

Back in December 2002 we despatched **Gary Crossley** to Jericoacoara, Brazil, to report on one of the hottest new hot spots to hit the scene since fire was invented. Since then the place has become extremely popular, and poor Gary has been suffering sleepless nights worrying about whether his telling the world how good it is has been directly responsible for its ruination. There was only one thing for it...



Jeri revisited

Ah, the twists and turns of life, eh? No matter what your personal belief system, it's hard to deny that there are strange forces at work in our universe. If you'd asked me four years ago what the chances were of being sent off to a wind and wave-blessed equatorial Elysium on Brazil's north-eastern coast, I'd have said around 10,000 to one against. The chances of getting there twice? In the millions. But thanks to a bizarre incident involving my long-suffering editor, a Steinway baby grand piano and a fourth-story window, that's exactly what happened.

Naturally, I popped into casualty to see how he was doing.

"*Mmph gelph pfhrd shamf bstd*", he spluttered through an imbroglio of tubing. I took this to mean: "*I appear to have been shafted by a Steinway. You'll have to go to Brazil in my place. Get back out there and see what's changed since your last visit.*" Or words to that effect...

That's not the sort of invitation you turn down, and I must admit I was keen to discover exactly what had been going on since I last visited Jericoacoara back in December 2002. It's certainly

become a hugely popular location since I spilled the beans about how good it was in **BOARDS** April 2003, which then led to the **BOARDS** Test Team adopting the place as their small-board testing location for the following two seasons and a whole heap more coverage. It's always a concern that when you publicise paradise it can turn from perfection to purgatory, or worse, *Torremolinos* – and I must admit I was worried about what I'd find. Indeed, I'd been experiencing disturbing dreams in which the beautiful beach had been cruelly scarred with high-rise hotels, casting black shadows over the village and wiping out the wind. Hideous themed pubs had sprouted like acne on a teenager's face, discharging deafening music and loud-mouthed lager louts, and the previously pristine dunes had been destroyed by buggies and Jeremy Clarkson's Range Rover. And somehow it was all my fault...

So, what's changed?

Fortunately, my fears were unfounded. As the local Rubens Barichello bounced the 4x4 over Jeri's streets of sand as we drove back into the

village for the first time, I was struck by how little had changed. There are for sure a few more restaurants and shops, a couple more cyber-café's and, if memory served, a couple of new donkeys, but essentially the village looked – and most importantly, felt – exactly the same.

The beach, too, looked no different. Not a palm out of place, and no detectable signs of development. Fishermen were still tending to their *jangada* boats, the enigmatic dude with a *berimbau* bow and a straw hat was still standing at the water's edge, silhouetted against that big, bright Brazilian sky, local kids were still fooling around with a football, getting in shape to kick us out of the 2014 World Cup, Jem Hall was still sitting outside the same bar we'd left him at back in November '04, cows and donkeys still moseyed on by, the wind was still blowing, exfoliating my ankles with fine particles of sand, and out on the water I could see those familiar flashes of colour flaka-flicking away as windsurfing art was being practised in the small but ever-present waves. Hmmm... Look like 4.7s, too.

I breathed a small sigh of relief...

So nothing's changed then?

Well no. And yes. Let me put it like this. For a place that hasn't changed much there have been a lot of changes. Thankfully, as far as we windsurfers are concerned, it's more *viva la difference* than change for change's sake.

The big news is the brilliant new Club Ventos windsurfing centre, which has been moved a fair way from its original location and is now situated bang on the beach right next to the prime sailing spot. Indeed, any closer and it would be in it.

Covering 3,000m², the centre is by no means small, so the fact that I didn't spot it from a distance is testimony not to my failing eyesight but to the care taken to ensure it was constructed completely in harmony with the environment (no tree was cut down in the process).

This isn't your average windsurfing centre. What was started back in 1997 as a dream and a simple surf-shack by a small ball of energy called Fabio Nobre, has grown and evolved into something quite special. I was impressed by the amount of thought that has been put into the details – the small but significant things that all add up to make a big difference. For instance, after only two days I noticed that the attentive staff knew all the guests by name, which helps to create a really friendly atmosphere. This is bolstered by the decision to put quality before quantity by not increasing the number of boards and sails, thereby limiting the number of guests and keeping everything cosy and personal. Another nice touch is the way the food – which is excellent, by the way – is served. Instead of charging per meal, you pay by weight. Fantastic. When you're windsurfing all day (and you will be), the last thing you want to be doing is bolting down a big bucket of grub at lunchtime and getting stomach cramps on the water. This way, you can eat as little and as often as you like throughout the day, keeping those energy levels topped up without paying a fortune.

