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HOW TO:

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A DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO

Mexico...

TEXT BY GABRIELE STENDI, PHOTOS BY PETER FETTER
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THE SPYGLASS BACKDROP OF SANJA DE MICHIGAN

I was sitting in an overland bus heading to Cancun, Mexico, after a few intense weeks of "hardcore spring training" in Belize, Central America (there are no flights from Belize to Europe, so I had to go via Mexico) when, on my way back home, "Gastrol", a funny Mexican dude who I met years ago, during my first year of competing in the World Cup, popped into my head. It's been ages since I last heard from him, so, needless, when I stopped in the ancient town of Tulum, East Coast Mexico (perkins) I sent him a quick email. I couldn't remember where in Mexico Gastrol was living, he'd possibly even left Mexico or perhaps he'd turned into a serious career person and was spending his days working like a maniac in smoggy Mexico City... I was curious, however I doubted I'd get a reply as I wasn't even sure whether the email that I had saved on my laptop, was still valid.

Highly likely, the next morning I already had a reply! Gastrol would be super stoked to see me, to celebrate a few "new" seasons on the water and to show me his home spot, Puerto Vallarta, on the west coast of Mexico. He was currently in the process of setting up a business, therefore he wouldn't have all the time in the world for me, but he would set me up and introduce me to his mate and he was sure that I'd love the place! All I needed to do was to move my ass from East to West and he would take care of the rest...

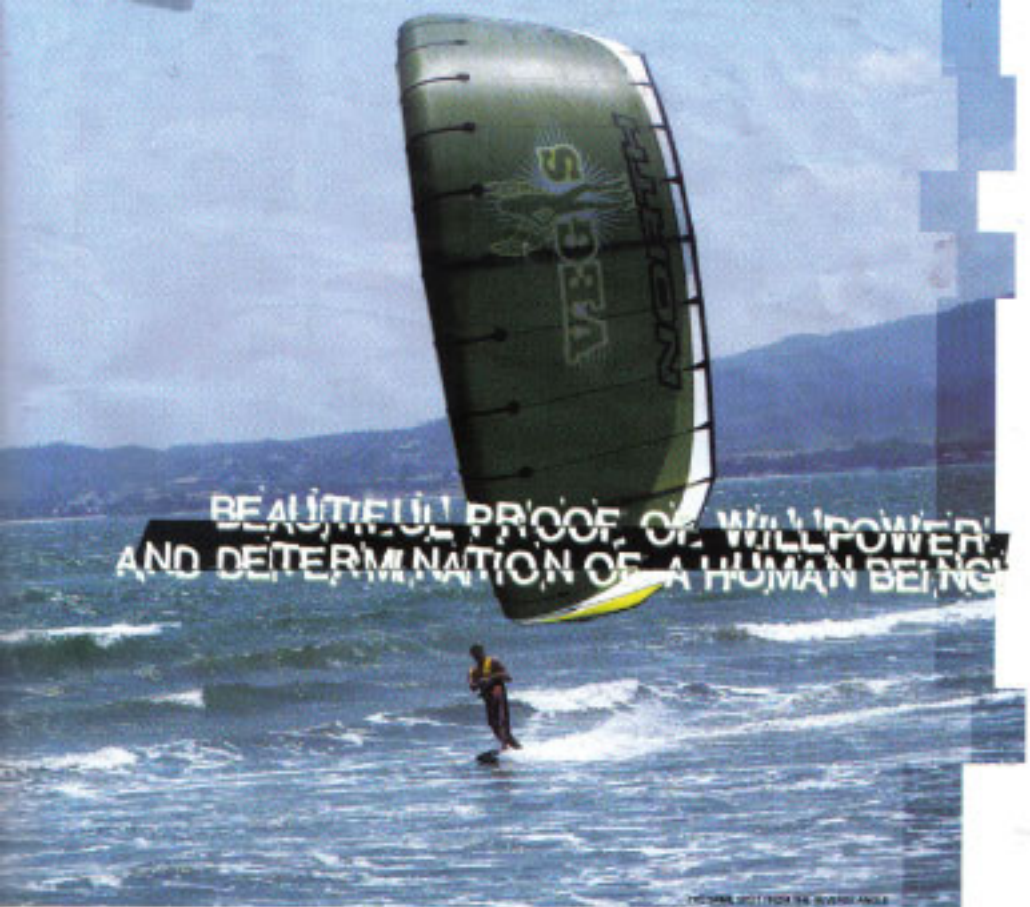
Wow, it sounded very exciting, however, pretty okay too... changing my return ticket to Europe, buying a new one to the west coast, traveling on my own as a

