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# KITEWORLD

KITERS ARE ONCE AGAIN THE FASTEST ON THE WATER



#49

PLUS: LEWIS CRATHER  
BEN WILSON, KRISTIN BOES  
BAJA, BASIC WAVE SKILL  
AND BOOSTING

KITERS ARE ONCE AGAIN THE FASTEST ON THE WATER

# KEEP UP!

KITERS ARE ONCE AGAIN  
THE FASTEST ON THE WATER!

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CAPTION → Jaime Herraiz tucking up to fire out, also in Mauritius



CAPTION → Gabi



*Wave*

ave kiting is growing rapidly in popularity as more and more riders exchange their freestyle board for a new sleek and slender waveboard to get a completely different feeling in the water. Pick up any kitesurfing magazine these days and you'll find them stacked with wave images.

I've almost solely focused on wave riding since 2005. Personally I'm a big wave freak, but without doubt, I enjoy waves of any size. Whether it's a tiny, onshore, messy beachbreak or beautifully peeling waves on a reef, it's all great when kiting. I

CAPTION → Gabi, WA  
PHOTO → Russell Ord



hope I can inspire you over the following pages to become a wave warrior yourself.

Wave riding isn't only for the pros. Having an accomplished riding level is certainly an advantage in being prepared for situations and having good kite handling, but you can get involved in elements of wave riding from very early on. In fact, if you kite on the coast, sooner or later you're going to have to learn to deal with white water. If you've done any amount of surfing before, then this will only help your kiting ability in the waves develop more quickly.

Obviously there's a difference between the skills required for having fun in some smaller beach- and reef-breaks compared to rippin' it up and pulling off aerials at an offshore dredging reef, but as long as you stick to your skill level, wave kiting is the greatest fun there is to be had out on the water without risking your life. You just need to take it step-by-step.

More often than not, guys seem to want to go out and hit the waves hard, whereas girls tend to be a little more realistic, settling for getting out and back safely rather than trying to pull fancy moves or killing giant swells. Whatever your aim, the most important thing at the beginning is to focus on a gradual, safe learning curve, going steadily from being a total newbie to a confident wave kiter. This article therefore focusses on some of the more important safety aspects and skills concerned with going out in waves, rather than intending to be a complete guide to different manoeuvres. These are the things I've discovered to be the most important when sailing safely in waves.

#### SKILL LEVEL

You should at least be very competent in your riding, water-relaunching, upwind body-dragging and getting out over shore-break. In fact, the better you are at those skills the quicker you'll progress and become a safe wave kiter.

Situations are constantly changing when you bring waves into the game, so it's important that you can look after yourself in potentially dangerous situations, operating quickly and smoothly, almost without thinking.

CAPTION → The big tease



CAPTION → Position yourself carefully, keep your wits about you and enjoy!



CAPTION → Mario Rodwald taking on a screamer in Mauritius

**INTRO → Super keen to learn to ride in waves but feeling anxious about the often intimidating environment and moving monsters? Fear not, Commander Gabi Steindl is here to give you a battle plan to march safely into wave combat**

ALL PHOTOS → North Kiteboarding







**CAPTION** → Sky Solbach carving fast and hard on flat water; perfect prep for a big fat bottom turn on a wave

## GEAR

**BOARD** Although true wave riding is the ultimate kick with a proper wave board, it's generally recommended to get experienced in the waves on a twin-tip as it's much easier to handle. You don't have to gybe, you can turn as you like, jump over the waves and it's also easier to turn around and run away from a big wave if you feel a bit scared (but make sure you look behind you first as this won't be popular at busy breaks).

Once you feel really competent cruising around in waves on your twin-tip, then it's time to find yourself a sweet wave board. Fortunately, there should be plenty of good, cheap second hand ones available. Test a few and figure out what size suits you most (as a rule of thumb: if you have experience in windsurfing or surfing, your first wave-kiteboard can be a bit bigger than if you have no experience on a bigger board). If you're an averagely sized bloke, aim for something around the 5'8" – 6'0" mark and

you should be good. If you're lighter you can afford to go a little smaller, but don't feel like you have to as you'll want a bigger board once you get better on the wave.

