



Let's go fly a kite

ABU DHABI HAS THE PERFECT BEACH TO LEARN HOW TO KITESURF. HAVE A LESSON WITH PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTOR SAMEH ELSAGHIR FROM KITEPRO ABU DHABI AND YOU WILL BE HOOKED ON THIS EXTREME SPORT

WORDS | TIFFANY ESLICK

Sameh Elsaghir grabs a screwdriver from the back of his jeep and starts scribbling in the sand in front of me. "I want to teach you about wind direction," he begins.

It's been five minutes since I arrived at the beach for a kitesurfing lesson with him and we're off to an interesting start. Sameh explains that this extreme sport is really about knowing how to harness the power of the wind to propel you across the water.

With a simple drawing of a few arrows and some squiggles, he explains there are four different types of winds. On-shore, side-shore and cross-shore winds are all good for kitesurfing. However, winds coming from inland known as off-shore winds are very bad indeed. "If you crash the kite, or maybe lose control, an off-shore wind will blow you out to sea," Sameh warns. "We don't want that." No, we definitely do not.

It's this exact peril that has deterred me from kitesurfing in the past. I was always terrified of being dragged out into the ocean because of not being able to control the kite due to my rather embarrassing fitness and strength levels. "There's no need to be super fit," Sameh assures me. "Anyone can kitesurf, you just need to learn how to read the wind."

"It's just you, the kite and the wind," he adds. "When you are out there flying your kite you forget your problems, your stress, your life – everything. After each session you feel so relaxed. It's just something wonderful." This all sounds so tempting and I'm eager to get flying.

However, it's time for another sand sketch. Sameh draws the top half of a clock ranging from 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock. "This is the power zone," he says. "Twelve o'clock is when the kite is directly above you and a kitesurfer needs to learn to control the kite between 9 and 3." With that sorted, Sameh pulls out a bright yellow trainer kite, hoists it into the air and we head down the dunes to the beach.

It's a glorious afternoon. We're standing on a beach with no name, somewhere on Abu Dhabi's Yas Island. There's a good side-shore breeze blowing and we pass other kitesurfers as they unfurl their kites and take to the aquamarine waters. Sameh knows them all. Six years ago he opened his kitesurfing school, KitePro Abu Dhabi, and comes to this beach almost every day – wind permitting, of course.

After a brief demonstration on how to move within the power zone, Sameh hands me the kite. Immediately I feel its force as it swoops to the right. "Pull to the left," says Sameh. I yank

the handle bar too hard and the kite swoops to the ground. "You need to be gentle," he laughs. "Show me your sensitive side."

We try again and I focus on being kinder to the kite. It works. I have it under control and I watch it dancing obediently from left to right against the blue sky. Sameh is right behind me, offering encouraging words. "That's perfect," he enthuses. "You are a natural." After a short while, he takes over the kite and lowers it to the ground. "Time for the big one."

I watch him inflating a gigantic fourteen-metre kite. There is no way I'm going to control this one. He straps me into a harness and we hoist the kite into the sky. I'm rather panicky as he shows me how to work it. He assures me all will be fine, so I give it a go.

The kite lifts me off my feet and I start to trot manically over the sand, shrieking. "Drop the bar, drop the bar," says Sameh. I let the kite fall to the ground.

Determined not to give up, I try again. "Lean back and relax," says Sameh. I pull the kite's back lines, gently manoeuvring the kite from left to right. For a moment I'm not aware of anything else and find myself smiling up at the kite. "I think you are hooked," says Sameh. I think he's right. ☺