

Kite Boarding Hot Spots

If Michael Mann were to produce his Miami Vice series now, kiteboarders would replace the sailboarders in the opening montage. Kiteboarding, also known as kitesurfing, is the new wind sport of Miami. Two of the hottest spots to check out the sport are Crandon Park on Virginia Key and Matheson Hammock Park beside Fairchild's Gardens. The shallow waters that extend

can experience some thrills vicariously, while sipping a cool drink under the shade of palms softly swaying in the breezes. The same breezes that your more "kick-ass" brethren are grabbing by the *#&~'s and having the ride off their lives.

If you are of the persuasion that would be interested in some of the excitement that only wind,



for several hundred yards in some areas, combined with easy access have made these locations the favorites among kiteboarders.

The colorful kites combined with the aerial acrobatics make the sport a rarity in outdoor adventure sports- its' spectator friendly. Even the non-adventurous types

water and speed combined with aerial acrobatics can provide, then this is the sport for you. There are a few things you should know before rushing out and purchasing a kite set-up. This sport should come with one of those consumer warning labels that often seem ridiculous, say on a pillow. "WARNING: Fail-

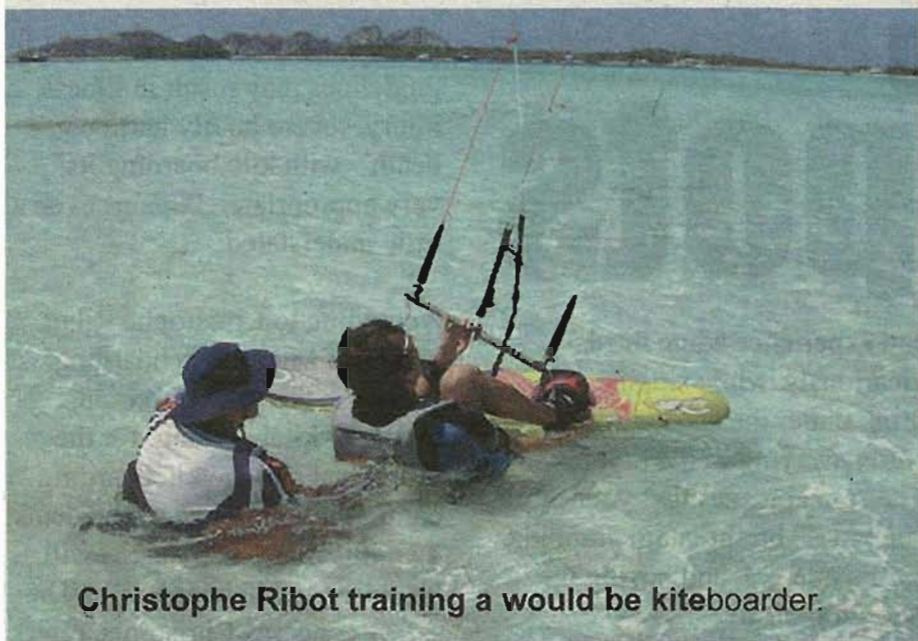
ure to follow all recommended guidelines may result in illness, injury, severe bodily harm or death" with kite boarding its' very appropriate. Perhaps even a little understated.

According to Christophe Ribot, owner of Miami Kiteboarding, "safety is the most important aspect of kiteboarding, for the individual and the kiteboarding community, if there are accidents then it is more likely areas will be closed to kiteboarders". The safety concerns Christophe refers to also applies to non-kiteboarding beach goers, maybe even more so. The beach goers are not choosing to be involved in a risky sport.

In the early days of the sport in Miami there was more of a Wild West attitude. The sport was evolving, which means so was the gear, protocols and levels of instruction. Most areas were open to kiteboarders and few rules were in effect. As the apparent risks became more obvious to the "decision makers" requirements, rules and regulations were put into place at the two hot spots. These local improvements combined with advancements made by manufacturers of kites have drastically improved the safety of the sport.

One of first big steps, that was met with some resistance from the established kiteboarders, was the implementation of a "license" of sorts. It is now required to provide proof of Level 3 Skills, as defined by the International Kiteboarding Organization (a.k.a. , IKO) at the Crandon Park North

WIND SPORTS



Christophe Ribot training a would be kiteboarder.

Beach. This is supervised by Christophe, an IKO instructor and the water sports concession operator. If a kiteboarder doesn't have a card, they have the option to demonstrate their skills to one of the IKO certified instructors, who can certify them at the appropriate level. It's very similar to SCUBA diving and the PADI certification system or a state's drivers license. An explanation of the different levels of certification can be found at www.ikorg.com. Another certification that is recognized at both locations is the Professional Air Sports Association (PASA) which offers similar "licenses" and instructor certification.

Getting caught in a strong gust and lifted to, and dropped on land or slammed into building, trees or other hard object poses one of the greatest dangers to kiteboarders. The other big improvement in safety addressed this issue by increasing ability to de-power a kite. This earlier kite designs allowed for very little control other than the kite's position relative to the wind. Eventually kite manufacturers incorporated a "chicken-loop" system to release the back edges, essentially opening up the kite to "catch less wind". Now kiteboarders have the ability release their kite "down to one line". This almost always makes the kite drop straight out of the



Carlos Sandoval at Mathes



sky. In the event the wind gust is so strong the kite still presents a danger, a quick release system allows the kiteboarders to completely separate themselves from their kite, and this according to Christophe has helped to make a land crash a rare event.

The bottom line with kiteboarding is, it is a great sport, but it is important to learn from a qualified instructor. Fortunately Miami's kiteboarding hotspots have IKO affiliated learning centers staffed with IKO certified instructors to help you get your kite boarding on!



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