

WORDS BY KEVIN PRITCHARD | PHOTOS BY JOHN COLGATE

SOUL SEARCHING

Kevin Pritchard re-discovers his old roots

Twenty-five years later, my brother called me up and said, “Hey there’s a race in Baja, you should come down! I am going to bring Erin (Matt’s lovely wife), Kaden (Matt’s son), Erin’s dad John, his wife Bev, and the rest of the family! It will be like the old Days. Come on down!” So I give it a thought, (well not much at all) and said, count me in. With our busy schedules, even though we live on Maui only 5 minutes away, we can go over a week without seeing each other. This was the perfect opportunity to get back to my roots!



Pritchard laying down his new Ezzy in Los Barriles



BAJA MEXICO

Los Barriles is located one hour north of Cabo San Lucas, which is on the very tip of Baja. The weather in the middle of January is usually perfect with 18 to 25 knots of steady side shore winds, temperatures in the mid 80's, and smooth rolling swells, making for possibly some of the best wintertime freeride, slalom, freestyle action you could ask for in North America. If you are looking for an adventure, you can get there by travelling over 1000 miles in a car, I have done this more than once with my family taking 24 hours of road time in 2 days. If you fly in, like we did this time in our older luxurious ages, it is a short two hour trip from LAX. Once you land in Cabo you are greeted by an entourage of taxi drivers ready to get you where you want to go.

I met up with Matt and his family at LAX and we hopped on the plane together. Matt, instead of hauling all his windsurfing gear like me, had just as much stuff as I did with his baby pen here, diapers there, stroller, wife, kid, food for the kid, oh man... I was like this is going to be interesting. At least we all know how to travel because between the 7 of us, we all had about 5 bags each and somehow managed to get it on the plane out of the baggage claim and into the taxi. One taxi, nope, needed two huge taxi vans to get the family and our entire luggage. So we cram in the van, and start the short drive northward, first stop, Cerveza Mart.



Blood red sunset over the bay in Mexico.

Pritchard cranks another gybe.

“ Anxious to get on my brand new Ezzy sails that I had never used before, I started scrambling around to get my stickers on, pull the downhaul and get out on the water ”





Los Barriles this way!



Time to get a nice cold Corona and sink into the Baja lifestyle. We weave in and out, up and down only to pop out just overlooking the windswept Sea of Cortez, the beautiful town of Los Barriles beneath us with tons of sails ripping back and forth. I can't wait to hit the water!

The cosy little town is very nice with a true authentic Baja vibe to it. The locals are very friendly and it makes for a nice environment for everyone that joins in on the trip. On any given day you can find local farmers coming into town with their fresh grown vegetables, and homemade tamales, and when the fish are biting, the local fishermen come through the streets selling their fresh catch making for some nice fish dinners in the evenings. Even though you are thousands of miles from the border, you can get just about anything you need right in town, from the local markets, to the nice Supermercado's which are a new thing since the good old days of dirt roads and one little dirt floor place you could buy a can of beans and a coca cola! Even still the blossomed town does not disrupt the natural feeling. The town has a nice "manana" feeling to it. Everyone is super laid back and if you really need something, they can get it for you. Manana, which means tomorrow in Spanish.

We get to our hotel called the Palmas de Cortez and it was pure luxury. I was totally counting on Matt for all the accommodations, and rides, and we pop out of the taxi to this beautiful Palapa style hotel right on the water. I am super stoked and meet the nice Mexican receptionist and in my best Spanish, Hola, mi nombre es Kevin Pritchard, with a smile. "Pritchard" she says, yes we have one room for Pritchard.. umm I am wondering how we are going to fit 7 people in one room, but not worried, I say ok, sounds good, let's go check it out. We all walk with our 18 bags, past the bar, across the forever pool, overlooking the beautiful windswept ocean, down 15 rooms, to this 2 bedroom, suite with a kitchen, two bathrooms, just the full deluxe, as good as you can get anywhere in the world room.

I am thinking, this is amazing, but where's my room. I was a bit nervous because I knew there was no room for me and the entire family, so I thought Matt, might have had me down in some slim shady place in the back of town. After some talking we managed to find my room just a few doors down, just perfect, close enough to hang out, but far enough to not hear Kaden in the middle of the night! The beaches of Los Barriles are gorgeous! White sand as far as you can see. The launching is easy for all levels of windsurfing.



