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TURISH DELIGHTS

Éric De Cruz takes a road trip in Turkey in the company of his son Esteban de Cruz and PWA slalom sailor Benjamin 'Babou' Augé. Éric tells us why Turkey's freeride windsurfing delights need to be sampled!



KILYOS

Kilyos is one of the best wave spots in Turkey and only 10 minutes from the centre of Istanbul. A small town with a few thousand inhabitants, a dozen hotels are open year round (allow roughly 30 euros/night for a 2 star hotel) and we spent a wonderful time here. It's no more than 15 knots during our visit, north / northeast, side-onshore; enough to get out the 7.5 for Babou and the 6.0 for Esteban. The water is 28 degrees celsius, a real treat! Kilyos can get very big, starting in September the north wind from Azerbaijan can exceed 40 knots and generate waves of 7 metres, blowing between 7 and 10 consecutive days. With a current of about 6 knots, it is not a spot for beginners.

There is no rental centres or shops dedicated to windsurfing in Istanbul, you will have to go to the west coast and Alaçati, if you need those services. During summer, access to the beaches for swimmers around Kilyos is charged. Depending on the comfort you want on the beach, it will cost you between 20 and 60 Turkish lira.

Walking back to the hotel, people are amused to see two guys walking around with windsurf gear on their heads. There is restaurants everywhere, with cuisine from all over the world and a very relaxed atmosphere.

ALAÇATI

After a 6 hour drive from Istanbul we arrive in Alaçati. The motorway network is really good and never busy because it is too expensive for locals; it will only take 4.5 hours in the coming years. Alaçati, pronounced 'Alachate' by the locals, is an upscale seaside resort, a small Turkish Saint-Tropez. 90% of the tourists are expat Turks who return to spend their holidays in their home country. Many come from Germany where a large expat Turkish community is located. In Alaçati it is no problem to find ways to enjoy yourself!

LAGOON

Alaçati's main windsurfing spot is located in a lagoon with an offshore wind. It is flat everywhere, a paradise for slalom sailors and freestylers. The thermal wind works almost every day in July and August with an average of 20 knots. All levels from beginner to expert will find something to do at this spot, which also explains the profusion of windsurfing clubs (about 7) all installed around the lagoon. We are met by Jimmy Diaz and his wife Cagla, a former Turkish TV star. Jimmy and Cagla settled in Alaçati just under a decade ago and created the Cagla Kubat Windsurf Centre there. It's a high quality centre with the latest Starboard/Duotone equipment. Jimmy Diaz is currently the chairman and president of the PWA, a position he has held for over 10 years now, and spends his time organizing the world tour and all that goes with it, like the approval of new sails to be used on the tour for example. He also shares his experience as a pro rider during the numerous briefings that punctuate the training days at the centre.

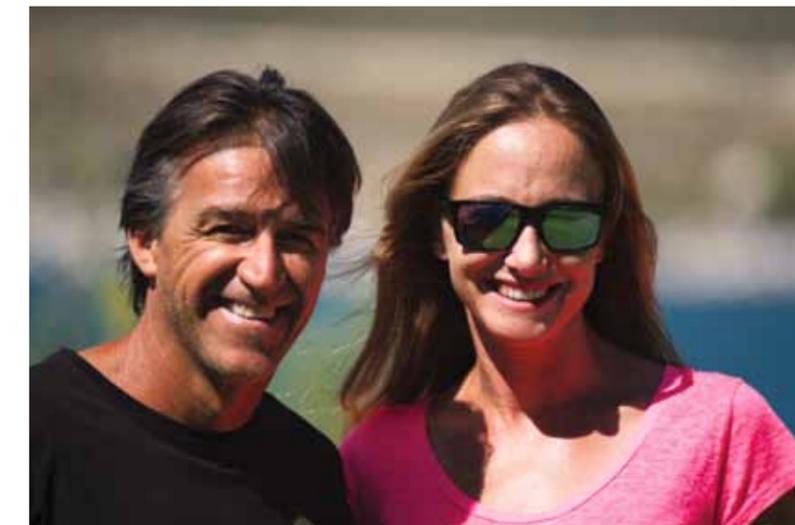
JIMMY DIAZ

Jimmy, who is from the U.S. Virgin Islands, has been competing since he was 13 years old. His competition career includes racing in the original Windsurfer Class format, the Olympics, the PWA, and many national and international events. He has been a top 10 PWA racer in slalom, as well as being heavily involved throughout the years in the development of windsurfing products, especially with regards to sails, working with both Neil Pryde and North Sails and being in charge of their testing programs. His wide range of experience spanning almost 40 years offers him a unique viewpoint on the sport. He tells me, "I originally came to Turkey to participate in a PWA race organized on the Bosphorus Strait. It was an

