

SURFING RRG



FLAT WATER BLASTING
PIC: WILLIAMS



CODENAME: *Surfing* RRG

THESE DAYS THE INTERNET HAS MADE THE WORLD A VERY SMALL PLACE, WITHIN MINUTES YOU CAN FIND WHAT YOU WANT AND NORMALLY HAVE A LOOK AT ANYTHING OR ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT CAMERA ANGLES. FOR THE TRAVELLER IT CAN BE A REAL ADVANTAGE, GIVING YOU AN IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU GET THERE. BUT IT CAN ALSO TAKE AWAY SOME OF THE SURPRISE AND EXCITEMENT FROM VISITING SOMEWHERE TOTALLY NEW. WHEN I STARTED HUNTING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT RODRIGUES I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO FIND THERE WASN'T MUCH OUT THERE. ACCORDING TO GOOGLE EARTH IT DOESN'T EXIST, AND UNLESS YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR IT YOU WON'T FIND IT AT ALL ON THEIR SATELLITE VIEW OF THE WORLD! I ENDED UP LEAVING FOR THE AIRPORT NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT! THE ONLY THING I DID KNOW WAS THAT IT WAS SOMEWHERE NEAR MAURITIUS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN!

WORDS: ROU CHATER
PICS: ALEX WILLIAMS AND ROU CHATER

the lagoon is
in a word, huge

SLING RRG



JEROME FROM THE KITE CENTRE GETTING SOME HANGTIME
PIC: WILLIAMS



THE LONG BOAT RIDE
PIC: WILLIAMS

The lack of information on the net, coupled with the remoteness of the island makes it one of the most magical places I have been to. Oh and that's not forgetting the awesome flat-water lagoon that surrounds the entire island and the strong consistent winds that blow all day long. It really is a paradise lost in a world that these days, is all too easy to find.

Rodrigues is situated nearly 600km off the coast of Mauritius to the east, it lies all on its own in the middle of the Indian Ocean and if you hunt on a map of the world you will find it about halfway between Africa and Australia. Flights leave on a regular basis from Heathrow and it takes about 11 hours to get to Mauritius where you have to change planes and head on the extra hour and a half to Rodrigues, which is now common rated, which means if you fly to Mauritius you get to travel to Rodrigues at no extra cost! The flight to Rodrigues itself

is perhaps where the true adventure begins. I must admit I was hoping for a 4 seater Cessna to fly us over but a much larger plane greeted us. It still had propellers so I wasn't totally disappointed! Flying out over the Indian Ocean you sincerely hope the pilot knows where he is going, Rodrigues is pretty small, only 18km by 8km wide, a small green speck in a vast ocean! As we fly in over the reef at Rodrigues we can see the waves crashing and we all peer out for a better look, after the waves we see the lagoon, the lagoon is in a word huge, nearly 200km square it surrounds Rodrigues offering a flat water haven for water sports enthusiasts. As the plane descends lower we spot the tell tale white caps that cover the water and it's windy! We soon forget all this though when the plane lands, the runway is short and when you aren't ready for it, the force with which the brakes are applied sends you flying forward in your seat! With that bumpy landing we had finally arrived in kitesurfing heaven.

We were here on a mission codenamed Surfing RRG. David Moore is the man in charge of PR for Air Mauritius and the locals in Rodrigues had gone to him asking for help. After years of playing second fiddle to Mauritius things were looking bad for the locals who relied on the tourist trade. Obviously the resorts and tourist attractions of Mauritius will entice most travellers to these parts so David decided to look into other markets. With the water sports centre in place and the perfect conditions that the lagoon offers this was where he decided to start. A meeting with David Thomas from Sportif (the UK's number one water sports holiday company) and the trip was born. A kitesurfer, windsurfer and surfer would all head over with a photographer to get the low-down on the spot and decide its potential.

