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BALI...

ISLAND OF THE GODS

FIRST 2013 KITES ON TEST

TOBY BRAEUER TALKS AIRSTYLE // FREERIDE BOARD TEST
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// THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE KITESURF MAGAZINE //

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline in Bali. The image shows a sandy beach curving along a dark, rocky cliffside. The water is crystal clear, transitioning from shallow turquoise near the shore to deep blue further out. Waves are breaking in the distance. In the foreground, a large, intricate stone carving of a face is visible on the cliffside. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy clouds.

BALI

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PHOTOS // © MARK THORPE WWW.LIQUIDMOCEAN.COM, GABI STEINDL

Island of the Gods

PULAU DEWATA - "Island of the Gods" - as the Balinese call their country. Who wants to contradict them there? Coconut trees shade fine sandy beaches, snow-white in the south, volcano-black in the north, varied landscapes of hills and mountains, rugged coastlines, lush rice terraces and barren volcanic hillsides; Bali is blessed with dreamscape beaches, a fascinating culture, tropical climate, flora and fauna and so much more ... The gods must know best after all, where else on earth can they live so heavenly!

Personally, I am very attached to this pearl in the Indian Ocean. Nearly 10 years ago I did my first kite-course on Bali and therefore this island has a very special place in my heart. In 2002 I spent a week there as part of a business trip with my former employer "Action Asia" (the leading media group for adventure travel & extreme sports in Asia), back in the days when I was still 'surfing the career train' in Hong Kong, jetting all throughout Asia on assignments in a management position. In this respect Bali is where Kitegabi was conceived! It is the place in the world where I first had a kite bar in my hands and my feet in the straps of a board; it's where I was shaken awake from the "brainwash" of the western world, where I got back in touch with my heart, which I had learnt to ignore as taught by society; it's where my passion for the ocean, that I had always felt inside me since I was a young girl and my childhood dream of learning to surf, came back to life. I owe Bali and the Gods there a lot :-)! I also bought my very first kitesurfing equipment here (a huge 2nd hand foil kite and a huge directional board). Shortly after my return to Hong Kong I handed in my notice, left Asia and decided to live my dream with the plan: to train as hard as I could for the next months in order to compete in the Kitesurfing World Cup the following year.

"the waves of Indonesia are without a doubt world-class"

Recently I decided to return to Kitegabi's birthplace. Although the country of rice fields certainly does not count amongst the windiest places on our beautiful planet, the waves of Indonesia are without a doubt world-class and attract surfers from all corners of the world all year round, with Bali being the Mecca.



Island of the Gods



Bali is incredibly diverse and does not only cause the heart-rate of surfers to go up: party-animals froth in the hectic "Kuta" and chic "Seminyak" in the south of the island; culture- and art-enthusiasts rather enjoy the mountains and chilled out hippie-vibes inland; yogis and those who are after peace and relaxation as well as devotees to their bodies and spa-lovers can find uncountable possibilities to indulge body & soul in heavenly oasis's, where time seems to be standing still. In Bali the flowers seem to blossom constantly, and every day its people celebrate the charitableness of the gods: in the morning, quite early, the Balinese put coloured offerings in front of hotels and restaurants, the beach, bars and souvenir stores - to appease the gods and to keep away demons.

Ahhh, Bali is simply divine! The Balinese have even managed with their smiles to make the awful terrorist attack in 2002 almost forgotten, 202 people died and it shook the peaceful island in its core deeply. But the Balinese people have moved onwards and upwards with their shiney white teeth smiling at every turn.

"Purely as kitesurf-destination Bali's wind statistic is not reliable enough"

Due to its geographical position and proximity to the equator, Bali's average temperature lies between 23 and 30 degrees; also water temperature remains steady at approx. 27 degrees from January through to December. Therefore we're talking "boardies and lycra only" pretty much all year round - Yippee !!

There was a myth kept for a long time that on Bali there's no wind, however, the months with the strongest swells (June-Sept) are also the time of the eastern trade winds. Purely as kitesurf-destination Bali's wind statistic is not reliable enough (neither in strength nor in consistency), nevertheless, anyone who arrives with two big kites, a waveboard and a surfboard during the main season, will experience the Island of the Gods and its magic!

Belief and everyday life are not to be separated in Bali. Hinduism is deeply integrated into the everyday life of the 3.3 million inhabitants. Bali is the only place on earth beyond India and Nepal where Hinduism plays the religious leading role. An enormously huge number of Hindu temples are spread all over the island.

In Balinese the word for temple is "Pura". Every tourist should visit at least one of the famous temples. My favourite one was Pura Ulu Watu. I adore this one not only because this temple in the very south counts amongst the nicest ones of the island and also because it is literally just around the corner from my beloved surfing break "Uluwatu", but mainly because it is dedicated to the gods of the sea. Pura Ulu Watu lies on a super steep rock ledge, the cliff here drops about 100 metres vertically into the sea. It's very beautiful, though one has to pay great attention to the 'evil' monkeys that also seem to like hanging around the temple. Despite many signs warning of the "thieving monkeys!!!" and plenty of advice to put away all objects of value, I saw a Japanese tourist bursting into tears, after quite a cheeky monkey snatched her prescription glasses and bit them into thousand small pieces right in front of her.

"even more fascinating than the top quality of the waves here, was the incredible mix of nationalities in the water, pretty much from every corner of the globe."

