

JERICOACOARA

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So, I'm back in the office after a weekend sailing at an unpleasantly cold inland lake; winter suit, hood and boots were definitely required. Sitting in my inbox is an offer to fly over to Brazil in December to check out the windsurfing at Club Ventos, Jericoacoara. With a reputation for winter warmth and wind, combined with the famously laid-back Brazilian culture and lifestyle, Jericoacoara is meant to be one of the best places on the planet for windsurfing. After about half a second thought, I turned it down... nope, not really!

WHERE?

Jericoacoara, or Jeri as it's usually known, is located on the north-eastern Atlantic coast of Brazil, close to the equator. Because of this it is extremely warm; inland it's humid and sticky, but out at the coast it's pleasantly hot. Boardies and a teeshirt are all that you'll need, even in the evening there's no way that you'd want to wear a sweater. Being in the Southern hemisphere it's quite a distance from the UK; flights via Lisbon to Fortaleza (the nearest airport) are operated by the Portuguese airline TAP, with the transatlantic flight taking around eight hours. The plane I was on was pretty empty and it was possible to stretch out over several seats, after actually enjoying the Portuguese airline food and a glass of wine. On arrival at Fortaleza I was met by the slightly surreal sight of a team of orange-attired dwarves who check my papers and left me humming the song from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory for the rest of the day. It's a pretty modern airport, without any of the chaos that greets you at some places. From Fortaleza it's about a 5 hour transfer to Jeri. I was picked up by the guys from Club Ventos in a Landrover, which seemed a bit over-engineered compared to the small city cars in Fortaleza. Leaving the city however, and the Landy came into its own. The roads gradually became smaller and smaller, turning off the motorway onto a wide tarmac road, then into a dirt trail, then finally half an hour bouncing across sand dunes on the beach, in Paris-Dakar style. The transfer was an adventure in itself, with jungle fauna, huge circling condors and stunning white beaches to look at on the way; it's certainly not dull. Finally you arrive in Jeri and it's certainly worth the travelling time!

THE WINDSURFING

The Northeast coast of Brazil sits in the path of the transatlantic trades, which blow pretty much all year round but are at their strongest from August through to December. The wind is funnelled and strengthened along the coast at Jeri, adding a couple of Beaufort compared to Fortaleza which is a strictly Formula location (it was the location of recent Formula world championships). The wind kicks in at around 11am, is at its strongest early afternoon, and decreases slightly as the day wears on (and you wear out). Generally though, it's 4.7m weather, and I didn't use any other sail size in the 5 days I spent sailing there. Some of the larger guys were on 5m, but pretty much everyone else was on 4.7m. It's extremely reliable from late September through to December; I spoke to someone who had sailed every day for 6 weeks on sails of 6m or less. It's also one of the few places in the world that is seriously windy in November, OK, apart from the UK, but it's a lot warmer! The wind blows offshore in Jeri village so it can be a little gusty on the inside, but it sits on a point (see aerial photos) so once you sail round the headland you're into clean, strong wind, ideal for powered up bump and jump type sailing. The strong wind blowing up the coast gives a running swell moving along the coast, which wraps round the headline giving breaking waves in front of the village. Jeri has to be one of the best places in the world to learn to wavesail! The waves are around waist to shoulder height, and gently break as they move along the beach, reforming and breaking on the inside. You try to pick up a wave on the outside, head tight upwind and hit it at the point then bear off downwind into cleaner wind, usually getting about five bottom and top turns on each run in.





The bottom is sandy with no rocks or coral to cause damage to you or your kit, so any mistakes will not be punished. The warm water makes falling in an absolute pleasure anyway and the beach shelves gradually so you are usually able to stand up. They waves aren't especially spaced out so it can be difficult to spot the best ones, but if you make a mistake and fall off the back of a wave you can pick up another one quite easily and still get a good ride.

It can get quite crowded at the point where the waves are biggest and the wind cleanest, so you have to make it fully clear to some of the less polite sailors. The Italian sailors are the worst at dropping in on you, but bottom turning reveals your intentions and they generally back off, leaving you to enjoy the wave to yourself. Saying this, the sailing area is pretty big, and there is plenty of space further downwind away from the crowds at the point. One problem that you don't have to deal with at Jeri are kitesurfers, although the centre does have kite kit, they are not allowed in the main wavesailing area so you don't have to watch out for lines when you're sailing, a real bonus.

