

➤ Bust out of your fitness rut by grabbing hold of the newest extreme water sport: kiteboarding. Chasing the wind has never been more fun.

BY JUDI KETTLER

# Free

➤ ARE YOU READY FOR AN

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THERM-A-FLAME

# Yourselves!

EXHILARATING, ALL-OVER WORKOUT? HOP ON BOARD.

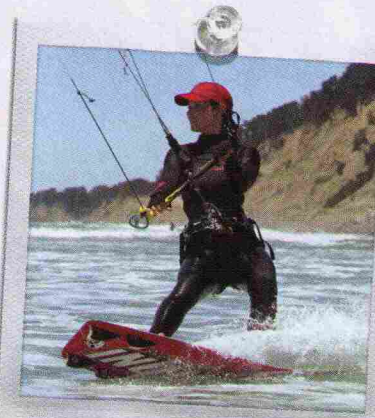
**T**wo years ago, Jessie Hassell was living in New York. She had a good job at an ad agency, and her husband, David, owned an online media company. But then something completely unexpected happened to this 27-year-old who didn't even consider herself a water person: She fell head over heels in love with kiteboarding.

She and David were introduced to kiteboarding by a friend who spent six months of every year kiteboarding in Brazil. Almost overnight, this extreme niche sport that relies solely on the power of the wind completely changed the course of their lives. Hassell learned to kiteboard while she was living in New York, but weekend trips to the beach weren't enough. Soon, she found herself ditching her corporate career and heading to Brazil—a kiteboarding paradise—where she and David bought a house. "Kiteboarding is one of those things where if you're in it, you're really in it," says Hassell. "It quickly becomes a way of life."

The Hassells now run Kite Adventures ([www.kiteadventures.com](http://www.kiteadventures.com)), a tour company that caters to kiteboard enthusiasts who want to travel the world and chase

the wind. In fact, kiteboarding is all about the wind. A cousin to windsailing—where a sail is physically attached to a board—kiteboarding involves a completely different apparatus and power source: the kite.

Kiteboarders balance on a board while holding on to a kite and basically ride the wind. The kite is attached to your board through thick nylon lines. Once launched, the kite sails above you at a 45-degree angle, allowing you to ride the waves, jump as high as 50 feet into the air or skim gracefully along the surface of the water.



KITEBOARDER CYNTHIA ALVERSON  
HOOKS INTO THE POWER OF THE WIND.

## ➤ Kiteboarding Need-to-Know

**Wind** Kiteboarders have to understand how to handle the equipment and, more importantly, be familiar with wind patterns. To kiteboard, the wind needs to be blowing steadily between 12 and 20 knots "side on shore," which means that it's blowing toward the shore. You can kiteboard on the ocean or on lakes and rivers—you don't need waves, just wind.

**Equipment** An experienced kiteboarder will have three kites: for light wind, normal wind and blasting wind. Kiteboard beginners usually have better luck using kites for light or normal wind. There are also different board sizes, but many kiteboarders can make do with just one board.

### Learning to kite

Kiteboarding isn't something you can just pick up from a friend; lessons from a qualified professional are a must. *Kiteboarding Magazine* ([kiteboardingmag.com](http://kiteboardingmag.com)) has lists of kiteboarding schools across the country. Your instructor will teach you how to handle your equipment and pick up on wind patterns—two things you have to know to kiteboard safely.



## Just You and the Ocean

"Nothing compares to kiteboarding," says Cynthia Alverson, a model and kiteboard enthusiast from Santa Cruz, California. "It's just you and the ocean, and you're whipping along the water. When I'm kiteboarding, I just get into the moment and forget about everything else." Alverson kiteboards at Waddell Creek in Santa Cruz. She's a committed kiteboarder now but admits that it was hard at first. "The kite is very powerful," she says. "It takes a while to learn how to maneuver and harness the power of the wind." But once you figure it out, there is amazing freedom that comes with being out on the open water. She loves to jump and can usually launch 15 feet or higher if the wind is right. Highly skilled kiteboarders can even do aerial acrobatics, such as flips and spins.

