





home
ground
PLAYING AWAY

ROAMIN'
RHODES

While the finishing touches are being made to the new BOARDS Home Ground mobile (a shiny blue Renault), **Dave White** heads out to the Dodecanese archipelago's biggest island to explore the windsurfing potential. It's by no means his first visit, and certainly won't be his last...



Travel the world and you're bound to have a story or two that are best kept under wraps, and most of mine contain the word 'Rhodes'. The spear-shaped outline of this 50-mile long island is rather apt, considering the gladiatorial encounters both on and off the water.

A call made from Gatwick Airport moments before take-off would always ensure an adventurous start to our trips: "Sam, we're arriving after midnight so leave four keys behind the bar. See you in the morning to do the paperwork". Being young and indestructible it took a few years and a lot of medical attention before the dangers of mixing motorbikes and alcohol were fully hammered into our brains. But then the subsequent switch to scooters did little to reduce the intensity of the injuries.

It's been a couple of years since my last two-wheeled misdemeanour (although I don't actually require any mechanical aid to injure myself, as my long-suffering wife will testify), but walking through the door of Sam's Rentals was like a blast from the past. Thoughts of revisiting my youth were, however, soon dashed by a little finger-wagging from Sam, which was all I needed to realise that things have changed. There was no way I was getting a bike this time!

Unlike our riding, meeting Sam wasn't an accident. This avid windsurfer knew his market and set up business adjacent to the biggest windsurfing centre on the island. The ill-informed might say that there are a few rental spots between Rhodes Town and the popular tourist area of lalysos, but outside of Jurgen Niens' Pro Center the others seemed more like 'one man and his board' style rentals.

PICK YOUR CENTRE

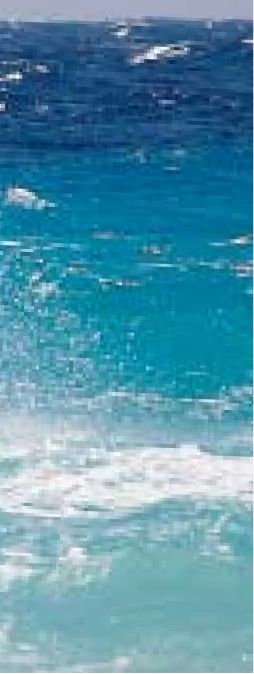
Once in the grounds of the Blue Horizon Hotel you see that the title of Pro Center is clearly justified, as boards and sails stretch across the right side of the beach. For me, seeing the racks filled with F2s was a powerful reminder of the reasons that brought me to this beach in the first place (in a previous life I was the UK F2 importer), but life never stands still so it was no surprise to see new logos emblazoned on the sail rack.

The wind is reasonably consistent and cross-shore from the left, which makes for ideal blasting conditions with a bit of bump-and-jump thrown in for good measure. And it has to be said that I've had my fair share of days where more time has been spent flying than blasting when the wind picks up.

As with most places, special days come along and here is no exception – though when I mention waves don't expect to be riding down-the-line. The waves that frequent this beach are for jumping, and damn fine jumping at that. Get your timing right and you'll be clipping the tips of your opponents' masts to earn that thumbs-up from the crowd.

Picking your windsurfing holiday can be a bit of a lottery, as everyone has fantastically tempting pictures and wind stats to match. In recognition of this the original Pro Center has expanded under Jurgen's name in the shape of two new centres along the same beach. Upwind at the far end of the Blue Horizon's grounds you'll find Pro Center #2, which carries a similarly impressive armoury of weapons. With over 230 boards and around 300 sails (all rigged on 75-100% carbon masts) between the two centres, kit choice and availability is never going to be an issue.

“The scooter trip south turned into a typical ‘mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun’ story”



ELK: Christof Kirschner

AKA: Many – ask my staff!

AGE: 41

OCCUPATION: I manage the Pro Center in Prasonisi together with my partner Martin and my wife Jutta

BEACH: Prasonisi / Rhodes Island, Greece

WINDSURFING: Prasonisi is located in the very south of Rhodes. Whereas ‘laboratory conditions’ reign on the spot’s eastern side, the west side is torrid and radical. Only a sandbar serves to separate these opposing poles, and a natural canal combines them. Gently sloping downwards, the sandy seabed disappears into the turquoise-blue water. A 20m wide strip runs along the sandbar that’s shallow enough to stand in, and perfect for ‘artistic’ pauses or step-by-step waterstart training.

