



CAPTION West Australia: Big country, big trees...

INTRO → Every self-respecting Euro surf van packs one. Now in its third edition since 2005, the Kite and Windsurfing Guide Europe has answered two of life's burning questions: 'Where shall I go on my next trip?' Then having got there, 'Which spot's best today?' In 2010 the guys at Stoked Publications followed-up with The World Kite and Windsurfing Guide after travelling the globe to 100 top regions, detailing more than 1,200 of the best spots on Earth. 'Made in Germany' to typically high standards, this unique piece of work is now available in English across 54 countries worldwide. We have enough trouble knocking together this little rag, so were keen to pick the brain of publisher and prolific traveller, Udo Hölker

CAPTION → Udo, deep in research, Reunion Island, Indian Ocean



CAPTION → Ouch! Check-in at Singapore for a round-the-world trip



CAPTION → Searching for the best spots, Udo reckons you always need to be prepared to go the extra mile to look round the next corner. Case in point, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa



CAPTION → Another spot ticked off the list





ALL PHOTOS → Stoked Publications

INTERNATIONAL HACKER

It must be a relief when you finally finish these books. They're such a huge project, you must need a holiday afterwards!

We actually finished the guide in November 2009 and then spent three months in Hawaii. The conditions that winter were incredible, the local riders said it was the best winter for ten years. We had swell almost the whole trip, half of the time over two-and-a-half metres, which means between three and five metre waves on the reefs of Maui and Oahu. We scored two or three days of wind a week, so it was a perfect mix of work and fantastic sessions on the water. This was the first trip for a very long time that wasn't primarily for research. But we always have our laptops with us as we still have to run the business – handling orders, for example. Plus over the winter we had to proofread the English edition, which went into print shortly after we got back.

Who's 'we'?

My wife, Nicole, and I do most of the trips. She also works full-time for the Guides - while I handle research and writing, she takes care of the pictures and photographers and deals with orders and bookkeeping for the whole company too. She's amazing.

Is producing the Guides your only job?

If we did anything else we'd never get out on the water,

which would completely defeat the object!

How big is your team?

Five of us work from our office in Germany (doing graphics, layout and admin), then there are 12 freelancers working on research and translation as well as an English co-editor. For the spot info we've built up a network of around 400 'scouts'; the locals who supply us first-hand insider knowledge.

What did you do before you started Stoked Publications?

I had my own mergers and acquisitions office for over 10 years. I found suitable partners or buyers for my clients and guided them through the contractual process. It was quite complicated but also very satisfying to develop such a trusting relationship with my clients – more often than not they had their entire life's work at stake.

No doubt the rewards were pretty good too. Why did you give up such a financially rewarding lifestyle and head for uncharted shores with the Guides?

It wasn't an easy decision as I'd worked hard for many years to build up the business. But it was getting more difficult to find the time to get out on the water and it obviously wasn't going to get any easier. I realised I needed to find myself a new job, one that connected me more to my passion rather than kept me away from it. You need priorities and there's

more to life than making money or having the highest standard of living. The financial crisis (not the first by the way, and definitely not the last) has shown us all what happens when making a fast buck is all anyone cares about. As far as I'm concerned this applies ecologically as well as economically. The 'bigger, faster, stronger' ethos that endured right through the 20th century is dead and buried now. It just leads to consuming more resources and producing more rubbish, but not to a better quality of life. Look at all the senseless consumables that people buy with their hard-earned cash. Less is often more.

Where did you get the idea for the Kite and Windsurfing Guide?

I've been travelling for wind sports for 20 years and always wanted a book like this. The idea buzzed around my head but I never imagined it would be so difficult to research all the information to bring it together. The waves always look smaller from the beach than they really are!

How did you finance it? The books have no advertising and are huge, so they must have cost you a fortune to get on the shelves.

We put everything on one credit card, held our breath for three years and carried all the costs ourselves. We did the same in the four years leading up to printing the World Guide. The necessary investment and complexity of the

INTERNATIONAL HACKER



subject matter are undoubtedly the reason why such guides didn't exist before. I'm sure plenty of people had the same idea. I don't have anything against advertising in the book, but it would only represent a couple of percent of our income anyway. Equally, only a timeless branding campaign would suit. A precious few companies in the industry think so long-term.

To fully explore all the destinations of the World Guide yourself would probably take three lifetimes. How did you collate all the info?

For the spot info we only work with first-hand information from locals in each region. Only someone who's lived there

for years can really talk about the conditions. How do the spots work in different seasons and in various wind directions? What about with and without swell? How are the currents? Where are the rocks? You can't learn this in two or even four weeks at a spot. But initially to find suitable locals and, then to understand what they really meant with their descriptions, we did visit every continent and most of the countries in the Guide ourselves. We would cross-reference research from two, three, four or even five different scouts to make sure the information was correct and that we'd filtered out commercial interests from shops and schools.

Some locals aren't too happy when their home break gets

famous, as they'd rather keep it to themselves. Did you come up against this problem?

We were worried about it, but thankfully the issue very rarely came up. Most people understood that such a vast project could only work if everyone took part. Sure, they share their region's best spots, but learn all about a hundred other regions around the world. We thanked the locals in the foreword for extending a fantastic invitation to share their home spots. Let's be good guests and repay our hosts by showing some respect.

On top of all those details about the country, people and spots, your book also offers comprehensive weather

CAPTION → Kite loop in Ceara, Brazil.



