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Feel the excitement riding with the wind at Miami Kiteboarding

By YARA ZAKHARIA, ESQ.

Born in Rennes, France, Christophe Ribot imported his passion for the ocean and aquatic recreational activities when he moved to Miami in 1999.

That was when he kickstarted his watersports career on Hobie Beach when he launched Hobie Kat rental club, which he sold in 2007 to another Frenchman. In 2002, he became the founder and owner of Miami Kiteboarding, located at 4000 Crandon Boulevard. Invented 10 years ago by French engineer Bruno Legaignoux, kiteboarding involves surfing behind a large kite that a rider maneuvers with a control bar, as one would a steering wheel. One needs a kite, a board and a harness to kiteboard.

"The kite is big enough to generate enough power for the rider to surf on the board," explains Ribot.

The control bar is connected to the kite by four lines, and any type of board, such as a surfboard, a wakeboard or a skimboard, may be used.

After a friend of his initiated him to the sport in 2001, Ribot began operating kiteboards from boats and Jet Skis and teaching students on remote sandbars all over Key Biscayne. In 2005, as equipment became safer and more user-friendly, kite-surfing began to gain momentum.

In 2007, Ribot was granted the kayak concession at North Beach in Crandon Park and has been running Miami Kiteboarding ever since.

Among the services provided by the company are lessons, gear sales, instructor courses and rentals. As a master trainer, Ribot has thus far trained as many as 150 kiteboarding instructors in the United States, Canada, Belgium and the Caribbean. He obtained his International Kiteboarding Organization (IKO) certification in Cavo Rete in the Dominican Republic. IKO sets learning standards and professional teaching skills for kiteboarders. To become certified, one needs to be a fully-competent instructor and have practiced kiteboarding for at least one year.

Ribot's coaches are certified by the IKO, and his center was the first one in Florida to be affiliated with the IKO.

This year, Miami Kiteboarding will be offering clinics for children as young as 8 years old. Any active and enthusiastic person can try kiteboarding, says Ribot, and a



Photo courtesy Miami Kiteboarding

Christophe Ribot operates Miami Kiteboarding from Crandon Park, along with his International Kiteboarding Organization-certified staff.

good kiteboarder needs patience, finesse and balance. The majority of his customers are in the 25-45 age bracket; nearly 60 percent of his clientele is comprised of locals and 40 percent is tourists.

"Kids can learn this sport very easily; the sole problem is that there isn't much equipment for their weight," he notes.

Kiteboarding works the core muscles, in particular the abs, as well as the legs, and provides an excellent, non-aggressive cardio exercise as no force or strength is needed. "This is a very exciting sport. You are in the middle of nature and can jump up to 30 feet in the air," said Ribot.

It is ideal for Florida because the warm temperature of the water and wind make it easier to kiteboard.

"Crandon Park, where we have the concession, is one of the best spots in Florida to practice this sport because the water is shallow and flat, simplifying the task for

beginners and enabling them to learn faster than anywhere else," he points out.

It takes from 6-10 hours for a student to become acquainted with kiteboarding. Ribot recommends kiteboarding because "it's a brand new, modern and thrilling sport that is easy to pick up and very rewarding once you get control of the kite and the board."

Miami Kiteboarding offers private (one-on-one tutoring), semi-private (one instructor for two students) and group (one tutor for three students) lessons.

"Depending on wind conditions, we can have up to six instructors teaching all levels, from beginner's to advanced," he says.

Typically, private lessons start at \$75 per hour. However, a summer special of \$50/hour and "buy one get one free," whereby the second student gets a free ride, is in effect through September. To be eligible for the discounted rate, at least two individuals must sign

up for a minimum of two lessons.

At Ribot's beachfront store on Crandon, which is equipped with WiFi and is open from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. seven days a week, customers will find gear, such as Cabrinhas and Slingshot kites, as well as complete packages consisting of kites, boards and harnesses. With the purchase of equipment, a student receives half a day of lessons or the equivalent of three hours free. Ribot rents gear only for advanced kiteboarders.

In the first weekend of April, he and his team organize a Miami Kiteboarding Masters event at Crandon Park. From October to May, they will host a race locally each month and offer free kiteboarding clinics. The company also puts together standard paddleboard races on the island.

In 2005, Ribot and his team participated in the Bahamas race from Fort Lauderdale to Bimini, competing against 24 other teams and finishing fourth. Miami Kite-

boarding sponsors social events such as free paddleboarding discoveries every first and third Friday afternoon of the month, which are essentially free trials or demos.

"We organize relays and have fun at the same time," he said. "Anyone can come and discover paddleboarding, which is a great activity during the summer, very beneficial for the core muscles and balance, excellent for health and fitness; in short, it provides a good workout," Ribot said.

Paddleboarding is generally offered during the summer because it does not require much wind.

Miami Kiteboarding provides paddleboard rentals seven days a week and two-hour paddleboarding clinics on Saturdays starting at 10 a.m.

For more information about Miami Kiteboarding, please visit www.miamikiteboarding.com or contact Ribot at 305-345-9974 or at info@miamikiteboarding.com.