

# KITE SURF THAT WAVE

*Mauritius' Le Morne is making its mark as a world-class family kitesurfing destination. Mother of one **LOUISE HALL** takes to the waters*

I am hurtling through the water behind my 10m kite, body-surfing upwind. My eyes are red, sore and salty, I can barely see, my nose is streaming and I am gulping seawater. This is so not how I'd imagined kitesurfing in Mauritius' Le Morne lagoon, a sensationally beautiful spot on the south-west tip of the island. We're near the end of the week. Thanks to the ideal learning conditions (constant winds and shallow, flat waters) I'm now up and riding – most of the time, at least.

This sport is not for the fainthearted, nor is it as effortless as the other riders are making it look. Like skiing or surfing, mastering it takes perseverance – which is why it attracts a certain type of individual: fit (not essential, it helps), focused and competitive. I'm here to learn to kitesurf on the recommendation of pioneer Marcus Bull, founder of Planet Kitesurf, the UK's oldest and largest kitesurfing holiday specialists, who says Mauritius is *the* place for families to learn.

It's May half-term, a great time to visit: warm with good winds and quiet without the summer crowds. It's also a direct 12-hour overnight flight with minimal jetlag, a three-hour time difference and year-round sunshine, no mosquitoes – so quite doable for a week with kids. We're staying at the 172-bed contemporary-colonial St Regis Mauritius Resort. There is no shortage of seriously good five-star family resorts on Mauritius, but nowhere beats here for location, facilities and service.

I'm here with my son Hamish who, too young to learn, is happily ensconced in the free Kite Flyers' Club. Earlier, I waved him off, beaming, as he went for a glass-bottomed boat ride. A marinelife fanatic, he was off to spot stonefish, yellow boxfish, Moorish idols, and who



LE MORNE BRABANT MOUNTAIN SHELTERS  
THE HOTEL FROM WIND



HAMISH, SEVEN, GETS SET FOR SOME SNORKELLING



“  
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WHOOPIING AS I GO



A SCHOOL OF WILD DOLPHINS SWIMS BY

## FIVE FUN KITESURFING FACTS

- 1** Kitesurfing will be part of the 2018 Youth Olympics
- 2** The British Kitesurfing Championships (the BKC) has produced five world champions. For a fun family day out, visit [britishkitesports.org/events](http://britishkitesports.org/events)
- 3** The highest jump ever recorded by a kitesurfer is 24.8m, by British five-time world champion kitesurfer Aaron Hadlow.
- 4** The youngest ever kitesurfer is three-year-old Brazilian kitesurfing sensation Davi Ribeiro. Google him! If he can do it...
- 5** THE BKSA runs a youth training programme for kitesurfers aged 12-20, visit: [britishkitesports.org/training/youth-training](http://britishkitesports.org/training/youth-training). For British Kitesports-accredited schools globally staffed by qualified English-speaking British Kitesports Instructors, visit: [britishkite-sports.org/training/learn-to-kite](http://britishkite-sports.org/training/learn-to-kite)

knows what else, with his new friends under the guidance of brilliant manny Christopher. Next up is beach games, kite-flying and a movie in the 32-seat private cinema, as you do – all much more exciting than a morning playing poolside with Mum! With him sorted, I've booked myself a private lesson with Jason Falconer, of ION Club St Regis Prestige, a kitesurfing school exclusive to hotel guests.

I've lucked in with the top instructor from one of the best kitesurfing schools, possibly in the world. But I'm still making a dog's dinner of it. I'm only one hour into my three-hour lesson and I'm shattered! I squint longingly at the shore, dreaming of lying prostrate poolside, as another wave engulfs me. I'm a bedraggled 38-year-old mum – what am I doing taking up an extreme sport on holiday?

But I can't give up now! What lesson would it teach Hamish? At a slight-frame seven years, he may not yet be old or heavy enough to learn to kitesurf (kids from 10 are welcome, minimum weight 35-45kg; always check as each school differs), but he is already showing his dad's obsession with the sport. 'Keep calm and carry on kitesurfing,' is one of his holiday catchphrases, for goodness' sake, and he's coming down to watch later. Now my competitive spirit is rallying!

Minutes later, I've retrieved my board and am back up, zipping across the bay. 'Lean back, trust the harness and edge,' instructs Jason through my earpiece. 'Try touching the water behind you to go upwind.' This time, I slow down, edge hard, lean back and my hand skims the water. I'm riding now, making good headway, whooping as I go.

By the end of the session I have, in kitesurfing parlance, 'nailed the sliding transition' – turning without sinking back into the water. Next up is wave-riding and jumps, but for now I'm happy enjoying the feeling of skimming over the waves, spray hitting face, kite arching gracefully and the water shimmering golden.