girl through Mexico... damn it, I didn't have much time to make up my mind! So I followed my heart and, right after the motto "no risk, no fun" accepted the invite.

Before catching the flight to Guadalajara, where I was supposed to meet Gastrol, I visited the Cancun and also blowing kitesurfing in Tulum, plus I was hoping to go for a little ride on Tulum during the night through some of the most turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea. There is a lot of good as well and apparently quite a nice community of locals and "temporary" locals (people there all over the world, staying for the season). However, this time the wind Gods were not on my side, thus I enjoyed the colors

of the sea from inside the water in a tiny swim rather than from above.

Gastrol picked me up at the airport in Guadalajara (with 4 million people it is the second largest city of the country and capital of the state "Jalisco"). Gastrol still had to sort out a couple of things in town, so the plan was to hang out for a day or two in Guadalajara before heading towards the West to Puerto Vallarta, a spot on the Pacific coast where I would meet all of Gastrol's friends. Gastrol suggested Puerto Vallarta was one of the best spots in the world to show and that I would want to stay longer than the two weeks that I decided upon. "Gastrol" was I'm curious.



BEAUTIFUL PRICE OF WILLPOWER AND DETERMINATION OF A HUMAN BEING

THE SAIL SURF FROM THE SURFBOARDER'S

The first day in Guadalajara I spent with a huge sightseeing tour around town, the next however, I met pretty much almost all day. I don't really know what was wrong, I called it the "sailing lesson", a heavy weather, combined with an aching body (everything head, muscles, stomach...), I guess it was the wrong and the stroke - Guadalajara let alone! (lol!) As soon as we left the big city and once I spotted the Pacific on the horizon, I felt immediately better; however, also a bit nervous: "Would I like this sport...? Where would I be staying? Would I find an affordable place...? Hopefully it was pretty like Gustavo suggested... and the locals and and and!"

Gustavo, who had some important business engagements already the same evening in another town, dropped me off at the house of his mate Cherie (from Vancouver), introduced us and asked him to help me find a place to stay and then he was gone again. Cherie turned out to be an incredibly cool dude. Having graduated from uni with a degree in law, he pretty soon realized that the "controversial music" wasn't really what

he needed in life and spent many years surfing in Puerto Escondido (a world-famous kitesurf spot) on the pacific coast before getting completely hooked on kitesurfing. He had just opened the first Kite School in Puerto Vallarta together with the female Mexican Cherie - check out www.kiteschools.com. Cherie was also a really good windsurfer and recently broke his back - yes, that's so let I saw the X-Files, in which one can clearly see a huge crack in the bone of his skull (yeah, the focus is on his face right in the face and he's had a few more ever since as the bone and cartilage got completely smashed). Cherie is an extremely laid back dude, he took the whole incident very easy and was back on the water kiting only a few days after his face surgery...