Gabe Davies, onetime British Champion, now living in Biarritz was to make up the surfing contingent, Ian Leonard the Boards magazine test editor got a late call to fit the windsurfing bill and myself as the kitesurfer. Legendary surf photographer Alex Williams was to bring all the expensive glass and the merry band of four were formed! I had never met any of the guys until the airport but Alex knew both Gabe and Ian, it turns out in fact that Alex knows everyone and in his long career has photographed everyone you could think of. He even knows you, you just don't know it yet and he definitely has embarrassing pictures of you in his archive somewhere!

It was an interesting idea to fuse the three sports together, windsurfers and surfers have always in the past frowned upon our fringe sport, but over the years as it has progressed we have earned a little respect. It was good to swap stories and for Ian and Gabe a chance to quiz a kitesurfer up close about things they had long wondered. For me I made a good ambassador with a history in both sports I had something in common with both of them. We all had something in common though and that was a love of waves. On the journey over we conjured up the idea with Alex of being able to get a shot of all three of us sharing a wave. I have seen windsurfers and surfers and kites and windsurfers but never all three together. So while Air Mauritius had its mission of Surfing RRG we had our own quest to fulfil.

Rodrigues is a basic place where the local people still produce their own fruit and vegetables and provide for themselves from the land and the sea. In a stark contrast to the resort-laden Mauritius, Rodrigues has one hotel, the Ebony Mourouk and this was to be our home for the next few days. If you hire a car in Rodrigues you get a 4x4 as standard and it is easy to see why! There are a few proper roads but mostly it is dirt tracks if you want to go anywhere!

The Ebony Mourouk has everything a weary traveller could need. The friendly staff are employed as part of a local project to encourage a career in tourist trade and improve their chances of employment elsewhere in the world, helpful just doesn't do them justice! There is a swimming pool overlooking the lagoon, restaurant and a couple of bars for you to drink Rum in. The rooms are well decorated and finished to a high standard. The hot water system may alarm a few but to be honest it is that warm out there that you don't really need it. If you do decide to have a hot shower then be prepared to keep the windows open and to listen to a roaring gas fire just above your head while you do! The Hotel is situated in the South of the Island and is only a few miles from the airport; the bumpy track however makes the journey last about 45 minutes. Right out front of the Mourouk, lies a small section of the lagoon, some 10km off in the distance you can see the waves breaking, but up till that point it's flat-water heaven. You will find it hard to get out of your depth as well as the water is pretty much waist deep the whole way out!

Jerome, a Frenchman who came to the island some ten years ago and never went back, runs the kitesurfing and water sports centre known as Osmosis on Rodrigues. The more time we spent with him it was easy to see why he never left. The temperature skirts around the 30-degree mark year round, the water just a few degrees lower. A wetsuit is a waste of space unless you want to lose some serious weight! The winds blow consistently throughout the year and are generally a little stronger than Mauritius. While we were there we had 10m weather everyday and when we got back to Mauritius they'd had nothing all week! Perhaps the real secret to the wind potential is that Rodrigues is very flat and very small with beaches on all sides, there is always a spot to be discovered and with smaller islands inside the reef, it is always easy to find the perfect spot in any given wind.

On our first night in Rodrigues we were treated to one of Willy Auguste's infamous cocktail parties, Willy built and runs the hotel and throws a damn good cocktail party. With some of the best finger food in the form of fresh fish and prawns and calamari and more rum than a pirate could handle, it certainly wasn't a night to forget, what I remember of it! We discussed plans for the next day and it was decided that to give us the maximum chance of getting us all on the water we would head to Jimmy's Pass. It takes a good hour and a half to get there by boat and it's one of the few breaks in the reef that you can get a small boat in and out of. To make the most of the day we left at 8am and drove to the small harbour near the airport where Jerome keeps his small boat, loading it up with all the kit we could lay our hands on we headed out into the lagoon for our first taste of paradise. The colour of the water is magical and to be sailing a boat that's rig consists of mostly bamboo was a real experience! We headed out toward Jimmy's and got a feel for the size of the place, the lagoon is huge, from sea level you can't see the waves in the distance and it really was a long haul. On the way we stopped for a freestyle session on the sandbar about halfway. With Alex taking the photo's Gabe and Ian got a lesson in new school versus old school with me throwing F-16's and Downloops all over the place and Jerome pulling big floaty no footers. At first Jerome impressed the uneducated judges but then a big crash from a downloop hauled me at mach 10 past the boat and over the sandbar into oblivion. Only then did they really understand the finer points of the consequences of riding new school! A quick lesson over lunch further cemented the idea that anything dangly was gay and anything powered was cool. We had lunch on the sandbar and then headed out to Jimmy's Pass. The wind was dead offshore, so perfect for Gabe but less than perfect for me. Especially as the boat Jerome had was hardly seaworthy for rescues outside the reef and the chances of it picking me up if anything went wrong were slim. The next stop being Mauritius if you were really lucky or perhaps Madagascar and failing that Africa I declined to get wet. Gabe caught some decent sized waves and Ian and I watched in awe from the boat, I wish I could surf like that I thought to myself! With Alex snapping away we got a good solid days work done and headed home to the bar!

