

Influencers

Being a female sailor who kitesurfs makes me unusual. It shouldn't. This sport is for everyone.

BY JILL GALLIN

Ride LIKE the WIND



I remember the near-perfect wind conditions: a clean 18 knots from the north. Smooth water slid under my board as the setting sun lit up my yellow Duotone 10. It was a glorious day in the Cyclades off the Greek mainland, behind a strip of land just south of Naxos. What made it unforgettable was the girl.

My heart jumped when I saw my friend and fellow cruiser, Yuka, launch from her boat on a pink Duotone 9 and begin crisscrossing my wake. I had no idea how rare the company of women in this sport would be. Nearly two years have passed, and I've yet to befriend another cruising female kitesurfer.

With women also being historically underrepresented in the sport of sailing, my

kite-surfing observation shouldn't be surprising—though there are compelling reasons for change. Female cruisers hold an advantage, being adept at harnessing wind for travel and being able to reach prime kiting locations by boat. And technically, kitesurfing is about finesse, not strength. As an instructor once told me, women tend to learn faster than men because they don't try to "muscle" the kite. It's a fantastic way for women of any age to have fun and exercise on those days when you can't get to shore. And don't underestimate the "badass factor." A female kitesurfer off her sailboat is undeniably lit.

There are many things to consider about learning to kitesurf off your boat, including



lessons, equipment and safety, but the most important factor is attitude. I'm an apprehensive, instant-gratification seeker, and in the beginning, fear and frustration almost overwhelmed me, but my stubbornness drove me forward. I refused to give up on the fun.

Over time, I overcame imaginary sharks, real muscle pain, and tearful moments of despair. Eventually, I stopped dragging downwind through the chop in search of my board and managed to edge upwind. I learned to do what seemed impossible because of my

attitude. Also, I had help.

I invested in three semiprivate half-day lessons in Antigua, which were pricey, but found better value with private hourly lessons from locals on Union Island. My husband, Michael, provided invaluable support and laughter as we both learned to kite. Additionally, the group dynamic at Frigate Bay, Union Island, in spring 2020 provided extra support. However, kitesurfing from your boat ultimately requires a solo effort and an internal "go girl" attitude to succeed.

match the rider's weight, height and wind conditions. Harnesses, either waist or seat, are made to suit different preferences, with quality bars and lines being crucial for steering and safety. While impact vests and helmets are optional, they add protection during rides.

Kitesurfing from a private sailing vessel offers unique advantages with few drawbacks. While emergency dinghy rescue might pose a challenge for solo sailors, the safety, convenience and adventure outweigh concerns

in anchorages inaccessible to land-based kitesurfers. Finally, seeking out the perfect kite spot is a never-ending epic adventure. (If you've stumbled upon one where cruising female kitesurfers hang out, please let me know.)

We began our kiteboarding journey on a monohull, but now we're launching from our catamaran. Most cruising yachts with sufficient clearance above the aft platform can accommodate kite launching, with stern rafts solving clearance issues if necessary.

Launch setups vary. The most common methods include running lines around the boat's deck, but we prefer storing lines in space-saving, water-filled buckets for tangle-free convenience. Partners should collaborate to devise the best setup for their boat.

There's little to stop female cruisers from getting in the kitesurfing game. Give yourself time and remember your sailing skills. You know how to harness the wind. You can reach ideal kiting locations.

Some tips to help you get started include utilizing board-sports skills. Experience in snowboarding, skateboarding or wakeboarding can smooth the transition. The same goes for kite skills. If you have no previous kiting experience, invest in a trainer kite. Also, watch instructional YouTube videos that feature women. When you're ready to begin lessons, look for teachers who use headsets. It's hard to hear an instructor without them. Wear a full wetsuit to prevent bruising at first. Apply sunblock and protect your eyes with a sacrificial pair of sunglasses. Know that kiting is for everyone, regardless of age, shape or size. Finally, when you accelerate for the first time, embrace the exhilaration, and feel free to curse like a sailor because chances are, no one can hear you anyway.

As cruising friends often are, Yuka is far away now, but I think of her often. On her recommendation, we recently anchored in Musha Cay, Exumas. There, the

GETTING STARTED

My husband and I (Michael, 6 feet tall, 175 pounds; Jill, 5 feet, 4 inches tall, 120 pounds) originally purchased the following two-person equipment package, which included the necessary gear tailored to our specifications:

Kites: Duotone EVO 10 m and 12 m

Harnesses: Ion Vega, size S, Ion FLX IND 13 size L

Boards: Duotone 134-40, 142-43

Bar: Duotone click bar and lines

Impact vests: Dakine size S, M

If you're lucky enough to be similar in height and weight to your kiting partner, then one kite, board and impact vest will suffice. —JG

Bahamas' azure waters—shallow and serene, gently rippled in 16-knot winds from the east—are perfect for kiting. I delighted in watching my husband's tricks, then challenged myself amid the company of enormous, friendly stingrays. The day was magical.

Yet something was missing: the girls. To my fellow female cruisers who might be hesitant: I understand that you've likely spent your life waiting for a free moment to read that book, learn that foreign language or take that nap. So why should you consider a time-consuming activity that seems meant for the guys? The answer lies in the sheer joy of it. Kitesurfing is a gift you give yourself—a chance to embrace fun and adventure simply because you can. I encourage you to accept this gift and relish the experience. Go on and give it a try. •

Jill Gallin, a US Coast Guard-licensed captain, pediatric nurse practitioner and mother of two, is sailing the world with her husband, Michael, on their 2011 Outremer 49. She started kitesurfing at age 50. Check out their blog at svgertry.com.