In addition to the restaurant and the kit (all new-season Neil Pryde, JP, and Starboard) Club Ventos also has a shop, and offers lessons for all ability levels. Planned additions for this season include a cyber-café, massage therapy and 'Dare2Fly Kite Centre'. (But don't worry folks – kitesurfers have their own part of the beach, so they don't get in the way of windsurfers.)

As an all-in-one deal, this centre ticks all the boxes. Good location? Check. Good conditions? Check. Wind every day? Check. Close to the water? Very. Good kit? Good staff? Check. Good food? Check. Full range of services? Check. Great views? Oh yes. And so it goes on. But more than that, the place is about people. At some point during the average day, just about everyone who's out on the water will drop into Club Ventos, using it like a windsurfing community centre to meet up with friends, chat, eat, watch the action, and generally socialise.

As Fabio himself said, when I eventually managed to catch up with him as he seemingly teleported from one place to the next: *"When I built Club Ventos I didn't want it to be just another windsurfing centre, but an environment where people are welcome to spend their days, and where they feel looked after."*

Job done, I'd say.



BRAZIL



Anything else?

Compared to 2002, I couldn't help noticing that the quality of accommodation has been notched up a few levels, and at both ends of the price scale there's now far more choice for the discerning windsurfer than before.

Although nowhere in Jeri is very far from the sea, if you can, do try and get yourself booked into the splendid new Jeriba Pousada, which is right next to Club Ventos and just a lazy thought from the beach. Stay here, and apart from a view to die for the total distance you'll travel twixt room and ripsville is so close to zero that it's not worth thinking about. Windsurfing life just doesn't get any easier.

It's pretty comfy, too. There's a small pool and spa-bath, beach-bar, and although my room lacked the jacuzzi the jammy Dutch guys next to me had, all rooms have excellent facilities, including superb showers, satellite TV, fridge, and most importantly, air-conditioning that actually works – essential if, like mine, your roommate is an ascended master of nocturnal eruption.

Sorry to bang on about this, but it is hard to describe in words the deep joy experienced when you come across an AC unit that performs so well. This may be a bugbear of mine, but air-conditioners in far-flung locations so often create the noise of an industrial megalopolis in an ultimately futile struggle to keep the room slightly below the temperature of the Earth's core, leaving you to choose between staring bug-eyed at the ceiling all night (ON) or trying to sleep in a pool of your own sweat (OFF).

As I said earlier, it's the little details that count...

Digging a little deeper...

Aside from these surface changes, what was really interesting was the chance to observe the impact that windsurfing tourism has had on this once simple fishing village and its 1,500 inhabitants. Certainly, things have come a long way since the visibly vibrating form of Fabio Nobre single-handedly introduced Jericoacoara to the world by knocking on the doors of tour operators and magazines all around the world, convincing them through sheer energy and passion that it is the place to be. And, while there will always be those that will lament the passing of the quieter, quainter days, when Jeri was unknown to all but the privileged few and a donkey called Robby Naish pulled a kit-laden cart down to the water's edge, there's no doubt that most people view the changes in positive light.

This is down to three main factors – economic, environmental and cultural – which all contribute to the symbiotic relationship that now exists between windsurfing and the village.

The arrival of more windsurfers has ensured a steady flow of tourists during a season when Jeri was generally empty, which has created more employment, boosted the local economy and raised the standard of living. Moreover, because of Jeri's remote location, the revenue generated from windsurfing tourism stays in the village.

Environmentally, windsurfing is low impact, which works very well with the area's status as a protected national park.

And culturally, the villagers can benefit from being able to access a much more cosmopolitan cross-section of society. While I was there I



bumped into more nationalities than I have space to list, which exposes the locals to a range of languages and knowledge that isn't available to most Brazilians. This, of course, is particularly good for the kids...

The Jeri kids

There's no question that the greatest influence of windsurfing in Jeri has been on the children. Apart from exposure to a wider cultural milieu, it has provided them with opportunities that kids from other fishing villages can only dream about.

As a growth medium, Jeri is a pretty powerful fertiliser. Plant a kid – any kid – in an environment that's super-saturated in the sport in a place where the world's best windsurfers come to train and where you can sail every day, and you can watch them grow before your very eyes. I was stunned by the talent these kids have, and it wouldn't surprise me if we see a Jericoacoara-born champion in the near future.