Come to terms with gybing by getting plenty of practice on flat water before hitting the waves. It will take you some time but don't give up. The more you practice, the more it will become natural, just like flying the kite or getting up on your board back when you started to get into the sport.

Actually, almost every skill that you will need later in bigger waves can be practised safely in flat water, in the shorebreak or whitewater. For example, a carve into toe-side is a brilliant way of preparing to stick a bottom turn confidently in bigger swells. The same goes for strapless riding and much more.

Important: I would highly recommend NOT using a boardleash as it increases the risk of injury. Yes, it helps you retrieve your board when you fall off in waves, however, when things go wrong it can also easily go the other way and turn into a catapult, pinging the board back

at you hard. Plus, a basic requirement in waves is that you're able to bodydrag upwind in your sleep, therefore please go without. I know there are some of you that will want to use a leash regardless, if so, use a reel leash as they are much safer.

**KITE** There are many special wave kites on the market that, at least, turn faster, perform dynamically in the turns and have very smooth depower. Generally you'll find that as soon as you're on a waveboard, you will be flying kites much smaller than for freestyle. That's because you will be working with the push and the power that you generate on the wave and also because a waveboard has more volume, making up for a few square metres in sail material. First off use the kite size you're used to but the better you get at actually riding a wave, the more you will want a small wave kite which will allow you more freedom and movement to attack the wave as you like, rather than being overpowered and pulled along it.

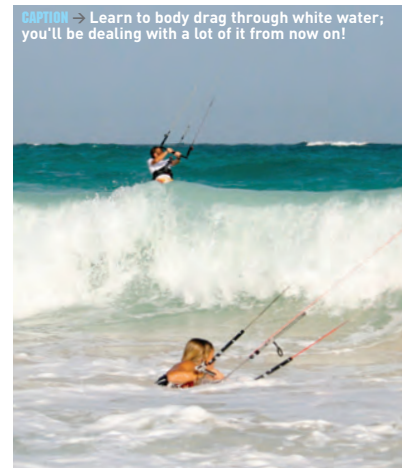




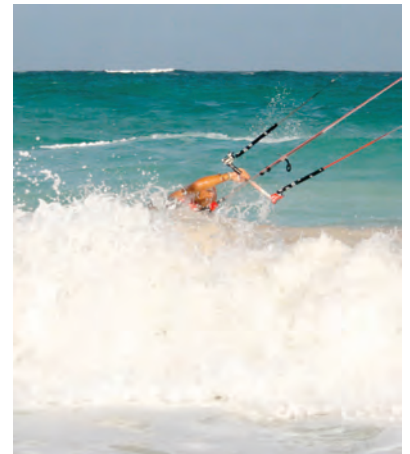
CAPTION → Gabi having some small wave fun



CAPTION → Learning to ride strapless is easier than you think and will improve your board feel and skills no end



CAPTION → Learn to body drag through white water; you'll be dealing with a lot of it from now on!



## WHERE TO RIDE

When setting out it's important to choose a location and the right conditions for your skill level and equipment. Before heading out, please make sure you're familiar with the right-of-way / code of conduct in the surf. Surfers and windsurfers have been playing in the waves for much longer than us kites, plus, it's much harder for them to get to the line-up and to actually catch waves. So the very least we can do is to show our respect and to be fair in the water. Being courteous will also help to avoid unnecessary accidents or disputes later on the beach (which are quite common at many of the more hardcore wave spots!).

Most wave kiting spots require you to deal with some kind of shore-break. This can be tricky to negotiate as all that wave energy is being released in one small area right up against the beach.

Spend some time watching the locals for a while, seeing where they enter the water, how they get out through the break and where they come back in. If there are no other kites out, there's

usually a good reason, so don't go out!

A great way to get introduced to wave riding is to do downwinders on long, safe beaches where there isn't too much heavy shorebreak. Also, try to make sure there aren't any rocks or obstacles in the water. One of the best things about long downwinders in the early stages is that it means you can practice things like gybes over and over again without worrying about losing ground downwind and you'll progress really quickly.