Brother Matt gives Kaden his first quad bike lesson!

The best place to rent gear is right off the beach at the Vela centre. This rental centre was the very first and might be the only place to get the full line up of gear. The staff are friendly and know just what gear will make your windsurfing holiday a dream come true. For me it was time to hit the water. Anxious to get on my brand new Ezzy sails that I had never used before, I started scrambling around to get my stickers on, pull the downhaul and get out on the water. I managed to convince John, Matt's father in Law to take some photos of me for my upcoming press release. This was great fun, cause I was out ripping around, coming in, checking the shots and then back out on the water with some new and improved ideas. John is a great sport and was fun to work with on the shots. I would boss him around with my photography directing skills; probably not the most ideal situation for someone who is behind the lens doing a favour. We made some great snaps, and I went to work on the computer, writing the press release and getting the photos and news out that Kevin Pritchard and Ezzy Sails had teamed up! Matt threw his head out the window and saw me ripping around, and with the baby sleeping, he knew it was time to hit the water. We went out sailing together for the first time in months. The two of us on our freeride gear just blasting around the warm waters like the two kids we once were..... and still are! Ahh.. the good old days.

One of the great things about this place, is the vast amount of accommodation. If you want luxurious, you can get it, if you want free camping you can get that too. You also have everything in between, and one of the things that is still the same from the last time I was here 15 years ago, was Martin Verdugos, a campground right in the heart of the town.

BAJA MEXICO



It is right next to the Vela Centre and is one of the best places for wind, waves, and easy launching. It is run by the same family and in my opinion is one of the best options to have a little bit of roughing it, mixed in with a little bit of luxury.

The following few days it was all work for Matt and I. Matt was the race director of the Lord of the Wind contest, and I was one of the racers. We had a great group of men and women who came out to battle on the water. I had some good competition with Wyatt Miller, Tyson Poor, and McCray Wilde, in the slalom and course racing, all wanting to be crowned Lord of the Wind. The real race though, was a race between the Kites and Windsurfers. The kites have been talking it up like they were going to slaughter the windsurfers in an all out battle for \$3,500 in a race that took us 3 miles upwind and 3 miles back down wind- winner take all! Just as we got ready to go, the wind filled in nicely and it was game on. Kite versus Sail. Right out of the blocks the kites took a commanding lead; Pritchard was leading the windsurfers and the wind started to increase. As the pack started to spread out, I caught some good wind and was hammering my 8.5 Ezzy Infinity and Starboard 133 as hard as I could. Pushing upwind hard and inching forward on every gust. I made a tack in for the beach, and was just looking for that upwind mark. Pushing and fighting I tacked again, looking around, I could tell that I was going fast. I saw the upwind mark and tacked again and was like, this is my chance, and I better make it happen. I figured, if I was going to beat them, it would be on the upwind section. So I manage to get to the top mark in

first, with plenty of room to spare. I didn't want to get caught on the downwind, so I popped the shoot, and let her fly.

Going three miles downwind on an 8.5 in 25 knots of wind, was a handful but I was not going to let this one slip away. As I made it back down to where the event site was, I could hear the cheers on the beach, kites, windsurfers, it didn't matter, they were all cheering and when I made it in, I have never been greeted by so many supporters. It was fantastic. So many people were happy and for me it felt like I won for the windsurfers, not just me, but for the windsurfing community! It was a great victory. At the skippers meeting before the race, I gave the kites a chance to get some \$\$\$\$ by suggesting that the first place kite or windsurfer gets \$2,000 and the next winner from either kite or windsurfer would get \$1,500- The kites objected to this..... nothing like a little motivation! The funniest thing according to Matt was the kiter who finished 2nd behind me thought he had won- He was fist-pumping across the line and didn't realise I was already on the beach sucking down a cold Corona!!!

The sun set behind the mountains, and as we packed up the Baja feeling overjoyed me. This place will always be a place in my heart, not only for its great winds, but for the people who make up the community. Greater than the sum of its parts, Los Barrels will stoke the inner soul. Bring your kids, bring your family, they will all love it, but just be careful, you might not want to leave. My brother and I, the good old days, well, these are the good old days. Making new memories every day, adding new ones, remembering old ones, just living the dream.

A man deserves a bottle of ice cold suds after a hard days work!