About three years ago, Alverson's boyfriend at the time introduced her to the sport. That's one of the most common ways that women find out about kiteboarding, which tends to be pretty male-dominated, says Hassell. "Our tours are still about 98 percent male, but I'm trying to get more women

➤ "WHEN I'M KITEBOARDING, I JUST GET INTO THE MOMENT AND FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE."

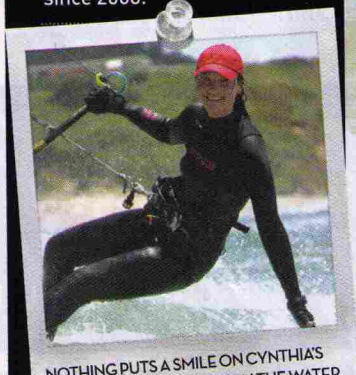
— Cynthia Alverson, model and kiteboarder

PHOTO KIM KERN

## Take a Tour

Kite Adventures, the Hassells' tour company, caters to intermediate and advanced kiteboarders who want to travel the world in search of the best beaches for kiteboarding. Hassell, her husband and their business partner, Alberto (the one who introduced them to kiteboarding), scout the best spots around the globe for riding the wind.

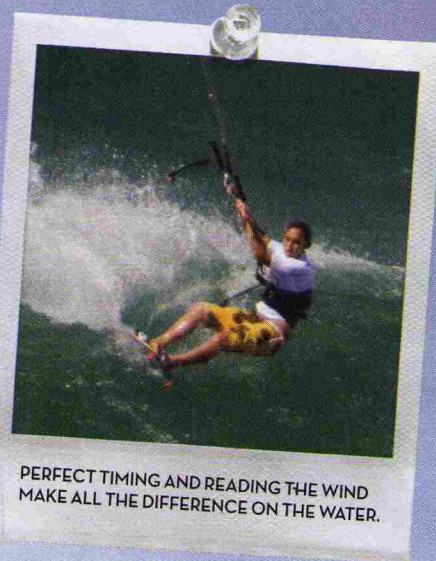
- >> The most popular destination is Brazil because it's one of the best places to kiteboard. "Brazil has perfect wind for seven months of the year and 300 kilometers of beach," says Hassell. "It's the ideal climate for kiteboarding."
- >> The company also offers tours to Italy and Greece for experienced kiteboarders.
- >> The tours, which are seven to 10 days long and include lodging, breakfast and transportation to and from the airport and beaches, range from \$1,300 to \$2,000.
- >> Kite Adventures also offers a program where beginners can learn to kiteboard - those tours are in Vietnam and Thailand.
- >> Kiteboarding is still a niche industry, but interest is growing. This year, Kite Adventures will offer 15 to 20 tours. The number of participants has tripled since 2006.



NOTHING PUTS A SMILE ON CYNTHIA'S FACE LIKE GETTING OUT ON THE WATER.



HEADING OUR FOR THE RIDE OF HER LIFE ON A KITEBOARD.



PERFECT TIMING AND READING THE WIND MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE ON THE WATER.

