

The Kiteboarder

THEKITEBOARDER.COM

magazine



Tropical

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STRONG WIND, SMALL KITES

By Melissa Gil
Photos Melissa Gil/Damien LeRoy

BAHIA SALINAS, COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is Spanish for Rich Coast, and its name says it all! Rich for its nature, beaches, mountains, rainforest and people, Costa Rica is a surfing, hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, diving, fishing, windsurfing and kiteboarding paradise. The "Pura Vida" attitude literally meaning "Pure Life" sums up the "Tico" way: peaceful and laid back, always enjoying life's every moment. So if you want to experience the simple and joyful life with a touch of adventure, Costa Rica is the place to go.



WHAT IS THE OFFICIAL SITE NAME? Bahia Salinas or Salinas Bay is located on the sunniest side of the country almost on the border of Nicaragua. Playa Copal is the beach where most people go to kite and the only beach with side-onshore winds in the bay.

WHAT IS THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR TO HIT THIS SPOT? From November through April the bay is blessed with consistent, strong winds, although the season sometimes extends through July. The windiest months are January and February averaging 25 knots, but it can easily come up to 30 or 40 knots, even 50 knots! During the season you are 99.9% guaranteed wind.

WHAT IS THE BEST INTERNET SITE TO CHECK THE WIND/CONDITIONS? www.windguru.com and www.windfinder.com

HOW DO I GET THERE? Fly into the International Airport Juan Santa María located in the capital of San José, approximately 170 miles away which is a 5-hour drive. You can then rent a car or take a cab and drive on the Interamerican Highway towards the city of Liberia and then towards the border with Nicaragua to a town called La Cruz, where you take the dirt roads down to the bay. Be prepared for a bumpy ride on the dirt roads, but know it is well worth it. You can also fly into the International Airport Daniel Oduber located in Liberia which is easier and only 45 minutes away, but the airline tickets are always more expensive.

WHAT IS THE USUAL WIND DIRECTION? North-northeast and northeast, which is side-onshore at Playa Copal.

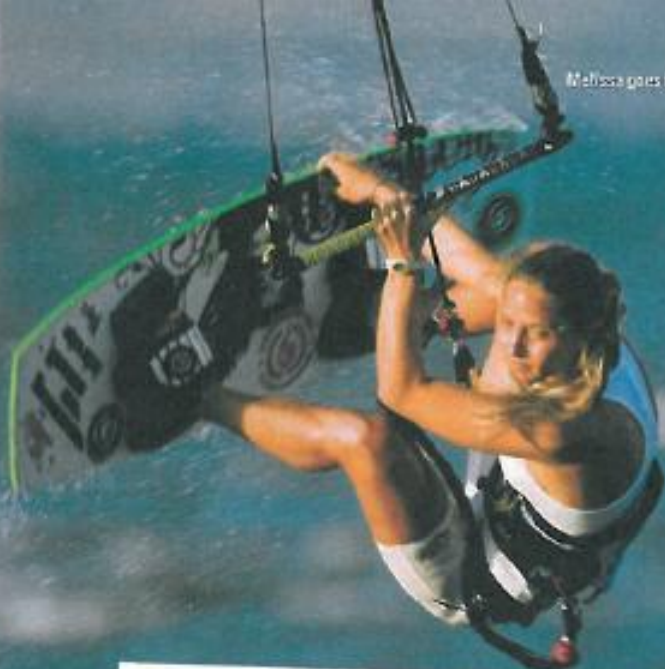
WHAT GEAR SHOULD I BE SURE TO PACK? During the windiest months, December to February, most guys will need a 5, 6 or 7 meter and for the girls, a 4 meter or a trainer kite! Also, if you have an extra bar with a set of short lines this can help out too. Otherwise, the average is around 20 knots, so you can get away with your 9 and 12 meter kites. Normally no wetsuit is needed, but if you tend to get cold a shorty should suffice. Bring booties if you are not comfortable walking on a sandy beach with shells and rocks. Lots of kites rip in these very windy and gusty conditions so bring materials for repairs. Cometa Copal Kitesurfing can repair your kites overnight as well.

WHAT CONDITIONS SHOULD I AVOID? Avoid really windy conditions if you do not have the right size kite or do not feel comfortable. There is always another day to kite. Also, be careful around the shallows at low tide as rocks and other hazards will become exposed, and shuffle your feet in the sand in case to check for sting rays.