STYLE: The Meltemi – accelerated by the narrow passage between the small, prominent island and the mainland – blows diagonally cross-offshore onto the Mediterranean Sea. The flat water side offers perfect slalom and freestyle conditions. A short sail upwind through a channel sees you segue from shallow water to another windsurfing world, where you can slowly grope your way forward and ride the waves. However, depending on which place you start at, you can also give a radical display of your capabilities and get into bump-and-jump wavesailing. The sandy soil dives slowly into the Aegean Sea on the wave side of the spot, too, thus leaving the waves to break, not hollowly, but softly from the crest. Here, the wind blows cross-onshore, making the waves a bit more demanding. Once you have surpassed the surf you might find yourself disappearing into the metre-deep troughs. The Mediterranean breakers can mount up to three metres and, on ‘big days’, even more.

CRAIC: Beach parties, cliff jumping, go-karts, Young Gun Camp.

FACILITIES: The Pro Center is located right on the shallow water side of the spot – just a few metres from the water. Every year we buy 170 brand-new boards from JP-Australia and 250 rigs from NeilPryde, which are available for you from mid April to October. Freshwater showers and toilets are available directly at the Pro Center, which also provides a sun tent with sunloungers free of charge, a chill-out terrace, a beachwear shop, and a snack bar! An experienced, trained team is in charge of the organisation, and guarantees your safety at the spot. A powerful motorboat is ready and available around the clock to ensure that you can be brought back to shore quickly if problems do arise. One of the station’s safety officers is always present to supervise the location and to spot any trouble right away. Since wind is what drives us, we want to know its precise speed at all times. Therefore, we have installed our own air speed measurement system, featuring a highly sensitive sensor. The system’s reading display is located in the station itself, and the measurements are automatically fed into our website and on a terminal in the 5-star Hotel Atrium Prestige in Lachania.

SECRET: If you come out in early or late season you’ll find Prasonisi quiet but still warm and windy, with fantastic blasting conditions.

TRAVEL: Prasonisi is located about 90km from Rhodes Diagoras Airport. Transfer time is 1.5 hours via buses and taxis for clients, or those who like to be independent can hire a car. You can book the whole arrangement through Sportif in the UK. (If not in the UK, please check out our website to find your country’s booking partner.)

MORE INFO:

Book via Sportif – info@sportif.travel / 01273 844919 / sportif.travel



As both centres are in the hotel's grounds and separated only by a short stroll, you'd have to stretch the imagination to call this a second location in its own right, but with #2's racks filled with JP and Pryde your final call might just come down to a preference in equipment. This had just opened on my last visit, but even then there was talk of a third centre designed to cater for the entry level windsurfer.

The Windmill Pro Center sits 500m downwind from the Blue Horizon, where the beach curves around the bay to leave calm and sheltered waters, making it an ideal spot to take your first windsurfing steps. But just because you sail from here doesn't mean your progression is held back – just the opposite, in fact. Freed from what can become a tricky launch for the newcomer on bigger days, it's up to you to set the line in the sand. The further out you sail, the more you get to enjoy the full force of the wind.

The Windmill Pro Center may have been little but a dream when I last left Rhodes, but the bar that shares the same name left me with more nightmare hangovers than I care to recall. The night hadn't started unless something off the top shelf had slipped down our throats, and all too often ended with a nightcap when the sun was clearly visible in the sky.

TWO SIDES OF TOWN

It's easy to draw a line of priority in the sand between windsurfing and partying, but you only have to be here for just a day to know that the wind isn't going to arrive until late morning, so if the party animal inside you wants to play then a little travel will send you on your way to oblivion.

A stroll into the old town is a good way to kick off an evening. With its lantern-lit courtyard cafés and warren of taverns and souvenir shops, there's a laid-back feel to it, and time and drinks seem to slip by as swiftly as the passing holidaymakers as they search out a present or two for home. I lost count of the occasions

that this relaxed start to the evening sneaked up on us, putting any suggestion of an early night to bed as we inexorably made our way to the new town.

As their names suggest, the two sides of town couldn't be more different. Make it to the new town before midnight and it's free entry or a free drink as the real players don't hit the bars in Orfanidou Street, Academy Square, Nea Agora and the illuminated Mandraki Harbour until the midnight hour has passed. Pull away from here on two wheels and you'll rightfully spend the night on a cold road. Thankfully times have changed, as I've seen too many ambulances picking bodies off the streets.