It's funny how being so remote can make you more reserved. If anything went wrong while we were out there then we had at least an hour and a half boat ride to the shore, followed by a 45-minute journey to the less than well-equipped hospital! A few years back Jerome had a big crash and broke his leg and pelvis, when he got to the hospital they couldn't deal with his injuries and sent him to Mauritius where they again declined to treat him and in the end he had to fly back home to get fixed! It's definitely a place to have the all singing all dancing insurance and also a place to be a little more humble than usual! But for me that's the charm of Rodrigues. You are out there all on your own and miles from any real civilisation. A great place to get away from it all and forget about the world for a couple of weeks!



BANANA BUS STOP
PIC: CHATER



THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE!
PIC: WILLIAMS



THE LAGOON CAN GET PRETTY BUSY AT TIMES!
PIC: WILLIAMS

SURFING RRG



LOW LEVEL FLYBY
PIC: WILLIAMS



GABE DAVIES AT HASSELBANKS
PIC: CHATER

*We rode close and got
further appreciation for
our respective sports.*



YET ANOTHER UNTOUCHED ISLAND INSIDE THE LAGOON
PIC: WILLIAMS



SUNSET RODRIGUES STYLE
PIC: CHATER

didn't see any other kites or windsurfers

The bar at the little harbour by the airport is actually more like someone's living room; well it is someone's living room! You call them in the morning and ask them to buy however many beers you want. They get them and put them in the fridge and then they are cold for your return. Sadly if you get a thirst they only buy what you ask so chances of a second, unless you pre ordered it, are slim!

We finally get back to the hotel at about 6pm, it has been a long day sat in the boat with no shade and we are all pretty shattered. But rest isn't for us as we are invited to the house of a local lady who is preparing some food for us. A typical Rodrigan dinner, just what the doctor ordered! We all head off in a mini bus with some musicians and head inland into the country. We arrive at Jeanette Baudoin's house and are welcomed with open arms and promptly given a bottle of rum and some cokes and left to get on with it! The musician's start playing for us and the mood is set for a great evening. The meal is superb, fish, chicken, maize, spices, hot chillies and all sorts to fill our stomachs. More rum and wine is consumed and then the Sega Dancers are brought on. This is the local dance of the island and it's hard work. It basically involves moving about the dance floor without

seemingly moving your feet. You have to kind of shuffle them very rapidly in small steps. Gabe and I were dragged reluctantly to the dance floor and we did our best to impress. Ian sadly had forgotten his dancing shoes and Alex was insisting he had to take pictures! By midnight we were all ready for bed and with the prospect of another early start the next day we headed off back the Ebony Mourouk for some well earned rest!

It's easy to forget the concept of time in Rodrigues, with awesome conditions every day and food and rum in abundance at every turn, you will very quickly settle into the charm of the place. For sure it isn't all 5 star resorts but that's what Mauritius is for! Rodrigues is about getting back to basics, switching your phone off and forgetting that the Internet exists! The days quickly turn into the most fantastic sunsets and the rum turns the nights into days with a frighteningly rapid succession.