As well as the main sailing area there are a couple of other spots within sailing distance if you want to sail pretty much alone. Upwind of the point there is a sideshore break only really suitable for the pros, as the beach is rocky and mistakes are punished heavily. Head downwind toward the dune and there is a side-on sandy beach, ideal for relaxing riding. It's not all about waveriding though, the flat and shallow water in between the waves is ideal for freestyle, and there is a small group of Brazilian slalom sailors who blast further offshore out of the wave break. The small waves in the launch area do make the place pretty challenging for learners though; you'll need to be able to waterstart to sail here, but if you can then it's one of the best places in the world for easy wavesailing. Because of the fantastic conditions the sailing standard at Jeri is very high, with PWA sailors visiting to use the place as a winter training ground. The locals are also extremely good sailors; rising PWA star Marcelo 'Browzinho' Browne and new boy Edvan de Souza hail from Jeri.

THE CENTRE

The main windsurfing centre is Club Ventos, where I was based. There are a couple of other small kit-hire places, but they don't have a particularly high standard or range of equipment. Club Ventos on the other hand has a good standard of kit, ideal for the location. For waveboards they have EVOs and JP radical waves, ideal for when it really blows and you want something manoeuvrable. There's also a various sizes of Freestyle-Wave boards, with a good turn of speed for getting out though the waves and providing a little more float and easy of use than the waveboards. They also have a range of freestyle and freeride boards for if the wind is lighter. All are current or previous year's models, with nose protectors fitted, and you book a board size to use on your stay. The sails are all Neil Pryde wavesails, stored with the booms attached. I preferred slightly more downhaul than some of the sails were set with, but this was just probably as the wind drops as the afternoon wears on, so rather than coming in to change sails people just let off some downhaul tension. It's a short walk, 20-50m depending on tide, from the centre to the water so it's not too far to grab a different sail size, but when you're at somewhere as laid back as Jeri, you just can't be bothered. You can store your own kit there for a small fee, maybe worthwhile if you're thinking of staying for a long period.

Club Ventos was the first windsurfing centre in Jeri, and has become slightly more sophisticated since the early days, when kit was carried down to the water's edge by a donkey called Robby Naish.

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Now the centre is one of the biggest and slickest operations I have ever seen, all in an amazing environment. The centre looks like a piece of paradise, with hammocks hanging from palms and loungers, all overlooking the main wave break so that you are in an ideal place to watch the wind to arrive in the morning. The Brazilian Club Ventos staff are super-friendly and very knowledgeable about the conditions and what kit to use (pretty easy when the conditions are so predictable!), and seem to know everyone's name straight away. There's a small Club Ventos shop that sells rash vests, beachwear and sailing gloves for when soft hands start to decay in the warm water. Because the centre is raised on a small ledge and closest to the wavebreak, it has the prime spot for watching the action making it the hub of Jeri windsurfing life, with everyone dropping in for lunch or just to chill out and watch the action. Lunch is charged by weight, encouraging you to eat healthy salads and nothing too heavy to weigh you down on the water in the afternoon. It's a pretty cosmopolitan centre, with lots of French and Italians coming over, along with Americans and Canadians who fly south for the winter. The best thing about the centre is just the atmosphere; it's so relaxed and chilled out sitting under the palm trees and watching the sailing. In the evenings everyone hangs around for happy hour beers, watching the locals go out windsurfing or surfing in the sunset. If you're into surfing, it's definitely a break suited more to longboards, the slow waves don't really have the punch for shortboards. There are regular video evenings, either pro's films or the day's action dissected with feedback from the club instructors so you can see how good (or bad!) your waveriding is. It seems that local life is hardly affected by the presence of windsurfers; the fishermen still use simple sailing boats to bring in the day's catch, and the entire village climb the sand dune at the end of the day to watch the sunset over the sea. The main beach activities for the Brazilians seems (unsurprisingly) to be football, sandboarding, or capoeira, a kind of spinny martial-art-cum-dancing combination that the Brazilians make look effortless. Sometimes the capoeira attracts large crowds of locals, although guys on the beach practicing on their own were pretty impressive to my untutored eye. Beginner's classes are available on the beach if you feel flexible enough to give it a go yourself.

