Whirl with the wind

Friday, 12 September 2008
Last Updated Friday, 12 September 2008

Natasha Fernandopulle explores the sport of the fearless on Lankan shores, Pix by M. A. Pushpa KumaraThe feeling of flying over water where the only form of propulsion you have is the wind and where the only person in control is you is a sensation that most adventure lovers would love to feel. I bet you may wonder what this is all about. In fact, when I first went across to Buba in Mount Lavinia, I really didn't know what to expect. Kitesurfing; as in surfing with the help of a kite? This is what I thought and this is exactly what it was all about.

Kite surfing or kite boarding is an extreme sport which uses the power of the wind to pull a rider through the water and this is done on a small surfboard or kite board. The sport is still in its infancy, but is rapidly growing in popularity. And when it comes to Sri Lanka, our country being an island, kite surfing can be done all throughout the year, depending on which part of the coast you are in. According to Mischi Walter – a professional kite surfing instructor based in Sri Lanka, "as much as this sport can be fun, it can be very dangerous if you don't know how to handle your equipment properly. You also need to be aware of your surroundings – the wind, water and ground situation," he says, adding that in spite of all the precautions, "you will have an accident at some point!" says Mischi, so remember to concentrate on what you are doing. "You need to get over a certain fear point – doing so gives you an adrenaline rush," Mischi says smiling. "Even children can learn the sport, overseas there are people who are over 70 who are kite surfing!" added Mischi. "It's the best sport in town, and never feel discouraged if you are taking a long time to get up on the board, because it happened to me, but it's worth the effort and the wait," said Julian Bolling, adding that the sport brings together some, "cool people to hang out with" and "it's pollution free!""Rugby? Hikkaduwa Beach Fest? Nah, I'd rather be kite surfing!" says Dilsiri Welikala. "It's extremely addictive and loads of fun. You're completely free, and the only noise you hear is of the wake coming off the back of your board," he says, adding, "When you launch, you hear a sound that's amazing. It's just you, the wind and the board." "It was in Feb 2007 at the Kite boarding Camp organised by some friends when I was first introduced to kite boarding. I was blown away by the dynamics of the sport and what attracted me the most is that when you're kite surfing, it's just you and the elements, the wind blowing hard and the sea all around you; pure peace infused with adrenalin!" was Previne Wicks’ opinion on the sport.And as the only local female to have tried out kite surfing in Sri Lanka, Mihiri Salpitikorale had this to say. "As much as the adrenaline rush beckons, out of respect for natural elements, I'm taking kite surfing really slow so I can enjoy it with minimal damage." Mads Jansen Raunsbaek, has an interesting account about the development of the sport, "The first person to kite surf in Sri Lanka was a German guy called Ben.” He went on to explain that this was in December 1999 when he noticed some colour on the water, "when I looked out the window I saw a guy with a kite starting from Mambos and straight out through the main point." He had already had an idea about the sport from an article which he had ripped out of a magazine and recalls, "when I saw it, I knew it was my call." This all happened while he was tattooing a client he said, "I was stoked; I jumped up and told my customer we had a 20 minute break and ran to the beach and waited for him to return." The kite surfer, Ben, he recalls, had a Naish Ar 3.5 and the first big Naish kite boards. He gave him a magazine and later had a chat with Mads about the sport. He goes on to state, "I'm pretty sure that that is the start of Kite surfing in Sri Lanka. The third person to kite in Sri Lanka was Holger Brummer from Negombo. We met in Hikkaduwa in 2001. Then Dirk Hanel came, followed by all the others.""Kite surfing has now started to grow in Sri Lanka, and that's what we want," says Mads, adding, "We want more information about kite surfing, safety and so on. And just to make it bigger and bigger and bigger in Sri Lanka," he said.(Courtesy : Sunday Times)