Cherie then introduced me to his close-knit, Jorge, a good looking, extremely dark tanned Mexican dude, whose background story even exceeded Cherie's by far! A bit less than three years ago, Jorge was kiting on the lake in front of his parents' house when a sudden, really bad storm came up. He was taken by the gust and gained off the lake onto the street. He couldn't get

released from his kite and got smashed against cars and other obstacles, finally ending up in a wall. In this incident, he broke 7 vertebrae and doctors declared that he would be stuck in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Even his father, one of the best surgeons in the country, couldn't do anything for him. His court only passed by doing medicine and told Jorge to lie in bed on his back for many weeks and months as that was the only chance he had for his back to eventually heal. Jorge followed the advice of his father and stayed in bed for almost 7 months, however he refused any chemicals. Instead he crossed the natural "green" way to handle the pain and he told me: "You won't believe me, if I told you that today Jorge is kiting, wakeboarding, yeah, he's even paragliding! It's a wonder, absolutely incredible and the most beautiful proof of willpower and determination of a human being!"

I was highly impressed by the stories of my two new Mexican mates but also a bit concerned "what freak show is going on here?!", I was thinking to myself, not quite sure what could it be about myself too.



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BOOK REVIEW



2000



Don't figure that Chertco and Dodge were in the only "original" in the small town of Buenos Aires, the main living place in the surrounding of the largest metropolitan Puerto Varas. Buenos Aires home is a unique group of friends, who spend time and girls all around my age, all of them close friends but living different lives. Some are sending their living in far out place, elsewhere etc. Some were still students, when strongly drinking by doing all sorts of games for life. All of them, however, showed their passion for the past, some purely weathering, the others living. Evenings, weekends, windy days, no wind days were quiet, "not the going and they always found something to do and to bring good times together!" I got integrated into this little family, both from my own

Oh yeah, almost forgot to mention that I even fell in love on the beach of Bucarest. Yeah, suddenly he was there... Oh, yeah, super handsome, and so strong like Tave... 24

The spot: Buenos Aires lies approximately 20kms away from the tourist centre of Puerto Iguazú – the 'Cancun' of the west coast, breeding hosts of shops

[illegible]

In the weeks - and Gustavo was right I changed my ticket back home a couple of times, staying in the end 5 weeks. I was enjoying riding the Balsa de Gandomo. I used almost exclusively my descent bars, my *Verges* B&E, which certainly contributed to the decision of hanging out longer. Every day I come down to the

leaves, checked the conditions, then once again pushed the kite that I was riding the previous day – *taaaaa!* – and the boys were mildly with 12 and 14%. What I mention a bit of time to get used to was the colour of the Pacific, which, I learned to the Caribbean Sea on the east coast, was green, sometimes appearing (sometimes due to some pretty recent sand) pretty dark. It was absolutely (dark). In addition, one would imagine the water in the bay as super hot, right – *hahaha*! was, no, not, not, in a bay that stuff! Some days the birds do the same as we are leaving the "clap from hell", but never mind, as we all know "those who are able to shift from a challenging condition will find it too much made it good once", right?

HAD SO MUCH FUN THAT DAY, I FACT I CAUGHT THE LONGEST WAVE OF MY LIFE!!



OSCAR BLOND

So one could rise from here to there, check out the spot, then go to the next, in case something happened, one would always end up on the beach eventually.

In there, however... My very first session in the Bahía de Banderas proved that theory not always applies to practice. Chents and I did a downwater from one of the most motherly spots on the bay ("Destacados"). We always kept pretty close to the shore, however when we returned one took away into the bay the rest of it of a sudden turned and shortly thereafter switched off completely. Camacho, and as nearly one kilometre off the coast...! Oh man, we would have swum for hours. Only a few minutes into our session when we spotted one of the hotel jetskis which was headed directly towards us. How lucky! Thus we were saved by this super nice Mexican and brought back to shore. Of course there was a price he had to pay for this rescue, however, unlike at many crowded spots in the world that I know, where a rescue of that sort could have been either pricey, a couple of cool Coronas made the Beach guard the happiest fellow in the bay. I love Mexico!