Choose beach-breaks rather than shallow reef-breaks to start off with and to practise all your new skills, such as getting over the white water, bodydragging through white water, recovering your board in waves, backhand/frontside riding on the wave etc. Also, although the wave will be much smoother, don't go out in offshore or even cross-offshore wind conditions. You may have read about how amazing these conditions are, but they are only suitable for very experienced riders. As soon as you drop your kite it's going to be pulling you out to sea rather than towards the beach, which is very dangerous.



CAPTION → Respect this and getting roughed up in the car park will be one less thing to worry about





**CAPTION** → Fly your kite high to get you up and over white water and then dip it back into the power to pull you away off the back



**CAPTION** → When negotiating white water, there's always the option of jumping



**CAPTION** → Keep your legs flexible as you go off the top of a wave or white water and power the kite up by dipping it back down in the power to keep your momentum when you land



**CAPTION** → Remember which hand you need to pull on the bar with!





**CAPTION** → Come on in, the water's lovely



**CAPTION** When in doubt, scarper

## GETTING OUT

White water is an unstable mixture of air and water which, as a result, is difficult to kite on. Remember that a breaking wave is in the process of losing its energy and you want to minimise the amount of energy that it hits you with. Tackling breaking waves is a skill that requires a lot of practice but there are a few tactics you can try:

**AVOID THEM!** Choosing the right time to launch and get out there is key. You will usually find that there are lulls where the water is quite flat. Wait for a big set to pass through and get out there immediately afterwards. If you get it wrong and a big set is heading right for you, you need to avoid having a big wave dump right on top of you by 'chicken gybing' and going back in before turning round to start again.

**ATTACK AND GET OVER IT** It will take a bit of practice to figure out the best angle you need to attack and hit the oncoming wave on. Choose the section of the wave which will be easiest to get over. Ideally you should be able to head for a section of wave that hasn't broken yet or one which has been broken for a few seconds and lost some of its power. If you absolutely have to kite over a piece of freshly broken wave, tackle it with full commitment. Fly your kite high so that you become very light on your board and lift your legs to try and bunny hop over the white water. Focus on bringing the nose of the board up and transferring your body weight

forward as you go over the white water, remaining light and flexible in the knees. Stand upright but absorb the bumps in your knees as you go over the top. You will soon get used to how the balancing works. The level of power you go into the wave with is down to personal preference and what you feel comfortable with. Some people swear by being super-powered, others the opposite. I recommend maintaining good speed and power which will give you more control. Of course it really depends on the wave.

One thing to definitely do is avoid being hit from the back or sideways by the wave or large amount of white water. If you do take a side-on hit, remember the 'hand rule' that you will find below in the 'When you wipeout in the waves' section.

Alternatively, there's always the option of jumping over the wave, something that's not possible in surfing or windsurfing, but this will require a lot of skill and practice.

There will be times that you don't make it out, but don't be discouraged. It still happens to everyone. Just have a rest, work out what went wrong and then try again.

Once you're out back, hang around out of the impact zone behind the waves for a while, get comfortable and try to work out where the waves are breaking and where they're not.

By the way, as you get better and start to tackle different spots, you'll come across a number of reef-breaks that are further out to sea. Although the waves will be heavy, you should be able to tack up to them via the flat sections around them, so you won't have to deal with getting out over so much white water.





**CAPTION** → When you're chewing on life's gristle, don't grumble, give a whistle

## FEAR

Going out in big waves is scary and with good reason. Get into the wrong place at the wrong time and do the wrong thing and you could be smashed to smithereens. But if you follow some basic rules, you can avoid these situations and kite in relative safety.

A bit of fear is good and the adrenaline rush prepares you for the physical rigours that lie ahead. A lot of fear is counterproductive and prevents you performing at your best, plus, you would only be really scared if your skill level isn't good enough for the given conditions and, in that case, you shouldn't be out there in the first place.

If you start feeling like your fear level is getting out of control and you are becoming uncomfortable, try sailing around out the back for a while and see if you start to feel better. If you don't, choose a small wave (without a big set behind it) and follow it in all the way back to the beach or sail in between sets.

## WHEN YOU WIPE OUT IN THE WAVES

When you fall in on a bottom turn or the wave is just about to munch you, THE most important thing in wave kiting is to always remember: TRY EVERYTHING NOT to crash your kite.

