

Kiteboarding:

Ride the surf, soar through the skies -By Tim Chingos

Imagine driving to the beach, jumping in the water and reaching speeds of 20 miles an hour without ever stepping onto a boat. In kiteboarding, you can.

Kiteboarding is a relatively new sport to the United States and is quickly picking up steam with adrenaline junkies. It's the first sport to combine high drag speeds across the water with acrobat-like freedom without an engine; kiteboarding is making waves in the world of extreme sports.

Trip Forman, the co-founder of a nationwide instructional kiteboarding company called Real Kiteboarding, says the sport first hit the United States in 1997. Since then, participation in the sport has skyrocketed. In 2003, Real Kiteboarding taught more than 3,000 individuals. This past summer, enrollment doubled to 6,000 new enthusiasts. Kiteboarders range in age from eight to 70, with the majority of the clients being between 25 and 50. About 70 percent of Real Kiteboarding clients are male. Such statistics make it easy to understand why kiteboarding has quickly evolved from a sport for the hardcore beach junkie to one in which anyone can participate.

In kiteboarding, the rider's feet are strapped into a kiteboard — a snowboard-type board made to cut through and across water. A harness, connected to a kite,

works as the power source, pulling the rider across the water. From the kite, four lines extend down to a bar the rider uses to manipulate the motion of the kite and himself. This carefully crafted apparatus gives the rider total control.

With improved teaching techniques and continued growth in technology, getting started in kiteboarding is easier than ever. For beginners, the most important thing needed is instruction. Even the best equipment is useless if one doesn't know how to use it — safely. With Real Kiteboarding and numerous other kiteboarding companies opening across the United States, those new to the sport have many options to get the education needed for a safe, fun experience.

Location accessibility is fueling the sport's popularity. Favorable conditions for kiteboarding — winds of 10 knots or more — are found in nearly every region of the country. Water sport enthusiasts can now find kiteboarding facilities from the shores of Hawaii to the bays of New York and everywhere in between. And, while many kiteboarders also enjoy windsurfing, wakeboarding, surfing and snowboarding, experience is not required. Comfort in the water is the only true necessity.

While the initial cost of kiteboarding is high, the sport is worth the investment. Instruction, an absolute necessity, will be the first major cost incurred. The Zero to Hero three-day course offered at Real Kiteboarding runs \$895. Participants learn all the basic skills of kiteboarding and graduate as safety-conscious, self-sufficient kiteboarders. Specific instructional programs average around \$100 per hour and vary in length and skill levels. As for gear, complete rig packages include a kite with lines, bar, harness, and board, range between \$500 and \$3,000. All said and done, newcomers can expect to break into the sport for about \$2,000.

If you're looking for one of the newest developments in adrenaline-rush therapy that lets you maintain control and push your personal limits, kiteboarding could be the sport for you. For more information on lessons and to see pictures and video of this exciting new sport, go to www.realkiteboarding.com.