

# QATAR'S KITE-RUNNER

By Ashlee Starratt  
Photography by Soné Moriarty

The popularity of kite-surfing continues to grow, fast taking off as the country's most innovative way to get outside and stay active during the hot summer months. **QH** tests the winds.

It's early on a Saturday in May and the heat is already stifling. We arrive in Al Wakra Beach, 40 minutes outside Doha, to meet up with Flora Pester – French ex-pat and owner and instructor of Flo Kite School here in Doha. The winds are good today and Flo has about half a dozen students on the beach with her.

Flora has been a certified kite-surfing instructor for three years and an athlete for six. After discovering the sport in the South of France, Flo Kite School here in Qatar was established in 2010 and Flora is a member of the International Kiteboarding Organization. Kite-surfing is a sport that's easily accessible for everyone she says, giving lessons to adults and children as young as twelve. We ask what her best tips and tricks are for getting started.

"It's very important to start with a teacher," she says. "It can look very easy and it's a lot of fun, but at the beginning you have to be very careful and make sure you're going out with the right equipment,

so it's best to start in a school. I don't want to scare anybody but you have to realize that these kites are powerful and if you're launching them in an improper way on the beach you can be dragged along. But if you're doing it in the right way, on the water, with the right equipment for your size, then it's very safe."

Watching Flora and some of her advanced students take to the waves, their wakeboards skimming along the surface of the water, kites 25 feet up in the air it's easy to see the enjoyment they get out of the sport. There aren't many swimmers at Al Wakra

today and the kite-surfers mostly have the beach to themselves, allowing them to spread out on the water and do some spins, jumps and tricks when the right gust of wind hits.

Flo's Kite School offers lessons for both beginners and advanced, starting with a 'discovery day' for newcomers to assess their skill level, their size and strength – the sport requires a fair amount of balance and lower body strength – and fitting them with their proper equipment. After their initial assessment, students can then go on to other four-day or week-long programs to help them improve their skills and become autonomous on their boards.

"You can learn a lot of things," Flo says of the sport that's become her passion. "After a few weeks of training you'll always have a lot of opportunity to do new things and with the wind conditions changing all the time you'll never have the same experience twice. Also, you're outside enjoying the landscape and nature. Kite-surfing allows you to discover new places, get out of the city and make new friends. These are all things I like."

For more information on lessons, equipment rental and prices visit [www.flokiteschool.com](http://www.flokiteschool.com) ●