Another absolutely unforgettable experience was a kite-surfing trip with Rafael Alvarez, the Mexican female Champion - a completely crazy chick! - Actually a (perfecting) lawyer (only a few weeks per year), who spends most of her days engaging in some extreme activities such as skydiving, scuba diving, kite-surfing and and and...! her boyfriend and Chents to Cruz de Loreto, a small rather remote, approximately 75 km south of the Bahía de Banderas. An exclusive beach, "El Playón", going on for kilometres and kilometres, not a human soul in sight except for a small, extremely exclusive hotel "Los Deseos" (the most expensive in the country if translated into English, the unknown hotel) nothing but wonderful nature. On windy days, Cruz de Loreto would be a magical island. Unfortunately this time no wind but that lucky and did not get the chance to enjoy the most perfect lagoon with an access to the ocean where the Pacific waves achieve relatively few waves (and the current can be extremely strong). Never mind, we still got to see the whole bay days that we spent there and certainly cannot complain about a lack of action. Rafael drove her jeep into deep

water, right at the tip of the coast, right up on a plateau of hills, however we certainly had a superb view over paradise, but the boat collapsed. Three Chents and I were back in his car (which was not strong enough to pull out Rafael's overly massive Pick-up truck... not that but the rope snapped...!) to the nearest village to get help. The locals were incredibly helpful, in fact they were really stressed about the action and could hardly agree on who would swim in Chents's car to assist in pushing. Thanks to their incredible kindness, I did not take the boat long to get Rafael's car back on track. In addition these Mexican people even cooked dinner! Yeah, out of a few simple ingredients, lemons, tomatoes, onions, chili and herbs they prepared the finest sauce where, in an open fire just outside our "camp" on the beach, we grilled some meat. Mmmmm, super tasty for dinner, of course we ate the Mexican way. Yeah! But, we slept ok so well in our tents that night!

So even on days without wind, one never really gets bored in the Bahía de Banderas. Another time, when the theme took a rest, we went wave surfing to Sayulita, one of the best wave spots in the surrounding area. Sayulita is a well known out of a picture book. A super sweet, saugy village with countless surfing shops, cafes, bars, and of course nice waves. I rented a longboard and man, I had so much fun that day. In fact I caught the longest wave of my life (and I jumped into a Portuguese man O' war also known as a waterbug, a really nasty sea creature. "Ouchh", suddenly I had the bloodiest bad pain. It felt like my foot had caught fire. I looked down and saw long, blue tentacles (which can stretch to over ten metres in length) stuck in the shell breaker that I was wearing on my foot. Luckily at the time I didn't know that these sea creatures can be deadly, otherwise I need probably would have started to panic. A surfer beside me noted my outcry and advised me to paddle back to the beach as quickly as possible in order to ask the locals for insulin treatment... I was confused but did what he suggested. Back on the beach, the pain became worse and worse and in fact became into a violent self-wring that continued spreading towards my thigh. The local surfers were lively and brought a plant that I had never seen before which was put into hot water for a few minutes. They said, I should sit down in the shade of the beach bar and wait until the miracle medicine was ready. So I did and indeed a Mega Marge for 10 to kill time and pain and the hot water turned dark green as I could then apply it to my foot which by then looked awful and inflamed. When the chance involved from the surf via the dark water into my belly, or used who cleaned the scene walked passed me and had to remark that if the orange didn't even up higher, then the heart would be red as hell...!! I looked under Mega Marge's and thanked God that after the belly cleaning, this quite painful but certainly interesting experience, which almost took 2 hours, was over. Man, I was lucky because one can suffer paralysis, paralysis of the lower leg up to the loss of the function of the extremities and even death. Today I know that these creatures have an octopus-like blood that flows from the surface of the body, which can be recognized as small bubbles and thus in some situations activated. Generally it's best, however, to leave the water immediately when you notice these tentacles popping up!

At the end of my Mexico trip, Jorge the guy with the broken back invited me to the ranch of his father up in the mountains. It was a toughie-deciding to leave Mexico with his lovely people and the Bahía de Banderas with its sweet friends. Nevertheless according to Jorge, the ranch was the coolest place on earth and that I would want to stay longer than just a few days... I have heard that before, so I felt like something extraordinary was still calling my way, and I packed my stuff!