Of course, they can't do it on their own. Enter stage left, right and centre, our old friend Fabio once more: *"By recognising the possibility to provide opportunity for the children of Jeri as well as the desire to give something more to the community, we developed the idea of the Club Ventos Windsurfing Foundation,"* Fabio told me, fizzing with enthusiasm. *"The Foundation will be made possible by sponsorship and donations from manufacturers, private parties, and Club Ventos. Its goal is to improve the future development and success of Jeri boys and girls by getting them involved in windsurfing as well as encouraging them to attend school and excel. How? By getting kids involved in an after-school program where they can learn and practise windsurfing if they achieve a certain level of school grades and attendance. Club Ventos will also sponsor foreign language lessons. Older and more experienced children will be encouraged to contribute by teaching the younger and/or more inexperienced kids."*

That all sounds great, but...

OK, the \$64k question – what about the crowds? Surely now the place is so popular it's rammed to the rafters and everyone's playing sardines in the swell, I hear you say.

Well, from my own experience, comparing December 2002 to December 2005, the numbers on the water were honestly no higher (check out the aerial pic). The village itself, if anything, was actually a bit quieter. Talking to members of the Test Team who have been there three Novembers in a row, it does seem that this has very much become peak time, and it has indeed become busier then, particularly on the point. Give windsurfers an entire coastline to play on and they will all congregate, like flies around a putrefying paw-paw, in one place. Yep, where the waves are. Then they will bitch like hell about the crowds.

But the great thing about this place is that **there is plenty of room to stretch out**. Around 15 miles of room, in fact. Jeri's beach seems to go on forever, so it's easy to make your escape. You can either sail upwind past the point to the next beach, where conditions are more cross-onshore but usually free of sailors, or head downwind and find your own private patch to play in.

The increasing popularity of freestyle has made it a slightly more hectic place to be, as the small waves are so perfect for doing tricks off, and now there are people busting out moves every which way, which means you definitely have to keep your wits about you at the busiest times. But actually, this supposed season peak at November is a bit of an odd one anyway – in real terms much more to do with the fact that there aren't that many other places in the world which are really good in November, rather than it being the very best time to visit Jeri. Their season actually stretches from mid-summer right through to December or January, and while the winds may be at their very strongest in early November – does it really matter to you that it's 35 knots rather than 25-30? Yes, this place gets seriously windy at peak season!

It can't all be good, surely?

Alas, no, it can't. Jericoacoara may remain an isolated, picture-perfect paradise, but technology needs no roads to advance, and there was one thing that had changed since my last visit that I didn't like.

My mobile phone worked.

Thankfully, my editor was in no position to make any calls. And besides, I've learnt how to use the off button...

The really bad thing...

Is having to leave.

As my stay in Jeri moved inevitably towards its end and I reluctantly prepared to head back to the frozen reality of brumal Britain, I was nevertheless suffused by a warm glow. This rapidly became a red-hot glow, and just before it approached incandescence I mused upon the folly of sunbathing under the equatorial sun after forgetting to apply the SP40. But the discomfort didn't dampen a sense of deep satisfaction that came from the realisation that, although Jeri has changed, and, as more and more people learn of its delights, will continue to do so, it isn't going to be destroyed – like so many places – by overdevelopment. Not while the current environmental laws and building restrictions are in place, anyway.

On my last evening, as I settled down on a lounge to soak up the sunset, sip an ice-cold *caipirinha* out of a coconut husk and watch the longboarders lap up the last of the day's waves, it struck me that the real reason that Jeri is such a jewel isn't just down to the consistent conditions, or the remote location, or the stunning scenery. It's much more simple than that. It's because people care about the place. Jericoacoara is in good hands, and under that stewardship will always retain its uniqueness, its quirky charms, and its character.

Long may it remain so...





Jeri fax

Location: Jericoacoara is on Brazil's north-east coast, in the state of Ceara, two degrees south of the equator and 180 miles from Fortaleza. It was and still is a fishing village, which was 'discovered' by backpackers in the late 1980s. There has been a slow and controlled development of tourism since then, as Jeri is a National Park protected by the local nature authority, which enforces strict rules. The 130 square-miles around the village is an Environmental Protection Area, and under this protective umbrella buildings are limited to the village area (just 1 square-kilometre) and hunting, road building and causing pollution are big no-nos. You need government permission to pick a flower...

How to say it: "Jeri-kwah-kwahra"

Getting there: TAP Air Portugal has regular flights from Gatwick to Fortaleza via Lisbon. The transfer at Lisbon is a breeze, and your baggage stays on the plane. You're looking at around nine hours flying time (two to Lisbon and seven to Fortaleza), so allow a whole day for travelling. Transfer from Fortaleza to Jeri takes around four hours by 4x4 (the last 15-miles to Jeri are across Frank Herbert *Dune* terrain), or spoil yourself and take in superb views of the coastline by helicopter (one hour). If you can stretch to it this is the way to travel...

