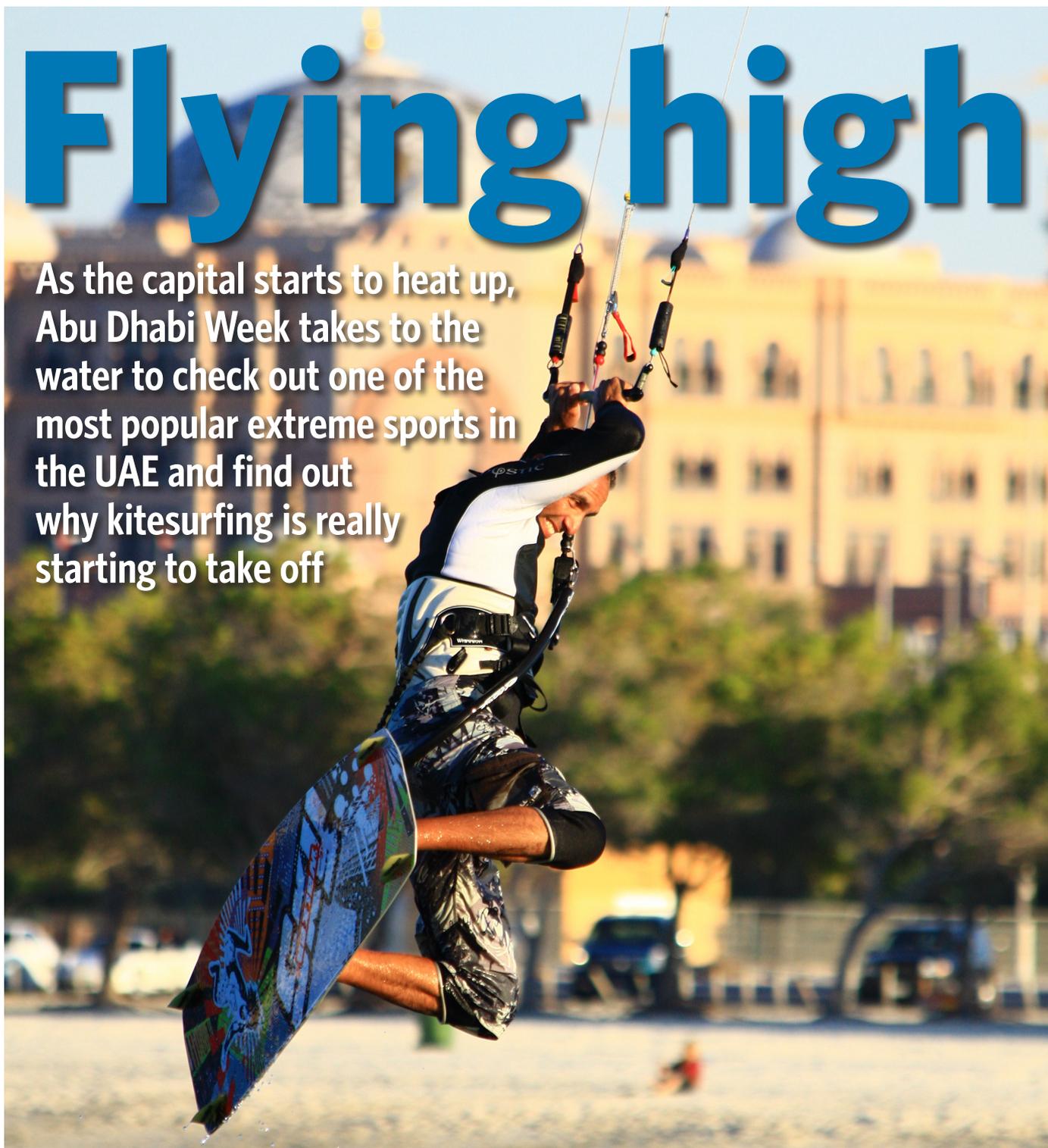


Flying high

As the capital starts to heat up, Abu Dhabi Week takes to the water to check out one of the most popular extreme sports in the UAE and find out why kitesurfing is really starting to take off



IMAGINE THE speed of wakeboarding without needing a boat, the freedom of surfing without having to paddle out or time the waves and the raw excitement of windsurfing without the need for expensive and bulky equipment – these are just some of the reasons why more and more people are throwing caution to the wind as they chase the thrills and spills associated with the highly accessible sport of kitesurfing.