WE WHIZZED AROUND THE
AIR SO FAST WITH
HARDCORE TRICKS



Wow, things had not changed. A man high up in the insurance with a view over Lake Chapala, the biggest in the country. His father, today president of the Red Cross, lived on a manor which excited my mind during dreams. A property of inimitable size with estates, natural hot thermal springs and pools, pyramids, tennis courts and more... I immediately went for a ride for several hours with the Mexican cowboy "Chavito", who was responsible for the horses. I felt like I was in a Western, with pistols, cactus and agave plants everywhere. Behind cactus is made out of, agave, and endless plains, simply mind boggling! However, my Mexican adventure climaxed on the last day before I was off back to Yucatan and the east coast. Jorge's brother-in-law, the Swede Peter, double men would discuss in jargonizing, asked me whether I wanted to come flying with him. Guac, sure, so we went on a breathtaking tandem flight! The theme: what we climbed up to 9,000 meters! Awahh, silence. Peter obviously wanted to impress me and when I told him, way up there, I would suffer from acrophobia. Fear of heights, he just laughed out loud.

Driving up there along the borderline to the clouds, just when my heartbeat had calmed down and I really started to enjoy the view, Peter mentioned that he would need to go for some freestyle maneuvers in order to get back down as otherwise the theme would keep us up here for ages and I still needed to park. I surely would not mind, ya? Oh dear, we whizzed around the air so fast with hardcore tricks like barrel rolls, spins etc. at one point I could see the World upside down. Peter even let me fly for a bit and when I finally had my feet back on solid ground again, I was really sad and wanted to go up immediately again.

The last days before departing on my plane from Cancun to Europe, I spent on Isla Holbox, a small island (35 km x 2 km) in the north of the peninsula Yucatan where the Gulf of Mexico borders onto the Caribbean Sea. Holbox is part of the natural reserve "San Geronimo", with endless white sandy beaches, big playing fields and even some water dog sections, perfect for beginners. In sunrise, fireflies

and sea turtles come here to mate and to incubate their eggs. Therefore during this time, observing is only allowed at one of the four beaches. In the winter from November to April, the main selling season anyway, all four spots of the island peninsula were who look for sweet conditions in a beautiful surrounding, still quite untouched from mass-tourism. Hurricane Wilma struck this small paradise and left substantial levels of destruction: houses and trees, devastated hotels, etc. There is also a lost Cerveza under Dutch management, and on days when the usually very loyal Mexicans do not drink, Holbox is the perfect place for anise drink and pure relaxation.

My trip through Mexico was one of the best yet in my life partly mainly due to the relative lack of violence, the diversity of the country and the absolutely incredible people that I have met. As a tourist destination, Mexico has almost unbelievable possibilities and I hope to return soon as I have truly embraced this country.

THE BEACH

JORGES BROTHER

THE BEACH AT TUCUM

GUIDE TO MEXICO

Country facts

Capital: Mexico City
Official language: Spanish
Numerous indigenous languages (in Mayan areas, still amongst these Nahuatl/Aztec).
One can get around with English, however, really spoken only in the upper class.

Ethnic groups: Indian-Spanish (American 60%), Indian 30%, Caucasian 1%, other 1%.

Religions: Roman Catholic (88%), Protestant 6%, other 5%.

Currency: 1 Mexican Peso (Mex\$) = 100 Centavos
1 EUR = 14 MEX

Time difference: There are three timezones: -5 to -7 hours.

Telephone code: +52

Facts & useful information

Entry requirements

The passport must be valid at least for another 6 months.

