



Boat slide

## RUFFING IT

*Intrepid traveller John Ruffing is back. In his semi regular column, John tells us about some of the more far flung and off the beaten track kite spots he comes across during his constant travels, usually on a motorbike, joined only by friends, a big kite bag and a ruck sack with the rest of his life in it. This issue, he's in India – not the first place to pop up on our kiting radars...*

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Another of India's contradictions

### NOTE #03: SOUTHEAST INDIA

When you first arrive in India, there is never enough mental preparation for the awe inspiring, sensory overload that typically takes place during your first few days. But do not be mistaken, this is what creates the love-hate relationship with the country known as "The Land of Prayers".

I first had the idea to visit India and explore the vast coast of the Gulf of Mannar after doing a few windy seasons in Sri Lanka, which is considered a tamed down Indian experience in comparison. There is a Venturi effect created between Sri Lanka and India, boasting the essence of what every salivating kite addict wants from a relationship with wind - reliable, strong, steady and, like the energizer bunny, it 'keeps going and going'! Knowing that there's wind in the Gulf of Mannar for eight months a year, I began researching the

area online which revealed vast areas of empty lagoons, islands and flat water. However, even though there is a large deficiency of information on the kiting conditions and spots, I decided to pack my bags and see for myself what kiteboarding adventures awaited.

Arriving in Chennai with my good friend and fellow kiteboarding adventure seeker, Ryan Curtright, at first glance we did not notice much difference to other airports or cities around the world. However, once we stepped outside things were dramatically different. The excessive odors hit your senses first. Something of a curry, body aroma, cow dung, spices, perfumes and car exhaust sort of mix. So the adventure began...

We loaded our kiteboarding gear on top of a rickshaw, our bags teetering in balance and dwarfing the three-wheeled vehicle. Within five minutes of leaving the airport we were in an accident with a very inebriated Indian who seemed



**Wakestyle tricks weren't the crowd's favourite, but the conditions called for them!**

to think driving without the lights on saved gas consumption. After switching rickshaws we were off again with our gear securely attached and unharmed. While 'safely' travelling to our hotel we reached a stop light where my vision was accosted by a man half squatting to relieve himself under a traffic sign with no hint of urgency, vigor or shame. Groups of beautiful, colorfully dressed women walked by in their droves with an extra pep in there step to pass the gentleman, but without a hint of disgust. At a construction site a water tanker truck was being used as a bathing station for adults and children alike.



**No dropping trou near the ladies please!**

When travelling along the roads in India you notice there is a pecking order in regards to the chaotic traffic rules. The 'rules' are mostly guided by the importance of size and go as follows: pedestrian, motorcycle, rickshaw, car (size dependent) and bus, A.K.A: vomit comet, all of which will only defer to the holiest of commuters on the road, the cow. After visiting India several times over the past few years, I have come to perceive, respect and, at times, disdain how India is full of contradictions. A faraway past is colliding wholeheartedly with the new, amongst the distant traditions that have lasted the tides of time. You will see families roaming the streets, fully content to walk barefoot next to folks with the latest fashionable Hindi cruisers on their feet. There are road signs that are apparently there to discourage the population from dropping trou (their trousers) in the streets. Bullock carts race down highways at a snail's pace, alongside the latest, obtrusively loudly honking European import. Five thousand different religious historical temples mix in with newly built skyscrapers that dominate the skyline - these are just a few of the many amazing contradictions you will see here.



**John claiming rights of way on the water**    **Doing the pied piper bit**







The open road, and not a cow in sight!



Rad flat water



The local lads with John's mate Ryan Curtright



The sacred beast

Ryan and I decided to take the overnight train from Chennai to Rameshwaram, home to one of the holiest of Hindu temples and a popular pilgrimage. Some Indians walk over 1,000 kilometres to visit the temples and you will see many pilgrims walking alongside the roads dressed in bright orange robes, barefoot and with facial hair down to their knees. After some negotiating with the train conductors (which mostly consisted of smiling and head bobbing) we weighed our kiteboard bags on what looked like a 300-year-old weighing scale and paid three dollars for the trip. We awoke to the smell of the sea, the vibrations of crossing the Pamban bridge and noise that enflames every kiteboarder's heart: wind, and loads of it!

After a great journey we arrived at our accommodation, Quest Adventures. From here we explored the coastline via truck and moto, finding endless, empty, chest deep, flat water spots with steady blow-dryer-like wind. After a month of adventuring around the southeastern coastline, we

began to get the feeling that we'd barely scratched the surface in terms of kite spots. These areas are completely undiscovered. We arrived at these previously unriden lagoons that are untouched by foreigners and the crowds of spectators that we attracted on the beach were large. At times the whole village came to watch! The bigger you go and the harder you crashed, the more your stardom rose among the villagers, inspiring many selfies and friend requests on Facebook.

India, while not for the faint of heart or the inexperienced traveller, is a special place and travelling there is half the adventure. Finding your way to the kite destinations is a journey unto itself that will leave you awe-inspired, exhausted, full to the brim with Indian delicacies and craving more afterwards.

### SPOT GUIDE:

The city of Rameshwaram is in the southeast of India, within the state of Tamil Nadu, and is the best starting point for accessing the many kite

beaches in the area. Kathadi South Kiteboarding school is currently in the only hotel in the area that caters for kiteboarders. The main windy season is from May to September, blowing 15 - 30 knots every day from the southwest. The entire coastline along the Gulf of Mannar is windy and open for exploring with its' vast amount of large, empty, windy beaches. The secondary wind season is from December to February, blowing a bit lighter at 15 - 20 knots from the northeast.

You have a few options in getting to the kite spots, either by flight, train or car. You can fly into Madurai and then take a car for two hours to the coastline. For the more adventurous kite traveller, you can fly into Chennai and take a direct overnight train to Rameshwaram. Having a rental car, taxi or a tuk-tuk (small three-wheel taxi vehicle) is recommended to get around for exploring different beaches on the island and the coastline.

For more information on Kiteboarding India, or to join the next safari adventure there, check out: [www.kiteboardingindia.com](http://www.kiteboardingindia.com) KW