“THE WATER IS 28 DEGREES CELSIUS, A REAL TREAT!”

amazing race competing in the middle of Istanbul in such a historic and important body of water. After that year we started having events in Alaçati which is the centre of windsurfing in Turkey. It is an amazing place to not only windsurf, but to visit. The steady winds and flat water make it ideal for learning to windsurf, but also for competitions. Over the years, it has been one of the favourite events for the sailors on the PWA tour. The spot is really good for all aspects of the sport from beginner to pro, slalom, freestyle or foiling.

I came to live in Turkey after meeting Cagla at the PWA event in Korea. We both had aspirations to share our wonderful sport with as many people as possible and opened a windsurf centre in Alaçati in 2011. We saw it as an opportunity to help promote our sport and try to build a bigger base for the sport to stand on here in Turkey. We have put a lot of emphasis on kids and youth events, believing this is what is needed for the continued growth and development of the sport. We both believe very much in the quality of the spot here in Alaçati for windsurfing, but also the entire region of Izmir as a place to live in and to visit. The region is full of surprises and has a lot to offer to visitors in terms of beautiful beaches, interesting towns, historic and cultural wonders, great Mediterranean cuisine, music, and entertainment. It is truly a wonderful place to visit and not just in the summer." Open year round, no less than 50 kids were sailing at Jimmy and Cagla's centre when we were there. It's a great spot for those who want to progress. We did not have time to investigate all the windsurfing centres there, but almost all the brands are represented. With music and cocktails served until late at night, there is plenty of opportunities to party as well as windsurf. Just like in Istanbul, there is no problem finding a hotel at night, the only difference is the price, twice or three times greater! €60 per night for a 2 star hotel is a good average.



You can't mention windsurfing in the Mediterranean without talking about Turkey! It's a country blessed with great conditions but is much more than that. We decided to take advantage of the regular north wind that sweeps the Turkish coast from July to August to discover this destination that is undergoing profound transformations.

Modern Turkey came out of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's rule in 1923. His portrait is everywhere, the identity references to the creation of this new nation are present in every city and on every promontory; it's impossible to look into the distance in Turkey without seeing a Turkish flag!

English is quite widely spoken and the favourable exchange rate of European currencies ensures a comfortable stay. Driving in Turkey is the same as much of Europe, except for a friendly but frequent use of car horns! Turkish Airlines is the best way to travel, with affordable rates from many European capitals and

a "friendly" policy with oversized luggage, handy for our 100 kg quiver! We brought slalom/freeride equipment and 2 wave boards, as well as a complete set of freeride foil kit in case the wind was capricious! We opted for a 10 day trip as we wanted to discover Turkey from east to west, from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea.

ISTANBUL

We took the option of arriving in Istanbul, the historic capital. A compulsory passage for anyone who wants to stop in Turkey, Istanbul, (formerly called Byzance, then Constantinople), is a megacity of 15 million inhabitants and the meeting point of Europe and Asia. It is an exceptional cultural melting pot. We travel along the Bosphorus Strait for about 30 kilometres until we were unable to resist the temptation to sail on it, despite it being prohibited. With a 12 knot breeze, Babou sailed between the two shores and we got some beautiful images.



NIMET TULUMEN

On the water we meet Nimet Tulumen, a Turkish professional windsurfer. She invited us to discover Alaçati's nightlife and a little more about life in Turkey, a proposal we didn't refuse.