To find the big clubs you have to look on the fringes of town or head for Faliraki, where the old saying, "What goes on tour, stays on tour" will become your motto. From the first steps onto its streets you feel like you're in the BBC3 series *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents*, or at least the X-rated version.

Over the last few years it has calmed a little, but whatever your age it's an eye-opener. As a parent it's where you hope your kids don't end up partying the night away, while at the same time wishing they had spots like this when you were still in your teens.

CULTURE CULTURE

While headaches and hangovers have blighted too many of my trips, Rhodes doesn't have to be that way. The island has a rich history, though I'm not sure if all can be believed, despite the 300+ days of sunshine it's blessed with.

According to the Myth of Rhodes, after Zeus' victory against the Giants he decided to divide the Earth among the Olympian Gods; the only one who received nothing was Helios, God of the Sun.

Helios had been out of town, and no-one had remembered to include him in the draw. (Even Gods suffer occasional memory problems, apparently.) When he returned he demanded his share, but Zeus told him that he couldn't make the cast again because the rest of the Gods

“While it’s an ideal location for Jem’s hour of power, I had to wait a while for Prasonisi’s real gem to arrive”



ELK: Bertrand Crausaz

AGE: 37

OCCUPATION: Pro Center owner / manager

BEACH: Ialyssos

WINDSURFING: On the west coast of the island we enjoy the reliable and well-known Meltemi wind, but the bay of Ialyssos also benefits from a thermal wind generated from the venturi effect between the island, Turkey and the hills of Monte Smith. This picks up in the afternoon to give a wind range between 16 and 28 knots. The three windsurfing centres are located right on the beach. In front of the Blue Horizon Hotel you'll find the JP/ NeilPryde Pro Center with about 70 boards and 100 sails, and the F2 / North Pro Center with over 160 boards and 200 sails. All the kit is the latest, and it's changed every year. Just 500m to the east you'll find the Windmill Pro Center, which has plenty of beginners' equipment. In this part of the bay the first 200m of water is sheltered from the wind, so conditions are perfect for learning throughout the day.

STYLE: With the wind blowing cross-shore from the left conditions are perfect for slalom and freestyle, with some nice bump-and-jump during the afternoon. Some days the wind turns more cross-on and creates some nice jump-ramps. Due to the thermal effect, during the high season (June to September) the wind is Force 4+ more than 90% of the time.

CRAIC: The Pro Center organises fun races, evening parties, and BBQs at the surf house. Also recommended is Jimmy's Pub, where you can watch the latest windsurfing movies and meet other windsurfers for a fun evening.

FACILITIES: Ialyssos is located just 7km from Rhodes City and 7km from the airport. The town has a tourist area with all the shops, restaurants, cocktail bars and discos you'll ever need, and just a short walk away you'll find a much more laid-back and traditional Greek village vibe.

SECRET: Ask the Pro Center staff where to go to find the best Greek tavern to enjoy a delicious local speciality.

TRAVEL: From Rhodes Diagoras Airport it's just a 10-minute transfer to Ialyssos.

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wouldn't agree. Naturally, Helios was gutted, but asked Zeus and the others to promise that the land that was to rise out of the sea could be his.

As he spoke, a beautiful island slowly emerged from the bottom of the blue sea. Helios claimed it and called it after his favourite nymph, Rhodes. He bathed Rhodes with his own radiance and made it the most beautiful island in the Aegean Sea.

Believe the myth or not, the statue of Helios that was erected between 290 and 292 BC – the Colossus of Rhodes – stood at over 30m (107ft) high and was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. While you'll need a time machine to see it, the island's history is everywhere to be seen. So if Helios takes a day off or the winds fail to arrive, you just might want to take in some of its sights.

Rhodes Town can stimulate your mind or satisfy your hunger, so while there seems to be an endless string of cafés and restaurants to cater for every taste, I picked out one floating in the harbour to mull over old times with Christof Kirchner.

Back in the day we were both in Rhodes for the same reason: F2. I was there as a sailor / importer and he as head of international sales, but as much as he tried to keep the selling message on track, there was always talk of a wave beach down south. Another myth?

PRASONISI

Myth or not, as the years rolled by this was one story that simply wouldn't go away, so finally we decided to make the journey south to the fabled Prasonisi. While Christof took a jeep loaded with kit us Brits thought it a perfect opportunity to top up the tan with a cool scooter ride.

