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An interview with one of the world's female TOP ranked kitesurf professionals

Meet Gabi!

Photos by Fritz Pfnur

Beautiful 30-year old Gabi Steindl is one of THE best female kite surfers in the world. Already a well known face on the international kite surfing scene, Gabi has been 'living her dream' of a life as kite surf professional for more than 3 years, competing in the World Cup and ranked amongst the top 10 riders worldwide.

Gabi was training in the Bahía de Banderas until a few weeks ago. She is a kind of 'kite-nomad', traveling the globe all year 'round, without a home base, in her mission to promote the sport and her sponsors to the absolute maximum. Her prior life, however, was completely different and her background is very unusual for a professional athlete ... an inspiring story of following one's dream.



3 years. I started off with an airline, then for a financial publisher in the city, the business district, until I accepted a transfer to the company's offices in Hong Kong. How exciting!!!

However, I soon got bored with the finance industry - too boring. Then I landed the job of a lifetime: I became Global Marketing & Circulation Manager with the leading regional media group for adventure travel & extreme sports, a magazine entitled 'Action Asia'. A pretty darn cool job!!! I had a secretary twice my age (I was 25 at this time) and traveled all over Asia promoting the magazine, talking to all different kinds of people about what I love to do most: extreme sports & travel .

Obviously, apart from traveling, I spent many, many hours per day in the office. In Hong Kong, one lives to work and work is life!! I would say, about 12 hours per day, 6 days a week. I was responsible for a lot of different things: managing and coordinating the global distribution, marketing, event sponsoring, trade shows etc.

One day in 2001, 'Action Asia' published an article on kitesurfing. It was the first time I had seen pictures of the sport that until then, I only had heard rumors about...! WOW, to me it seemed THE most perfect combination of all fun things to do: boarding, surfing, paragliding ... My mind was set: I had to learn that!! ..



good I could get and to do what it takes in order to become a kite professional and to compete in the World Cup the following year. And that's what I did. I went to Venezuela for 6 months, practising every day for many, many hours. I came in 7th at my first World Cup event in 2003!

What made you come to Mexico? How did you find out about Bahía de Banderas?

A Mexican friend of mine, Gustavo, who I met 3 years ago during the World Cup in Cabarete, Dominican Republic, has been telling me a lot about his 'home-



Besides super good conditions, I met absolutely unique people. Honestly, everyone here is just so friendly and helpful, plus I feel very safe (I have to admit that safety for a girl traveling alone in Mexico, was certainly a concern before I came here). In the short time that I've been here, I made a lot of new friends, in fact, I already have kind of a small Mexican family. I would like to take this occasion to especially thank the team of "Kite Vallarta" - check out their website www.kitevallarta.com) - Chente and Raquel and all the other lovely people I met through them. I love the food and especially the warm and very relaxed atmosphere everywhere!

Another great point about the Bahía de Banderas is, without a doubt, Puerto Vallarta. A very special city with unique vibes and character! Fantastic restaurants, bars, shops, you find everything you need here!! In fact, I like it here so much that changed my return ticket to Europe to stay for another 2 weeks. However, I know already now that it's gonna be so hard to leave this place!!

You have already been traveling all over the world, for example?

I know pretty much all of Asia: Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Philippines etc.; the same goes for Europe: Sweden, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Switzerland; Africa: Morocco, Cap

We had the pleasure to meet and chat with her before she returned to Austria.

Where were you born and how did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Vienna, Austria, so I'm kind of a 'big city-girl'. Already from a very young age, I was always dreaming about living in some beautiful place at the seaside with beaches and waves! I kept posters of surfers on my walls. Obviously, being in the middle of Europe and without any access to the sea, Austria is definitely not where many surfers are being raised, and so the posters were as close as I could get to my dream.

What plans did you have as a teenager for your life?

Well, my plan as a teenager always was: 'study as fast as possible, move abroad to a BIG city and make an even bigger career' and so I did. I studied Tourism & Marketing at the University in Glasgow, Scotland, and with a B.A. in Arts in my pocket, I moved to London, where I worked successfully for almost

or in other words: this was the beginning of the strongest obsession I have ever experienced and which is still growing more and more every day that I spend on the water!

Back then in 2002, during a business trip to Bali, Indonesia, I booked a kite course, which unfortunately mainly consisted of videos and playing with a small kite on the beach due to a lack of wind. Nevertheless I got severely infected with the kite-virus and bought my first (second hand) equipment, which I took back to Hong Kong and on several other trips through Asia. Unfortunately on all those trips, the wind gods just did not seem to be on my side ... and every trip was another 'no wind experience'.

I got really fed up with waiting so I quit my job, left Hong Kong, decided to live my dreams and went to Morocco where I finally got to try for real! My dream came true in the most perfect setting: a turquoise lagoon with dolphins, surrounded by sand dunes, in the middle of nowhere, 2000 kilometers into the southern Moroccan Sahara.

Progressing extremely fast encouraged me to 'go for it', to see how



spot' Puerto Vallarta. He suggested the Bahía to be a world-class location for kitesurfing, where the sun is always shining and the wind never really stops blowing. According to him, late spring was the best time to come and so this year in March, I took the opportunity and booked myself a ticket to Mexico.

What do you think of the place? Did your friend promise too much?

No, absolutely not, I love it here! The Bay is incredibly beautiful and so perfect for kitesurfing! I have been riding already at several spots, it's great because no matter the direction of the wind, one will always find a good spot to go kitesurfing. Out of the 3 weeks that I spent here already, I enjoyed a good average of windy days and yeah, the sun is always shining here!

verde, Tunisia... I just love South and Central America with Belize, Brazil, Venezuela and of course now Mexico, being amongst my favorites. I've also been to the U.S. a couple of times, Florida, California, etc. However, Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean is my personal 'paradise', but who knows for how long? Being constantly on the move, I'm discovering new places all the time.

What distinguishes our Bahía de Banderas from the rest?

Certainly the size of the bay. At times it almost seems unreal and I've only seen one Bay of that size once before. I love to go running early in the morning on the beach when the sea is still so calm. Moreover, the green Pacific and the absolutely amazing sunsets here, will stay in my memory forever, that's for sure ...and so will the people with their big warm open hearts and happy smiling faces.

Gabi Steindl is sponsored by North kiteboarding, Fanatic kiteboards, Dark Dog energy drink, Oakley eyewear and ION essentials. Check out her websites at www.kitegabi.com and www.gabrielesteindl.com