He owns one of the two shops in Qatar which sells kitesurfing equipment and an official dealer of known brands in the industry. He also provides lessons on the sport.

Asked whether kitesurfing is difficult, Jolynn said it can be difficult for the first or second week but everybody can learn it. Ovi warned his students that it can be frustrating in the beginning.

As to the basic skills a person should have before starting to ride, Carl

says, "you need to understand the wind, the concept of the wind and how it's blowing. You need to understand the kite, all the different parts of it and how to control it properly." He added that "kitesurfing is 80 percent about kite control and learning to fly the kite. The other 20 percent is learning to ride the boat on the water."

One's build and age are hardly considerations in getting into the sport. As long as the person can stand on the board and hold the control bar, the person can do it. "The wind does everything for you. You don't have to be strong," says Jolynn.

Ovi says Qatar has a big potential for kitesurfing in terms of water and wind conditions and in terms of places to learn. Zekreet, located at the west coast, is his best choice for giving lessons. According to him, the relatively shallow water, steady wind, absence of buildings, electricity posts and cars are ideal and a safe environment for learning. Another reason Qatar is ideal for the sport is that its wind conditions allow for kitesurfing throughout the year. Places where kites usually fly are Fuwairit, Wakrah and Zekreet.

Considered an extreme sport, it deserves to be treated with respect, believes Ovi. So we asked our kitesurfers about some of unfavourable experiences they might have had doing the sport.

Jolynn showed us a scar on her knee that she got from falling on a rock. "I was unlucky," she said laughing. "There was no rock, there was only one and I found it."

Carl related a time when his kite broke in the middle of the day and he had to swim back to shore, which took an hour. "As a rule, never go farther than what you can swim back," is one of the do's in kitesurfing he mentioned.



Ovi



Jolynn

Dos

- Take proper lessons
- Respect the people and their space
- Help the people if they need help, especially in launching and landing
- Be aware of the wind conditions
- Know your equipment

Don'ts

- Don't do it unless you've got someone who knows what they are doing
- Don't go farther than what you can swim back
- Don't ride in conditions beyond your capability

But those are unfavourable experiences that are now good tales from which one can draw lessons. To our kitesurfers the exhilaration that comes from cruising, the thrill of a jump, the challenge of controlling wind power, the satisfaction in finishing a ride are not to be given up. "I love it every time I come out," says Carl.

The three strongly recommend getting lessons instead of learning on one's own. Carl has seen people injure themselves or break their equipment trying to learn on their own. "Don't just try on your own or you will end up with a broken knee," says Jolynn.

Ovi says injuries come from not understanding the water and wind conditions, not understanding the equipment and not being able to judge when to go out. The risks involved are getting hit by the board, hitting corals or rocks, being lifted by the kite and falling. All can cause serious injuries. There is also the risk of damaging the equipment. Lessons, Ovi says, keep kitesurfers away from these incidents. He said everybody get hurt, but it does not have to involve blood, hospitals, fractures or breaks.

The basic equipment for kitesurfing includes a canopy (kite), a control bar, a harness and a board. The build of the rider, skill level and wind conditions where one normally rides are the basic factors to be considered in choosing a kite and a board. Generally, smaller kites are used for strong winds and larger ones for light winds. The same principle applies in choosing a board.

To get the most out of the sport, Ovi recommends having (at least) two kites, and according to Carl, most people do. Ovi says each kite has a wind range and the appropriate kite should be used in a given wind range to stay out of trouble. Having at least two kites, one each for strong and light winds, allows one to ride regardless of the wind condition. Otherwise one might end up just sitting on the beach because the wind is either too strong or too light.

We asked Ovi if there is anything else he thinks worth mentioning about kitesurfing. He said, "It's a beautiful sport. It's (a) very friendly sport. In Qatar, it makes sense to be involved in as a rider."



Carl