CAPTION → 3,000km through West Australia in 11 days, with just an old dog-blanket to sleep under



CAPTION → The KM0 stone in Teahupoo doesn't just mark the end of the coast-road, but also the edge of the known wave riding world



CAPTION → The mobile office view. Pacific Coast Highway, California



CAPTION → Udo and wife, Nicole



CAPTION → Tahiti: warm, heavy, sweet-scented air and world-class reef-breaks



CAPTION → Nicole catching the action



CAPTION → Sometimes you have to wait for weeks to score sessions like this on Oahu's Northshore. In winter, it's not the waves that are the problem - the wind rarely blows right

information. Did you produce this yourself? You must have needed a degree in weather forecasting!

As well as publishing a spot guide we really wanted to show how the conditions are created. We digested so many academic sources over the years, combining that with input from our scouts to tailor it to kiting and windsurfing. The final hurdle was to present it all in a user-friendly, easily digestible format. You could say I've read an eight-year Open University course in meteorology! To make sure we had quality information we had academic assistance from the meteorologist Dr Michael Sachweh from Munich University as well as experts from KNMI, NASA and the Dutch Argoss Group; offshore experts who advise companies on how to withstand wind and wave activity when laying undersea cables or pipelines. We did the models and graphics ourselves, but for the underlying data we are particularly grateful to NASA and the Argoss Group. NASA gave us access to 20 years of high-resolution satellite wind measurements from around the globe. This

stuff wasn't in the public domain and, combining it with the scouts' info about the local wind phenomena due to thermals and topographical features, we were able to create a solid picture of all the regions for the first time. Argoss supplied us with swell height measurements from satellites, buoys and ships taken over decades across every region to create the swell height graphics.

Was it easier doing the World Guide after your experiences with the Europe guide?

We had the internal structure sorted of course, knew how to research and compile a book and finally had the printing all set-up. Being able to show our first book to everyone who helped us made life much easier, as they could see we were genuinely able to bring such a big project to fruition. This was especially true of the photographers. The first time around it was much harder persuading them to open their archives for us, on the other hand the World Guide covered such a vast area and many destinations are much less

explored than is the case in Europe. Both books presented us with different challenges, but they had something important in common: You need a solid concept to work from. That said, in practice things won't always go according to plan so you have to remain adaptable and find new ways to reach your goal.

Having travelled around so much, have you ever thought about leaving Germany for good?

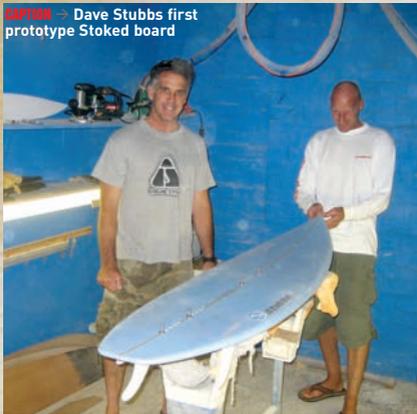
When I'm travelling that idea is always in my head. It starts with the climate and ends with the quality of the waves. If it were simply a question of living only in Germany or only in another country, I'd definitely have pulled up roots long ago. But what makes travelling so special for me is the variety of conditions and cultural experiences on offer. That's why Germany's my base, from where I can always leave and also enjoy coming back. The more you travel the more you realise what Europe in general and Germany in particular have to



CAPTION → Lanes, Maui



CAPTION → Jimmy Lewis



CAPTION → Dave Stubbs first prototype Stoked board



CAPTION → Stoked signature series

offer. Things like stability, security, cultural and social standards, and of course the European lifestyle. Naturally there are also personal things like family, friends and the language too, of course.

Where is your favourite place you've covered in the Guide?

'The best region' doesn't exist in my opinion as each has its own special charm and character and it also depends on your preferred conditions but, if you really want me to choose one for each continent it would be these: Europe: Ireland for its incredible waves, the pristine landscape and the sincere people. Africa: Cape Town for its mix of conditions and lifestyle. Indian Ocean: La Réunion because she's so natural. East Asia: Bali, when it gets wind. Australia: Margaret River and the south coast of West Oz - big country, big trees and big waves! Pacific Ocean: Tahiti

for its sweet warmth and world-class reef-breaks. North America: California's Pacific Coast for its spectacular landscape. Central America and Caribbean: Cuba, one of the most interesting places in the world to wait for wind. South America: Ceara, guaranteed wind and so warm the houses don't even have glazed windows.

Now that the World Guide's finished you must be able to put your feet up for a while.

That would be nice, but as the footballers say: after the final whistle it's time to focus on the next game! While doing the World Guide we introduced our online Worldwide Travel Directory with contact addresses for all the regions. We'll expand that next. In two or three years we'll bring out a completely overhauled new release of the Europe Guide. At the same time we're also preparing

our content for digital applications. Let's just say iPhone, iPad, that kind of thing. Last but not least, we've brought back a load of interesting 'souvenirs' from our trips – Stoked Signature Boards from the finest shapers in the world (like Dave Stubbs in South Africa, John Amundson on Oahu, Jimmy Lewis and Keith Teboul on Maui) and matching accessories.

Jeez, that would take most people another three lifetimes!
That thought had occurred to me!

*The World and European Kite and Windsurfing Guides are available at www.kiteworldmag.com/shop as well as in book-stores, surf-shops or online at www.stoked-publications.com for €45. The English edition weighs in at a mammoth 320 pages. **ku***



CAPTION → 'Work' is fun. Platboom Bay

CAPTION → It's no surprise that this shot of Udo also made it into the book. Haakgat, South Africa – as good as it gets

