

KITE SURF



"DO NOT FOLLOW WHERE THE PATH MAY LEAD. GO INSTEAD WHERE
THERE IS NO PATH AND LEAVE A TRAIL."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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NEW CALEDONIA



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IN NEW CALEDONIA, IF YOU ARE ADDICTED TO WAVES like me, you better also be addicted to boats.

The little country that's composed of a group of islands - The Main Island (Grande Terre), Loyalty Islands, Isle of Pines and a myriad of other small islands - is situated in the heart of the South Pacific, 1500km east of Australia. Surrounded by a coral barrier reef that stretches over 1600km, New Caledonia boasts the world's largest lagoon (24,000 square kilometres).

Needless to mention, it's absolutely perfect for our sport and any kiter's dream! The lagoon has been listed since 2008 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is recognised as one of the three most extensive reef systems in the world. In some places along the coast the reef is only a few kilometres from land, at others it's over 65km. The wave action for kite, wind, and surfers is happening at the reef-passes offshore, along the outer edge of the lagoon. There, the best waves form due to the combination of deeper water in the channel and adjacent shallower water near the reef.

New Caledonia averages over 220 windy days per year. That explains why kiting and windsurfing are so popular here - it truly is absolutely superb for our sport! I personally planned my trip during the off-wind-season (May-September). That's when the winter-swells roll in, generated by the southern ocean lows. Feeding straight onto the coral reefs off New Caledonia, they produce waves of much larger size than in summer.

Tenia is the place to be when it's pumping, a perfect long peeling left-hander that can hold the largest swells that hit the coast of New Caledonia. I simply couldn't wait to see Tenia's set-up and the wave. Cramped into a tiny Zodiac with two frothing windsurfers, the photographer, all my stuff, the camera and sailing gear was already an experience in itself. The mission: 70kms drive by car and then a good 25-minute boat ride makes everything even more exciting. There are no webcams, swell buoys or any live data found online. The anticipation and adrenaline heading out with the boat is a real rush. Over the weeks in New Cal the local forecast turned out to be the most unreliable I had ever come across, changing quite drastically over the course of 24 hours. We had a running joke going that the local meteorologists obviously must be deciding the weather by the paper, rock and scissors technique.

Also that day, the weather bureau didn't get it right and instead of the forecasted 18-knot south easterly wind, we found the break a sheet of glass, with overcast skies. Thank God, I had managed to squeeze in my surfboard and I surfed for nearly four hours that day.


On standby for the next swell alert with wind for Tenia, I decided to head up the west coast and check out Bourail, another of the country's surfing-hot spots. Bourail is also home to Poe Beach, one of the top flat-water kiting grounds. It boasts a massive shallow lagoon in the most beautifully coloured waters, where you can camp right on the water's edge. I stayed at the Nekweta Surf Camp at Roche Percee (translated as the Pierced Rock), the only surf spot in New Cal that's actually on the coast but only breaks when massive swell hits (a few times per year) and I was in great hands. Manu Hernu, a fifth generation local, surfer and fisherman, built the surf camp, an authentic little guesthouse, from scratch by hand nine years ago. He is the man, who knows all the right spots to go for a paddle, snorkel or fish. His lovely wife Stephanie cooks the most amazing meals for the guests.





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GABI - NOW A MASTER IN BOAT LAUNCHES AFTER A NEW CAL TRIP!

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[HTTP://EN.VISITNEWCALEDONIA.COM](http://en.visitnewcaledonia.com)

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Tenia delivered at the next alert. When we arrived at the break, there were two boats anchored with a couple of windsurfers who already had broken all their gear. Blue skies and straight lines were hitting the reef superbly. I will never forget kiting waves so clean and perfect with a massive smile on my face until shortly before sunset. It was high time to pack up and steer the boat towards safety before it got dark.

Launching from a boat became pretty much a daily routine, just like brushing my teeth. And - not taking sleeping time into consideration - I spent way more time on boats and on the water than on land. In New Cal it's not about the car you're driving, it's all about which boat. For ocean, wind, and wave-lovers seeking to be free to enjoy the elements as Mother Nature dictates, a vessel is a must-have.

It didn't take me long to make lots of new friends and I always managed to find a ride to the reef. In any case, there are several commercial taxi-boat operators who will take you day tripping to the reef or the islands. The Bouts d'Brousse taxi-boat company specialises in surfing trips to Tenia and Ilot Tenia, a beautiful little dream island just a few kilometres north of the reef-pass. It's a popular camping spot for kites, surfers and families alike with amazing flatwater kiting grounds on all sides.

New Caledonia is absolutely dazzling and there's no doubt I had found kiter's paradise. This country is kite perfection paradise, in fact it's kite perfection paradise on steroids! The laboratory perfect wave conditions, the boating life, the crystal-clear waters of the humongous lagoon, surfing with turtles in a sheet of glass, the sheer beauty of nature, 50m high pines growing at the edge of the most luminous waters I have ever seen, the delicious French and Melanesian cuisine, the tribal vibes, and making so many new friendships are only a few of the memories that I'm taking away from this trip in my heart for the rest of my life.

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