Kitesurfing may be an extreme sport that commands attention, but when you're in the zone, there's nothing like it. It's worth the eye-watering, bikini-wedging, face-planting and water inhalation, I now have a big tick on my bucket list. Nor is it just me. A decade ago, it was still so dangerous ('extreme') that generally only the likes of the world's pro-surfers dared master it. Then, in 2005, the scope of the sport changed overnight, when a new safety system was invented. For the first time, it became accessible to all, for the price of some lessons. Today, novices can be up and riding within days and kitesurfing is one of the fastest-growing global sports; work-hard, play-hard families are taking it up in droves.

As a parent, there is nothing more fulfilling than introducing a passion, but sending your child off to learn under a stranger's supervision can be nerve-wracking. Kitesurfing is an extreme sport, and we've all heard the horror stories, but the team here at St Regis is superb. They focus on skills and safety, tracking each learner





using a level system. So, what's the best age for children to learn? 'Don't do it too young. We do see kids being put off by pushy parents,' warns Emma Falconer, the other half of the ION Club Prestige husband-and-wife team. 'We advise waiting until they are 13 or 14, and strong enough.'

Unless you're in the know, Mauritius may not be on your kitesurfing radar, but Le Morne has world-class conditions from beginner to pro and is ideal for families. While the lagoon is a shallow, sandy-bottomed, flat-water, wind-lashed swathe ideal for learning, the hotel is in the wind shadow of Le Morne Brabant Mountain – an iconic UNESCO World Heritage site, once the refuge of runaway slaves. This is rare: there aren't many places in the world where you have a five-star resort with kitesurfing on your doorstep and don't get wind-blasted on the beach – which is why kitesurfing doesn't generally make a great family holiday with young kids in tow. Throw in the reef-sheltered beach (flat calm – no Indian Ocean rollers), three hotel pools (one so lagoon-like you can swim around a different palm for every day of the week – Hamish did!), five restaurants, fitness centre, 24,000 sq ft Iridium Spa (seriously), air-conditioned library (grandparents love it), aqua gym and drawing room (with pool, table football, and PlayStation). For a comfy, affordable base for all ages, from babies (the butler service delivers all you need) to grandparents (one third of the guests, alongside honeymooners and families), it's a winning family package.

Another of the great draws of St Regis is that it looks directly onto 'One Eye': a steep, hollow, barrelling, fast-paced wave and the playground of the world's pros. We are daily



## MAURITIUS: THE LOWDOWN

### BOOK IT

Seven nights with Planet Kitesurf Holidays at five-star The St Regis Mauritius Resort in a Junior Beachfront Suite with Air Mauritius and private transfer costs from £4,490 for four. The children's club is complimentary and open daily, 9am–7.30pm, ages 4–12, with a relaxed sign-in, sign-out policy. [planetkitesurfholidays.com](http://planetkitesurfholidays.com)

### KITESURFING LESSONS

A 10-hour beginners' kitesurfing course with ION Club Prestige Mauritius costs from £350, all kit included. [ionclubmauritius.com](http://ionclubmauritius.com)  
Open all year daily, 9am–5pm.  
Conditions are excellent for all levels. They can store your kit, too.

### LE MORNE KITESURFING AREAS

GREEN: Le Morne Lagoon – beginners  
BLUE: Little Reef – wave beginners  
RED: Manawa Reef – advanced wave riders  
BLACK: One Eye Reef – experts only

### WHEN TO GO

May–December. Best wind months are August–October. May is good value. Kitesurfing season coincides with the South African safari season.



LOUISE AND HAMISH ENJOY SOME NON-KITESURFING DOWNTIME

hypnotised by them as we dangle our toes in the pool from the hanging wicker chairs.

It's testament to Mauritius that, the thrill of kitesurfing aside, there's tons to spark kids' imaginations and keep active families happy here, both on and off the water, be it zookeeping for a day (8–14 years) or underwater sea-walking (10 years plus).

We fall into an easy rhythm of waking to the Butler Alarm Service, pulling on swimmers, throwing open the veranda doors and racing to the beach (I always lose – don't want to spill my cuppa), followed by breakfast beachside, kids' club, kitesurfing and afternoons poolside or kayaking.

Then, just as we think it can't get any better, it does. On our last morning, we leave early for a private wild-dolphin-watching and snorkelling boat trip – it's the family highlight of our week. Then I get a taste of how the other half kitesurf. I am picked up on our hotel's private beach by private boat, and taken to my own private lagoon, where my kite is inflated and handed to me. All I need to do is get in the water and power away. It's ridiculous service. Kitesurfers have never been so pampered.