WHAT IS THE LAUNCH/LANDING LIKE? Playa Copal is close to a mile long with plenty of room to launch and land at low tide. At high tide the beach can get pretty narrow, but there is still enough room.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST PLACES TO EAT NEARBY? Andreas's Playa Copal restaurant is within walking distance of the Kitehouse villas and serves up great food and incredible views of the bay. A local kiteboarder named Kent puts on great barbecues on Thursday nights, where all kiteboarders can enjoy an evening of good vibes and storytelling. Ehecatl, meaning "God of the Wind" in the Chorotega Indian language is a moderately priced seafood restaurant located in the town of La Cruz. The Blue Dream Hotel

Melissa goes for the grab on her kame tuit.



Damien LeBoy is outsting with style.



A native of Costa Rica, Melissa enjoys a walk with the family dog.



and Spa and the Ecoplaya Beach Resort both have restaurants that serve typical Costa Rican food among other things.

WHO ARE THE LOCAL SCHOOLS AND SHOPS? Cometa Copal Kitesurfing run by Bob Selfridge gives you the opportunity to take lessons, rent gear, buy gear, repair kites overnight, get housing and even go for a massage after a long day of kiting. There is another kitesurfing center run by Nicola Bertoldi. He is a certified instructor and works with the Blue Dream Hotel and Spa.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY? The Kitehouse house rentals are the best deal. The houses are beachfront and include a kitchen, refrigerator and separate bedrooms. The villas sit on a hill overlooking the bay and average a mere \$65/night. If you would rather stay in a hotel the closest one to Playa Copal is Ecoplaya Beach Resort (\$75-100/night including all means or \$80-300/night for villas) located at the La Coyotera beach. You can kite at this beach, but the wind there is onshore so be very careful riding here. Another hotel with more economical rates and amazing views of the bay is the Blue Dream Hotel and Spa (\$15-40/night) located up on the hill, 300 yards from Playa Papoturo.

WHAT IS THE NIGHTLIFE LIKE? This area in Costa Rica is pretty remote with little tourism and is very low-key at night. But after riding nuclear winds all day, it is most likely all you will want to do is chill, eat some good food and sleep. There are some parties and local festivals that take place in La Cruz.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DO IF I GET SKUNKED? It is very unlikely to get skunked if you go during season but you can dive, snorkel, fish, surf, mountain bike or take a horseback riding tour. There is a famous surf spot called Witches Rock close by with one of the country's best breaks and offshore winds. The little fishing town called Puerto Soley has boat tours available that can take you to see the bird's nests at the protected Isla Bolaños. You can also rent kayaks and go explore the unknown corners of the bay or take a canopy tour where you slide across the tropical forest through cables from tree to tree.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RIDING THIS SPOT? Go explore the bay! Ride up to Isla Bolaños, the little bird nesting island in the middle of the bay, where you can find an awesome white sand beach with crystal clear turquoise flat water. Here you can get the biggest airs on the fattest water with the windiest conditions! Just south of the little island between Playa Copal and Playa La Coyotera you can ride among some rocks and slash small, but fun rolling waves. If you go upwind to the northeast tip of Playa Copal, a barrier reef provides shelter from the wind and allows the water to be butter flat.

ARE THERE ANY SAFETY ISSUES OR RULES I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT? Just be careful in the very windy conditions and choose your kite size wisely.

ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING BITS OF TRAVEL ABOUT THIS SPOT? South of the Bay lies the Santa Rosa National Park, one of Costa Rica's most important historic areas which protects one of the last remaining fragments of tropical dry forest in the world. To the southeast is the National Park Rincon de la Vieja known for its stunning diversity of flora and fauna, the active Rincon de la Vieja volcano, fantastic sceneries, beautiful waterfalls, soothing hot springs, a fresh water volcanic lagoon, and picnic areas and long winding trails that you can hike or horse back ride. Rincon de la Vieja literally means "old woman's corner" named after the legend about a young girl who became a recluse living in the mountain after her lover was thrown into the crater by her father.

COSTA RICA RESOURCES:

<http://www.kitewindsurf.com/store/faq.aspx>

http://www.kitewindsurf.com/store/who_and_why.aspx

<http://www.thekitehouse.com>

<http://www.bluedreamhotel.com/faq.htm>

<http://www.ecoplaya.com/>