THE VILLAGE

Jeri village sits in an environmental protection zone in the Ceara national park, and all major development is banned. There are no high-rise hotels and MacDonalds here! With no tarmac roads and nothing except sea and sand dunes for miles around, you really feel like you've escaped from the rigours of modern life. There are no ATMs or banks in Jeri for example, so get any cash out at the airport. Jeri is a popular tourist destination for the Brazilians in Fortaleza as well as foreign windsurfers, so there is a good infrastructure. There are several small Brazilian hotels and many pousadas, Brazilian guest houses available at reasonable rates. If you want to stay in style though, Mosquito-Blue is probably the best hotel in the village, with a The main street has restaurants, bars, local mini-supermarkets and shops to buy food and souvenirs, with a maze of smaller streets off to the side; it's very easy to get enjoyably lost when shopping. There's lots of great stuff to bring back for (jealous) friends and family; silver jewellery, beads, carved wood, and lots of Brazilian clothes in yellow and green. In the day and early evening the village has a laid-back atmosphere, with not much going on, and



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some of the shops and restaurants not opening until later. Windsurfing in the heat of the day tires you out, and going for a quick sleep after sailing is highly recommended! You'll need the nap, as nothing really happens until very late; the party seems to kick off around midnight. The beach end of the main street is colonised by cocktail places, offering a range of freely mixed drinks, all extremely strong and extremely cheap. The bars start to play samba and parties can go on until sunrise, although I was never able to stay up that long, something to do with the strength of the cocktails and of the wind! Jeri has plenty of good and reasonably priced restaurants, and the portions are pretty large by anyone's standards, and good value at around £5 for a main course. There are loads of Brazilian places serving steak and fish, as well as great pizza places (order one between two people, they're huge) and even sushi.

GOOD THINGS

If I've made this place sound like paradise, that's because it pretty much is. The combination of perfect, easy wavesailing, bathtub-warm water and the generally chilled-out Brazilian atmosphere that make Jeri so special.

FOOD AND DRINK

With no idea of what Brazilian food would be like, I was thoroughly impressed with the local cuisine. Here's some of the particularly good local stuff:

Green Coconut (Água de Coco)

The main soft drink in Brazil comes from the water of the unripe green coconut, and completely different to the coconut milk in the brown and hard coconuts we get in the UK. It's kind of fresh and limey, and great for a quick drink during a break. The top is cut off with a knife, and then a small hole is bored through, and you drink from the husk with a straw.

Açaí

A fruit which is mashed and served with nuts and bananas like a smoothie. It tastes kind of chocolaty, and the Brazilian guys claim it's great as an energy drink. Studies have shown it to be full of antioxidants.

Beer

The Brazilians are as serious as the Ozzies about keeping their beers cold, and serve them in an insulating plastic jacket with a lid. A 600ml bottle costs about 75p.

Chilli Sauce

Restaurants tend to put a couple of bottles on the

table, hot and stupid hot. Finding out which is which can be interesting.

Steak

The steak is very good, coming either from Brazil or Argentina, and served with a range of sauces. Look out for the sun-dried steak (carne de sol), which tastes kind of bacon-like. Brazilian Churrasco restaurants are all you can eat meat places, ideal for the real carnivores out there.

Seafood

With Jeri being a working fishing village, the seafood is of the highest quality, with excellent prawns, sea bass, red snapper and swordfish, usually sold by weight.

Beans (feijão)

Beans are the national dish of Brazil, and come served with every nearly every main meal. They're a little dull sadly. Sorry Brazil

Wines

Brazilian wine is ok, but Chilean and Argentinean wines are excellent but slightly more expensive

Caipirinha

Almost worth the journey in itself! Caipirinha is the Brazilian cocktail, refreshing and sharp making it ideal

for the hot Brazilian evenings. A large and very strong Caipirinha will cost about 75p from the vendors on the beach in the evenings.

Ingredients:

1 lime, quartered

1 tablespoon of sugar

1 shot of cachaça, Brazilian sugar cane spirit.

½ cup of ice cubes

Preparation:

Place the lime and sugar in the bottom of glass.

Using the handle of a wooden spoon, crush and mash the limes.

Pour cachaça and ice over mashed up stuff, stir and enjoy.

Caipirioska

The same as a Caipirinha, but with Vodka instead of cachaça.

Macaxeira, or Manioc

A kind of flour and butter combination that has a potato-like texture, very tasty and seems to come as a side dish with most meals.



THE NUMBERS

Air temp: 30C

Water temp: 27C

Thickness of wetsuit required: 0mm

Sunblock SPF: 30+ is pretty sensible

Most common sail size: 4.7m

Sharks: 0

Other biting/poisoning things: 0

Price of beer: 75p

Price of cocktails: 75p

Approx number of units in the cocktails: 5

Flight time: 2+7 hrs

Time diff: 3hrs

Visas required: 0