Also the kite- and surf conditions that I found on the island of the gods were absolute bliss! What was almost even more fascinating than the top quality of the waves here, was the incredible mix of nationalities in the water, pretty much from every corner of the globe. Brazilians, Russians, Dutchmen, Germans, Greeks, Japanese, Mexicans, Austrians, Spaniards, French, Australians, New Zealanders, Scandinavians, Portuguese, Poles, Czechs, Americans, Canadians... everybody paddling after the magic energy and flow that is found in Bali's waves!





The two main kitespots are Sanur Beach and Canggu. Sanur Beach, in the southeast of the island is often also referred to as "Kitebeach". Right here I held onto a kite bar for the very first time in my life; I did my intro-to-kiting course. It was really good to see my two kite instructors again; Mario and Jankie, two Italians who previously were running Bali's only kite school together. Today, each one of them does his own thing, Mario is still the manager of the kite school at the Blue Oasis Beach Club, the Watersports centre at one of Sanur's big hotels, and Jankie owns Bali's only kiteshop, "Kite & Surf Bali, The Pro Shop" in Sanur www.bali-kitesurfing.org which sells kitesurfing gear, surfboards and SUP as well as apparel and accessories. Jankie is the local contact point for all kilters, who are new to the island. He's always super happy to help with words & deeds, rents out

SUP-boards on days when there's no wind and is also still well connected to the "Bali Kite School" www.bali-kitesurfing.org/kiteschool.html his former business. Today the school is run by a lovely, super competent bunch of local rippers. Situated directly on the best spot along the beach, they have a great little set-up (courses & rental) and I can only recommend you swing past them when you come to Bali. Sanur Beach is perfect for the freestylers amongst you as well as the ones, who would like to get into kiting: an immensely wide, white sandy beach that borders onto a perfect, heavenly flatwater-playground. In the dry season the eastern trade winds blow here consistently side-onshore; a little bit further outside there's a reef, which often produces really fun waves. Each year in July, the annual "Sanur Kite Festival" takes place, which has nothing to do with the kites that we're using,

but rather 'normal' kites in its classical meaning. During this week, numerous teams of all the different villages on the island are flying gigantic traditional Balinese dragons (up to 10 m in length) the sky over Sanur is literally plastered with those fantastic creations. The origin of this tradition comes from sending a message to the Hindu Gods in a festival to ask for a rich harvest and a successful sowing year. It was a really cool experience to kite around Sanur beach with all the amazing, super colourful pieces of art and dragons up in the sky which came in various forms including fish, crabs, bears, tigers, and many more!

"The beach here is rather narrow, black and therefore often extremely hot (keep your sandals on whilst setting up your kite and lines!)."

On days when the 'conditions were on' I would make the drive with Jankie from Sanur to Canggu for an afternoon session. Canggu is the main kitemwave-spot in the southwest of the island. A well-known (amongst surfers) semi-reef break that breaks on a mix of stone, sand, and lava. The beach here is rather narrow, black and therefore often extremely hot (keep your sandals on whilst setting up your kite and lines!). There is also some pretty harsh rocks in the water and the wind is often very gusty and fickle. The channel to kite out into the line-up is very visible, however, due to a pretty gnarly current and often big holes in the wind, getting out can be a bit tricky on some days. Canggu is really only for the experts and bravehearted, but on the good days you can be rewarded with some amazing down the line wave riding.

"I continued on my own... I was really stoked when I could recognize Bali appearing on the horizon."

The absolute highlight of my kiting-time in Bali was without a doubt a fairly daredevil crossing from the sleepy neighbouring island Nusa Lembongan back to Bali. The Lombok strait that connects the Indian Ocean with the Java Sea is infamous for its depth and strong current. Several years ago a French windsurfer, who attempted the same crossing, disappeared and was never found again....

An amazing sailing-cat took me and a group of local kites over to Lembongan, where we launched our kites from the boat. I had borrowed an old 16m² North Rebel from the kiteschool for the crossing as the wind forecast was very light and off we went... It all went alright at first, just that the wind left the party rather early in the game.



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Way out there, in the middle of nowhere at sea, all the kites of my colleagues dropped out of the sky, all of a sudden at once due to a wind hole. I was a bit ahead of them, the cat was a fairly large distance behind us and I had to decide "Do I continue alone or is it time to surrender?". Kitegabi never gives up and so I continued on my own... I was really stoked when I could recognize Bali appearing on the horizon. It was a long, lonesome kite and hard work until just before actually reaching the coast (way further downwind than were we had planned on landing at), the wind completely died on me. Ouch, the kite fell out of the sky and I was floating all alone, literally in the middle of nowhere... not a pleasant feeling as I am sure you can imagine! I drifted closer and closer to the offshore reef which did not look inviting at all. I have never been to that side of the island and didn't know where I was nor did I know whether the reef was as gnarly as on the other side of the southern tip of the island. If it was, I would get seriously hurt trying to swim in... To make matters worse there was no sign of the catamaran! All of a sudden I spotted a potential rescue: an outrigger boat with a fisherman and two small kids on board which had just passed the reef on their way out. I shouted and waved in the water and so they came over. It wasn't easy to explain to the fisherman that I needed help as I was in a rather dangerous situation but somehow I managed to get the message across. I packed up the kite and was pulled into the tiny boat with all my gear where I squeezed myself in between the fisherman and his kids. The chase in search of the catamaran and my mates started... Wooow, it was the bumpiest ride ever,

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