If you do, get this 'hand rule' into your system: Always remember which hand needs to pull on the bar that will pull the kite against the push of the wave (i.e. away from the beach). If you get washed it's easy to lose orientation, and that's when motor skills come into their own, which you hopefully have programmed into your head. You will only have a split second to decide which side of the bar to pull on, so hopefully you get it right! Remember not to pull so hard as to actually crash the kite behind the waves. You need to just pull enough to get the kite beyond 12 so it pulls you up and out of the wave.

Crashing the kite in waves can get dangerous. It's not necessarily a tragedy every time, but once the kite is down it will get washed, just like you, and it's very likely that the next wave that's behind the one that got you off your board, will push you into your lines and wash you through them. This is when you have a serious problem as lines wrapped around your limbs and body can result in injury if another wave hits.

Thus, THE most important rule in wave riding: Try to always keep your kite up in the air no matter what happens!

The 'hand rule' is just like all the other skills and something that you can practise beautifully, right from the very start in smaller shorebreak whenever you get thrown off your board (i.e. while bodydragging back to your board). Practice immediately pulling the kite in the opposite direction to the push of the wave as soon as that white water comes at you.

## SAFETY

You will be bowled, probably more often than you wish for. What you don't realise when looking through magazines and film footage is that so do the good guys; it's just part of



**CAPTION** → Gabi using the kite to pull herself up and out of some hectic white water after a wipeout

the game and part of the progression (which is never ending). The difference is that they are used to it and know how to deal with it. Good wave riders aren't thinking, 'Oh no, I'm going to die.' whenever it happens. They have just got used to some useful kite skills to negotiate and minimise the trouble, and you can too.

Stay out of the white water as that's the stuff that bowls you over. When you're learning, stay on the shoulder of the waves and out of the critical, breaking sections. If the wave breaks behind you, try to outrun it and it will eventually run out of steam.

Always try to avoid being washed, but if washed, do everything not to drop your kite. Do your absolute best to keep it up in air.

In case you do wipeout, try to keep clear of any kite lines and please don't waste a moment thinking about it: Ditch your gear if you're in any doubt about whether you might be washed into your lines and tangled in them. It's only material. Yes, expensive material, but your health and life is worth way more.

Sometimes you might wipeout and just not be able to re-launch your kite for some reason. If so, pack up and swim back in or, if you really need to let go of your kite, swim your board back and see whether there's a way of rescuing the kite once you're safely back on the beach.

## STUDY THE NATURE OF WAVES

Although waves seem to be such an unpredictable and constantly changing medium, they can be understood. The more you play in them and involve yourself in trying to understand them the better you'll be able to predict what they're going to do. Pick up a longboard or surfboard whenever you can. Go and paddle on a SUP board, get familiar with the different parts of the wave (face, shoulder etc.) and try to anticipate it breaking, closing out etc. Or just simply chill on the beach and watch them. Being able to 'read' waves is a vital skill out in the surf. The more you study them, the faster you will be able to work them out.

## ENJOY IT

Yes, it really is about enjoyment. Ideally, once you're past the 'wave-beginner stage', you'll go out in conditions that you feel slightly uncomfortable about, survive, perhaps even kite well and get back to shore completely stoked. The level of stoke after a sick wave session is undescrivable, but you'll feel really good about it. Then, the next time you'll need a bit more of a challenge to get the same buzz. That's progression and that's what will eventually get you out into the bigger ones. For now, enjoy smacking it up in your comfort zone.

Gabi is part of the North Kiteboarding team. Find her and get in touch at:

[www.kitegabi.com](http://www.kitegabi.com)

Brush up on your surfboard skills at: [www.kiteworldmag.com/surf/](http://www.kiteworldmag.com/surf/) *kw*





**CAPTION** → Sky's not thinking 'Oh no' at this point, he's thinking 'fu?k yeah!'



**CAPTION** → You're not dyslexic. Learn to read the waves and you'll be able to predict the seemingly random order of breaking sections



**CAPTION** → Big or small, Sky deals with all comers on merit, and where possibly destroys them