Booking: Unless you're the adventurous type who likes living life on the edge, to have all your flight, transfers, accommodation and kit needs catered for, call Jeri specialists Sportif on 01273 844919 / www.sportif-uk.com / info@sportif-uk.com

Conditions: Err... In a word, windy. Every day. If you're the average weekend windsurfer, you will sail more in two weeks here than a whole year in the UK.

There's no need to look at the forecast – it's like clockwork. Trade winds travel east to west from the shores of Africa, and when they hit Jeri they're accelerated and strengthened by a hill (or *serrate*) just upwind from the town. If you're not a total beginner, you'll really enjoy Jeri, and can't fail to improve your sailing in the challenging, yet non-threatening and consistent conditions. I said this last time, and nothing's changed – Jeri has to be one of the best places to learn wavesailing. Although it does get big waves on rare occasions, most of the time they're chest high or smaller (but long), and great fun. When you wipe-out you're not going to get brained by a boulder either, as the bottom is soft sand. If you don't fancy playing in the waves, head downwind and find your own patch – the beach stretches for some 15-miles. Plenty of people do learn to windsurf here, but beginners normally choose the morning period when the wind is lighter. If you're of early intermediate standard then avoid November, as it's probably going to be **too** windy for you!

For those into flat-water blasting with bigger

kit, there's a huge inland freshwater lake a 20-minute buggy ride away. Known as 'Paradise Lake', it's nine miles long with gently sloping banks, crystal clear waters – and a couple of bars for essential thirst-quenching.

When to go: The most consistent conditions occur from July until the end of December, when you get solid, dependable wind every single day. It's rarely less than 20 knots, with the strength peaking in around November, occasionally at 40+ knots. The best waves are from October to January.

On the web: Typing 'Jericoacoara' into Google will return over 100,000 pages, so there's plenty of info out there. To have a look at the conditions and learn a bit more about Club Ventos, check out www.clubventos.com (which may well have a webcam set up by the time this is printed...)

Eating out: There's no shortage of great restaurants, offering everything from sushi to steaks and more traditional local fare, and usually to a very high standard.

Nightlife: Hit the bars much before midnight and you could be forgiven for thinking everyone's light-weighted out and gone to bed. You'd be partially right, too. After frazzling your every fibre to quivering exhaustion on the water, the routine here is to take a nap after dinner, set the alarm to midnight, then hit the town. The action shifts from bar to bar until sunrise, with the liveliest being in Main Street, which turns into cocktail alley as Jeri's band of independent mixers and shakers vie for your custom. Around 70p buys you the compulsory *caipirinha* or a cool chocolaty *capeta*, or you could go crazy with a *coco loco*. One thing is certain – all will contain enough of the primary ingredient to get you rocking until sunrise. Where others measure spirits in fingers, here they measure in fists. The great thing is that the wind only picks up after 11am, so there's time to sleep in. Lovely...

Other things to do: Take your pick from sandboarding, kitesurfing, sailing, scuba diving, paragliding, or horse riding. Limber up those windsurfing muscles with some yoga lessons, or





check out the *capoeira* fighters practising their art to the beat of bongos and *berimbau* bows. Go for a walk and explore. One of the most popular activities on offer is GPS hiking across the desert terrain. The scenery is incredible, and if there's a full moon while you're there you can watch the sun set as the moon rises. Magical.

Next to these options, it has to be said that one of the best things to do in Jericoacoara is sweet sod-all. Leave the maelstrom of activity to others, grab a hammock under the shade of a palm tree, soak up the simple, stress-free life with a book and a beer and let time just slip slowly by...

Currency: Brazilian Reals. You get a better rate if you change your currency in Brazil. The easiest way is to use an ATM or *bureau de change* at Fortaleza Airport or in the city. There are no banks or ATMs in Jeri, but there are a few shops that will exchange Euros or US Dollars, and most shops / restaurants now accept credit cards. Progress, huh?

Weather: Equatorial. Only the days of the month change. Air temperature is 28-35°C. Water temperature is 27°C year-round.

Language: Portuguese

Equipment: The kit at Club Ventos is top notch, but be aware that their boards are fitted with 'Deviators', which aren't to everyone's liking. (For more on this subject, go to: www.boards.co.uk/articles/index.asp?ID_A=177&article_type=50)

If you prefer to take your own equipment Sportif can make the necessary arrangements.

Other things you'll need

A harness.