Combining the best elements of wakeboarding, windsurfing, surfing and paragliding, kitesurfing harnesses the power of the wind to propel the rider across the water on a small surfboard or kiteboard. One of the main attractions is the minimal equipment you need – a lightweight board, a

kite that folds up into a rucksack and a small pump that can all be stored in the boot of your car means that you can be ready to go whenever the mood takes you. All you need to do is add wind.

This is something we've been wanting to try for a while so when Kitepro Abu Dhabi offer us the chance to try it out for ourselves, we don't need to be asked twice.

It's a beautiful Friday morning as we wait excitedly to meet our instructor Sameh Elsaghir at Carrefour on Airport Road. A professionally qualified instructor with over nine years experience, Sameh explains that the tide is really low around Yas Island, one of the most popular spots in the capital among Kitesurfers, and that we're going to be

heading out to a quiet beach in Al Dabiyah, where the weather conditions will be more favourable.

Located about 45-minutes by car to the south of the city, the beach is deserted as we pull up. Sameh erects a tall flagpole on the beach so we can easily gauge wind speed and direction, before unpacking the kit we're going to be using.

Gathering us around him, Sameh highlights some basic safety principles and then draws diagrams in the sand to show us how to work with the wind. As a general rule, you use the kite to surf at right angles to the direction of the wind and the main thing to remember is never take to the water when the wind is coming directly from inland – should you

crash or lose control, you don't want to be blown out to sea.

Unfurling a small trainer kite, Sameh smiles as he explains that we won't be setting foot on a board today. The most important thing is to have complete control of the kite – it normally takes four to five lessons before you're ready to actually get surfing. Walking the length of the guidelines to make sure there are no tangles, he then shows us how to attach the kite before walking back to the handlebar and with a gentle backwards tug the kite is launched gracefully into the air.

We spend ten minutes on the trainer kite as we gradually get the feel for it, concentrating on performing smooth figure of eights between what Sameh calls the eleven and one positions. Imagine the face of a clock, twelve o'clock is when the kite is directly above you and eleven and one are positions about 30 degrees either side. Once we've managed this to his satisfaction, Sameh lands the small kite and it's time to have a go on one of the big boys.

We step into our harness as Sameh unpacks one of the larger kites (measuring 13.5 square metres) and pumps it up. Wading out knee-deep into the sea, he then carefully attaches the safety line to the hook on the front of our harness before handing us the reins.

It's immediately apparent how much force these kites can generate as we are a little too slow to correct one of our first swoops and we're almost dragged off our feet. Luckily Sameh has a firm grip on the loop at the back of the harness and we manage to get the kite back under control. Once we've relaxed however, it's surprising how easy it is to control the kite – delicate, gentle movements are all that's required. Sameh seems quite impressed with our progress as we follow his commands and we're pleased that he isn't called into action again to stop us from floating off into the clear blue sky. As we become more confident, Sameh explains about the power zones and we practice keeping the kite in different positions around the clock.

Before we know it our time's up and, with a certain sense of exhilaration, we make our way back to shore. The beach is starting to get busy now – Sameh's next students have arrived and other, obviously more experienced, kitesurfers are unpacking their boards and strapping on their harnesses. We watch enviously as a couple of them effortlessly launch their kites and glide off over the calm water.

It's only been one lesson and we haven't even been on a board yet but we're hooked – let's hope the wind is blowing next weekend. 

Jon Muller



An individual lesson costs AED 300 for an hour, a dual lesson for two people costs AED 500 for 90 minutes and a ten-lesson package costs AED 2,600.

For more information, visit www.kitepro.ae or call Sameh on 050 544 1494.

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