With only a day left we hadn't yet fulfilled our dream shot and it didn't look like conditions would allow it, Jimmy's was too offshore to kite and was the only part of the reef that Jerome had surfed, without a bigger boat to go and properly explore it was going to prove

difficult, so instead we settled on at least getting myself, Ian and Gabe on the water on the same day! It was really windy and enough for Ian to get out blasting on some slalom gear, I was way overpowered on my 10m and we at least got the chance to ride together. We rode close and got a further appreciation for each other's respective sports. Ian realising that every time he tried to overtake I would just jump over him!! After shooting some more photo's we headed back out to Jimmy's Pass which we had now renamed Hasslebanks; after Jimmy Floyd Hasslebank and the fact that it was always a bit of a hassle to get there. Credit to Gabe for that one! Gabe arguably caught some of the best waves of the trip and Jerome had the best surf of his life! The crazy thing about this place is that it is so un-crowded. We didn't see any other kites or windsurfers or surfers the whole trip! There is of course a worry that by telling you about the place this could change. Thankfully the Ebony Mourouk has no plans to expand at the moment and with only 30 rooms then even if everyone staying there was a kitesurfer that would only be 60 kites! And the lagoon at 200km Square could easily hold two to three hundred without seeming to get busy!

We went in search of a new destination and for the kitesurfers out there, we definitely found it. Easily the best place I have ever been fortunate enough to travel to and with conditions that would suit 90percent of the UK's kitesurfing population down to the ground it is hard to argue there is anywhere better! With Mauritius just round the corner you can spend a week in luxury, fly on to Rodrigues and escape the crowds and enjoy the back to basics lifestyle, then fly home with some of the best memories of a paradise still lost in a world that has become so small.

FACTS

Air Mauritius flies non-stop six times each week from London Heathrow to Mauritius. The flights are operated by Airbus A340 aircraft and all are overnight to Mauritius taking around 12 hours.

All seats on the A340 have personal entertainment systems so, you can watch the latest movies in the air! From December this year, Air Mauritius will be introducing two brand new Airbus A340s onto the London route.

There are up to four flights a day between Mauritius and Rodrigues and there is no additional fare if you buy a return ticket London/Mauritius. Flights to Rodrigues are by ATR 42 and 72 aircraft and takes one and a half hours between the two islands.

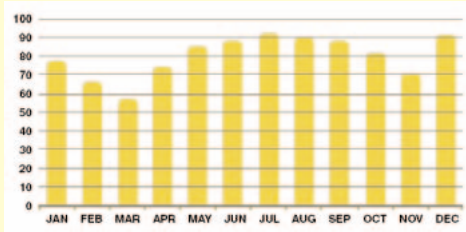
Sportif are running tours from the beginning of May right through till November. They can organise everything that you will need to get there including flights transfers and accommodation from as little as £966! If you fancy a little bit of luxury for the family then why not split your trip up with a week in Mauritius staying at the excellent Indian Resort and a week in the Ebony Mourouk on Rodrigues to get the most out of your trip. Visit their website www.sportif-uk.com or call them on 01273844919 for all the help you will need in getting there.

We are running a trip there in November with legendary kitesurfer and current BKSA champion Dave Ibbertson check out the Word up section of the magazine for all the details. Make sure you don't miss out on your chance to visit this little spot of paradise!

WIND CONDITIONS

	Wind Type	Direction	Strength
Winter	S E Trade	Cross	3-7
Summer	Trade/Frontal	Cross/Cross-shore	3-5

WIND STATS



Huge thanks to:

David Moore, David Thomas, Air Mauritius, Sportif, Club Mistral, Jerome and Osmosis, The Staff at the Ebony Mourouk and Willy Auguste and the Indian Resort in Mauritius.



BAMBOO TELEPHONE
PIC: WILLIAMS



THE FOUR EXPLORERS
PIC: WILLIAMS



*best place I have ever
been fortunate enough
to travel to*



TROPICAL KITESURFERS PARADISE
PIC: WILLIAMS