10:00 p.m. is the popular time to eat, we decide to forget Doner kebabs and go for fresh sea bream; for seafood lovers, this is a little paradise. We follow Nimet to a bar where the atmosphere is already warm. With Turkish songs playing in the background, she tells me, "I started windsurfing in 2010 in Alaçati. Currently I am racing in the PWA slalom division (9th in the 2019 ranking). Besides professional windsurfing I have a full time job as a data scientist. I am working in artificial intelligence projects, I design math algorithms and code them. I am quite lucky I can do my job anywhere, all I need is a computer, internet connection and coffee; so this give me an opportunity to travel and windsurf freely, as well as meeting new friends! I like to experience new people, explore new ideas and taste new foods. Every time I return home I gain a new perspective and naturally I compare other spots to my home, Turkey. But in the end I always find myself saying Turkey is the best of all. So I say come and experience the best!"

I tell her my astonishment to discover a country so pleasant to live in; I can't tell the difference between our way of life in southern France and their daily life!

Nimet tells us that her country has undergone profound changes over the past four years. Their financial comfort is closely linked to the Euro, which can devalue their purchasing power as quickly as the 2 beers we just drank.

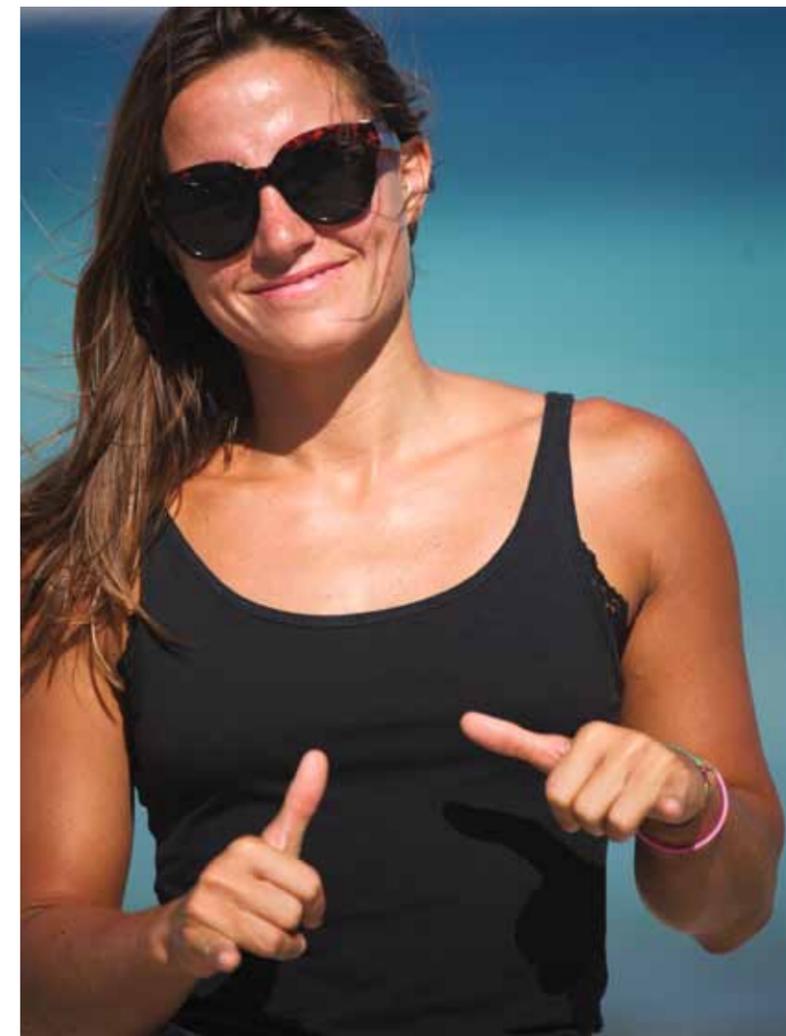
"Many of those who have never come to Turkey may believe that we still live as we did in the Middle Ages," said Nimet. "We are the new generation that is set on European living standards, my 26-year-old sister has won pole dancing contests in Italy!" We move on to a nightclub next to Cagla and Jimmy's club. With talented DJs, a banging sound and light system, the temptation is strong to keep partying, but we have a date with the wind tomorrow!

The next day Nimet shows us Pirlanta beach, 25 minutes away from Alaçati and 15 minutes from the town of Cesme. Pirlanta offers waves, nothing huge but good. Babou goes off, he sailed as much as he slept from the night before! Este puts everything he dreamed of the day before into practice, there is no pause mode!