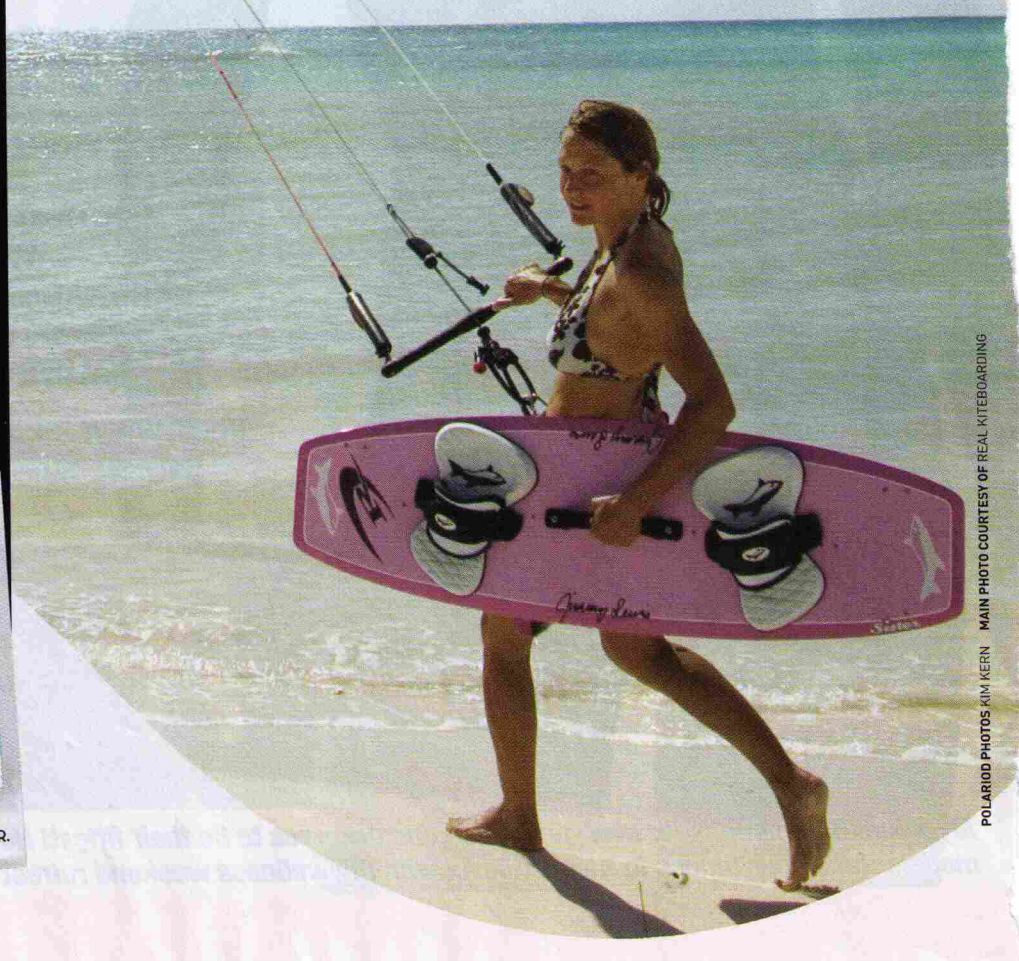
involved and develop programs where women can learn the sport together," she says.

### Women Take It On

Kiteboarding is really still in its infancy. Enthusiasts usually cite 1998 as the year that kiteboarding was born, but it didn't start booming until about 2000. The past seven years have seen more women like Hassell and Alverson become intrigued by

the challenge that this extreme sport offers.

But kiteboarding is not for the faint of heart; not only is there an element of danger (a rush that kiteboarders love) but it's also physically demanding. You need a great deal of core strength to stay in control and maneuver both the board and the kite. "It can be tough to learn," says Hassell. "I had a hard time and was frustrated at first, but then it just clicked and suddenly it was the most freedom I'd ever had."



POLAROID PHOTOS: KIM KERN MAIN PHOTO COURTESY OF REAL KITEBOARDING

# Kiteboard Catch-all

Find out about the fastest growing water sport in the country.

30%

of students who sign up for REAL Kiteboarding how-to camps are women.

(REALkiteboarding.com)

>> You only need 10 miles per hour and a body of water to kiteboard. Women are kiteboarding in every country around the world on lakes, rivers, bays and oceans.

>> Women actually learn the sport faster than men.

Kite lines average between 20 and 30 meters in length.

The average women's kite size is nine meters. The average men's kite size is 12 meters.

PHOTO: KIM KEARN. FACTS COURTESY OF REAL KITEBOARDING