If you ignore everything else I've ever said, don't ignore this bit of advice as the trip was a typical 'mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday

sun' story. Cool as the air might feel on your skin cruising along in shorts, the sun's rays are working just as hard as they do when you're sunbathing on the beach.

By the time we reached the southernmost tip our only discomfort was from the saddle, as we'd travelled 70km at little more than a snail's pace. We jumped into the sea to wash off the road grime before rigging for a couple of hours' sailing, and it wasn't until we arrived back at the Blue Horizon another 70km later that people started to ask "Where the hell have you been!?"

We looked like we'd just popped out of a toaster. We were burnt to a crisp. But in true 'Brits abroad' style we took our medicine at the bar to ensure that our pain the following morning was both internal and external. So, if the idea of a sail in Prasonisi appeals, don't go by bike and cover up if you do.

The suntan wasn't the only thing that didn't go according to plan, as the promise of waves also failed to materialise. What we found instead was exactly the opposite – a speedstrip that was truly butter-flat where we could hang on to 6.0 sails regardless of how overpowered they felt.

While this mythical wave beach turned out to be just that, a myth, Christof proclaimed he was going to leave the job and set up a surf school on the beach. "Are you nuts?" we exclaimed. "There's nothing here but an empty beach!"

A year passed before his plans were drawn up, but eventually the time had come for him to leave. Skype and email are all very well for keeping in contact, but there's no better way to see how things have changed than going in person.

Thanks to BOARDS' very own technique and publicity machine, Jem Hall, I had to confess to already knowing the barren beach of the past was now a popular destination for freestylers





WINDSURFING



home ground

“In Faliraki, ‘What goes on tour, stays on tour’ will become your motto”

and blasters alike. However, having looked up the Greek translation of Prasonisi before leaving home I knew we weren't technically staying there. We were still on Rhodes at the beginning of a sandspit that not only joined us to the Island of Prasonisi, but also divided two different seas. While the mellow Mediterranean sits to the south, you only need take a few steps to the north to jump into an agitated Aegean. The prevailing wind blows out of the north to push a small choppy wave onto the Aegean side before crossing the sand to leave the sandspit off to cross-offshore.

With its varied conditions it's no wonder Jem spends a month here every year, but it's the flat waters of the Mediterranean that are the real pull. As he stands on the shoreline his clients can sail within an arm's length, as the water isn't just flat but also waist-deep by its edge.

While this may seem an ideal location for Jem's 'hour of power', I had to wait a while for Prasonisi's real gem to arrive, but sure enough the north side of the spit had logo-high waves rolling onto its shores. The best way out from the centre was to sail up to the far end of the spit along the flat side before crossing to the waves.

In this corner you get a chance to slip behind the white water that crashes along the beach. Once out there was plenty of space to ride and jump in both directions, and if you should get it wrong the waves were spaced out enough to see you waterstarting away before the next arrived.

That doesn't mean you can hang around for too long as wind and waves will inevitably push you to the shore, where you'll have to work hard to get yourself out back or take the easy route and walk to the top of the beach again.

Prasonisi's après surf couldn't be more different to that of Rhodes Town. There's

nothing on the island itself apart from a lighthouse at its head, though some small diversion can be had by observing the quirky habit of its visitors, who seem to enjoy nothing more than stacking stones. Hundreds, possibly thousands of mini stone towers cover the hilltops, and you can't help but add to their numbers.

Home sits at the other end of the spit, where you'll find a couple of motels, two restaurants and a general store aptly named 'The Super Market Surfer', which sells everything from apples to wetsuits. And if that's not enough, before its shutters close it turns into an open-air pub for the night.

Being tucked out of the way I was surprised by the varied menus and size of the restaurants. They seemed to offer more than us windsurfers could cope with, but we have to thank the stone stacking tourists that bus in during the day to keep the cooks busy while we're out at play.

As for the accommodation, this is no Blue Horizon, but if it's luxury that you seek then catching the shuttle bus will soon have you sipping a cocktail by one of the many pools of the Atrium Prestige Hotel. Strangely enough, this is exactly where I had my first encounter with our test Clones, and if they can't work out what's best, who can?

Maybe it was the people I was with or just simply the laid-back feel of the area, but the entertainment here didn't have to revolve around the shot glass; in between the beach and the Atrium was a small village where time seems to have stood still. But I'll leave you to discover it for yourself, as sitting in the restaurant at its heart you felt like you'd found something that others had missed, and maybe that's a feeling I'd like to find again upon my return. **B**