BODRUM

We are exhausted, but a windsurfing road trip in Turkey is not complete without seeing Bodrum, so we hit the road for the 4 hour journey arriving in as night is falling. All the buses we pass feed huge tourist complexes of varying luxury. The range of accommodation seems enormous. This city clearly seems to us to be a place of tourism and rest; many Turks have a summer residence here. Lena Erdil, another Turkish professional windsurfer, runs a windsurfing centre in Bodrum, so we arrange a meeting to learn more about the windsurfing potential of this area. Bodrum is great for slalom/freeride conditions. It is easy to rent kit or take lessons and the atmosphere is family-friendly and hospitable. Bodrum is also near to the Greek islands, with many ferries running between them; the closest being 30 minutes away.

Today there's not much wind but time passes quickly and we get a nice foiling session in, bathed in beautiful light. Ever looking at the weather, conditions in Istanbul are more favourable until the end of the week. That's enough to motivate us to get back on the road for the 11 hour trip north. A five o'clock in the morning sunrise brings us back to Kilyos beach outside Istanbul, staring at the sea. The waves are there, but not the wind! It's time to rest and discover some more of Istanbul city. Tomorrow will be our last day, we are up from 8 o'clock.



**“I ALWAYS
FIND MYSELF
SAYING
TURKEY IS
THE BEST.”**

Breakfast was taken as soon as possible and we head back to the sea of Marmara opposite Kilyos in the suburbs of Istanbul. An hour later we arrive at Mimarisanan beach to find a north wind of twenty knots. Babou opts for a 7.5 while Este prefers a 4.2 to send some moves. The pair have a great session and we spend the late afternoon at the biggest windsurfing club in Istanbul - Mimarisanan Windsurf Club (www.facebook.com/mswindsurf). It has 200 members, each with their own locker and is a well organised facility.

“THE TURKISH GIVE A WARM WELCOME.”

FAREWELL

The trip is over, we travelled 3600 kms, sailed on 3 seas (Black Sea, Marmara Sea and Aegean Sea) and ate enough Doner kebabs to last a lifetime! Babou scored a world first, having sailed and crossed the Bosphorus many times on his foil kit, sailing between the two continents (Europe and Asia). Turkey remains a great summer destination for those seeking to enjoy slalom/freeride conditions, with windy weather forecasts almost guaranteed. Alone or with friends and family, the Turkish give a warm welcome, leaving a strong desire to return. 🇹🇷



FACT BOX

AIRLINES

The best airline to go to Turkey with is Turkish Airlines. Turkish Airlines is the company favoured by the pros when traveling around the world because of their good excess baggage rates, normally €30 for a 32 kg bag on your way in from Europe. Book as soon as possible to get the best rates, as Turkish planes are fully booked during the summer months from Europe.

LANGUAGE

English allows you to communicate quite easily, young people especially have a good command of it.

USEFUL INFO

One pound is around seven Turkish lire at the time of writing. Time difference to UK is + 3 hours. Excellent telephone and internet coverage with Wi-Fi plentiful. Best winds are from June to August and suitable for freeride, slalom and foil. The water temperature is around 24°, so only board shorts or shorty wetsuit needed; good sun protection is recommended. There is a wealth of restaurants that offer the full range of cuisine, European and local; as well as lots of hotels for all classes of budget. Our hotel in Kilyos was 'Yuva Otel', www.yuvaotel.com, info@yuvaotel.com. For car hire, allow about €200/week for a basic car with unlimited mileage; the road network is excellent.

CENTRES

Alaçati

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www.caglakubatwindsurf.com

Email: info@caglakubatwindsurf.com

ASPC

(Alaçati Surf Paradise Club) Sport Center

www.microholyday.org

www.aspcsurf.com

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Facebook/Instagram: [LenaErdilWindsurfCenter](https://www.facebook.com/LenaErdilWindsurfCenter)

www.ortakentwindsurf.com

NO WIND

Visit Istanbul; treks and cycling and quad bike hire at Alaçati and Bodrum, as well as all summer watersports on the seafront. Plenty of nightlife - bars, pubs, restaurants and nightclubs in Istanbul, Alaçati and Bodrum.