Waterproof high SPF sunblock – think factor 40.

A small torch for those starlit staggers back from the bars – street lighting is courtesy of the cosmos.

A camera and plenty of memory cards or film –

the light here is a photographer's dream.

Fingerless gloves or some **gaffer tape**. Trust me, you'll be doing so much sailing that the Brazilian bathwater will quickly soften your calluses, and around-about day 3 or 4 you'll appreciate some extra protection until your hands acclimatise.

A phrase book (not much English is spoken by villagers, and they really appreciate any efforts to speak Portuguese, no matter how garbled!)

Mosquito repellent (as a precaution. The wind seems to keep them away, and I didn't come across one while I was there...)

Stuff you won't need

A watch. There is no time there, as everything operates to 'Brazilian time', which is more flexible than a Ukrainian gymnast. The time that does exist, when you can find it, is three hours behind GMT, so it's useless to you anyway. Just think 'windsurfing time', 'food time' and 'party time' and you'll be OK.

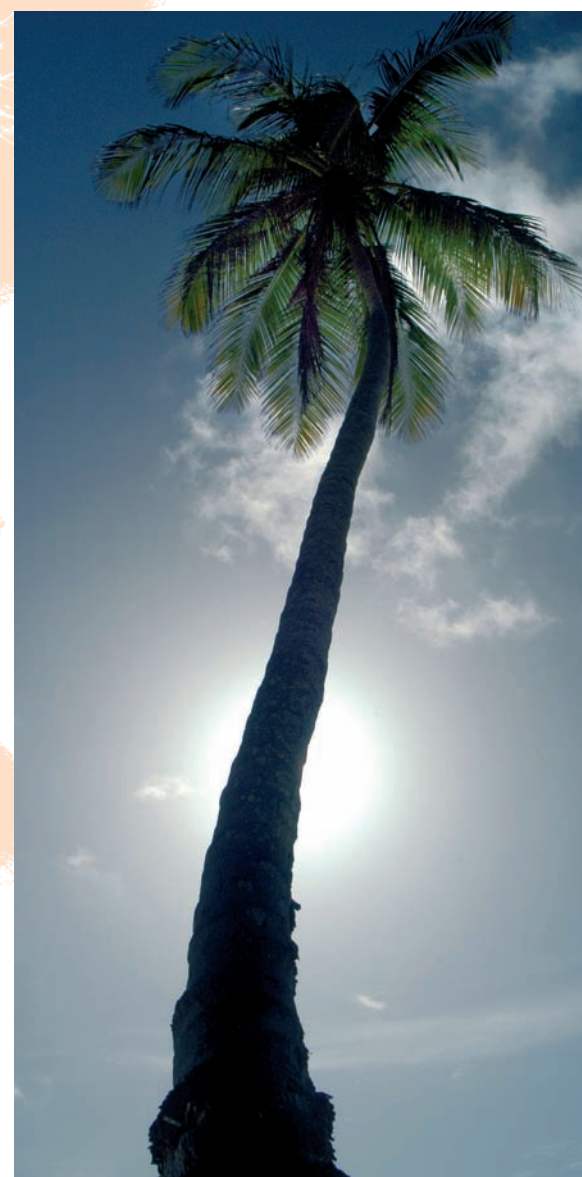
A wetsuit. It's so warm you'll want to sail nude. But shorts and a lycra rash-vest will save potential embarrassment.

Clothes. Apart from a few essentials, you won't need them. Pack light and save weight. If you're a bloke stuff a few t-shirts, a few pairs of shorts and some slaps into a plastic bag. That's all you'll use.

A hire car. Well, I suppose you could try, but with no roads you're not going to get far. But if you can drag yourself away from the windsurfing and want to explore, Club Ventos can organise 4x4 excursions to places of interest.

And last, but not least...

How to make a caipirinha: Take one lime, cut into quarters, one tablespoon of sugar, one shot of *cachaca*, and half a cup of ice cubes. Put the lime and sugar in the bottom of a glass, and crush with a wooden spoon. Pour *cachaca* and ice over mashed-up stuff, stir and enjoy. **Warning:** This drink can cause some people to



clamber onto tabletops, shake their booty and occasionally remove their clothes. Also may cause a wee bit of a headache the next morning, but it's well worth it. Chin-chin. ☺

Thanks go to that miracle of organisational skill, and no slouch on a board either, Tove Rees, for making things happen and generally being Mum, to Fabio Nobre for remaining still long enough for the human eye to register his presence now and then, and Messrs Chappel & Phelps of The Strand, London, for the loan of a second-hand Steinway baby grand piano, now slightly damaged...