Travel & transport

Domestic or scheduled flights from all big European cities to Mexico City and Cancun, via the States to all international airports in Mexico. Further by internal flights (very good network). Automobile and Mexicano, rental car or cab. Travelling by coach (major stations in Mexico is really cheap, extremely comfortable (always ask for first class coach), and certainly an option to experience overland sea journey and shorter domestic flights.

Climate

Geological to hot (tropical) climate. On the coast, the whole year is pleasantly warm to tropical hot, high air humidity. During the winter months it can get chilly in the evening or at night in the northern states, like Baja California, however, it never gets really cold. The rainy season (which also showers) is from June to September.

Safety

Like in all Central and South American countries, the crime rate is the highest in the cities. Be aware of pickpockets, always carry valuables underneath your clothes, never walk around with too much cash or all your credit cards and documents.

Health

No vaccinations are required. Apart from the basic protection (Diptheria, Tetanus/Polio, Hepatitis A and B, typhoid), a preventive vaccination against cholera and malaria is recommended for longer stays. Malaria prophylaxis for the southern land parts / border areas as Guatemala and Belize is advised.

Electricity

110 volts. Plug: like in the States, two being along 220/240V.

Rough Guide Mexico

— the best kite spots in the country after States

Veracruz

BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

<http://www.veracruzboardsports.com>

Spots: La Paz, La Ventana, Los Baniles, Loma, Santa Rosalia, Santa Concepcion

Windseason: November to March

Conditions: Great wind (usually) 18-25 knots almost every day. Mostly flat water. Cool water, so bring your wetsuit (3/2 wetsuit should be perfectly warm). Very comfortable during the day (pleasantly warm, cooler nights). A number of kiteclubs. Perfect kiting grounds for all levels.

Int. Airport: Los Cabos or La Paz



JALISCO: <http://www.kitecabo.com>

Spots: Bahía de San Carlos, Cruz de Loreto (mentioned in text).

Windseason: February to June

Conditions: Chilly in the day, flat lagoons in Cruz de Loreto. Certainly not the easiest spot for absolute kite novices, however, not ok for beginners, better for a bit more experienced kiteboarders. Kite Center at the bay.

Int. Airport: Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (Puerto Vallarta)

COLIMA

Spots: Minatitlán, Laguna de Cuajalán, Boca de Aguas

Windseason: February to July

Conditions: Top Wave spot for kites, who know what they are doing!

Int. Airport: Playa de Oro (Manzanillo)

MICHOACÁN

Spots: Toluca, Rio Negro

Windseason: February to July

Conditions: Most probably the best waves in the country (mostly ridden by surfers) with relatively strong kitesurfers (please stick to the surf). Although even then, the surfers mostly take priority... Due to the exceptional conditions, this area is certainly worth a visit, even if it's only to watch top world class surfers playing in the waves!

Int. Airport: Swois (Mérida City), then internal flight or rental car.

GUERRERO: <http://www.mexicoboard.com>

Spots: Acapulco, Laguna de San Marcos (mentioned in text) from Mexico City

Windseason: February to August (3-5 winddays/week) Season (3-5 wdays)

Conditions: Everything is possible from flat to big waves, depending upon wind and swell direction. BOC Center at the spot.

Int. Airport: Juan R. Álvarez (Acapulco)

Baja coast

YUCATAN: <http://www.touristboardcenter.com>

Spots: Isla Holbox (flat strip of my trip, short description in text)

Windseason: November to April

Conditions: Flatwater playground in the most beautiful cays. Kitecenter under Dutch management on the island.

Int. Airport: Cancun

QUINTANA ROO: <http://www.kiteboardmexico.com>

Spots: Isla Blanca, Cancun, Puerto Morelos, Playa de Carmen, Cozumel, Puerto Polanco, Tpu-Hd, Tulum

Windseason: November to April

Conditions: The "White May" has the whitest sand and beaches, crystal clear turquoise waters and diverse diversities from super flat, waist deep to waves. Kite centers can be found at almost all of the above mentioned spots.

Int. Airport: Cancun to the island Cozumel (Cozumel