



Makani fins Punta San Carlos trip 2014

From Freerider to Wave Ripper

with Maxime Gagnon

It was almost the end of the windsurfing season here in Québec City. The days were going shorter, the weather much colder and the leaves were starting to show their autumn colors. For a windsurfer like me, this time of the season is a sad one...

The sailing season is so short up here in Canada that it seems we do not have time to enjoy it as much as we would want to. This time of the year also means that the luckiest among us would soon take a flight towards a windy tropical destination... then I got a call from Makani's founder J-R telling he needed someone to come down to San Carlos with him to capture videos.

My Background

I started sailing right about the time I learned how to walk. Even though it could seem strange that a kid from Canada was born on a sail boat, this was my reality thanks to a sailing enthusiast father. At age 8, I started doing dinghy competition around north America and this until I was 18 years old. Our sailing team drove around the country for training camps and regattas.

During all those years, sailing was at the center of my life, it was my passion, sailing was all I wanted to do.

When I reached the age of getting into university and the more serious study, I had to choose between keeping my competitive sailing career alive or entering university and ending up with a degree. It was hard, but with the help and advice of my parents I chose to leave competitive sailing and to concentrate myself on school. As everyone with a passion will understand, it was impossible for me, to let go sailing completely...I had to find a way to fulfill my craving.

May it was my destiny to discover windsurfing. I am lucky enough to live in a region where windsurfing conditions are very good for a landlock area. As soon as I decided to try my old father's windsurfer on the lake close to my house, I was hooked and I knew I had found a way to live my passion.





Windsurfing in Québec

As you may or may not know, Quebec city is a radical place to sail and therefore to learn how to sail. The skill level of the windsurfers around here is surprisingly high considering we are not even close to an open water area. When exposed to this reality with challenging conditions and riders, you have no choice but to step up your game, grow some balls and quickly learn how to improve your sailing (survive) to be able to take advantage of the conditions surrounding you.



There is also another challenge in windsurfing, find the budget to get the right gear for the conditions you sail in. I am fresh out of university and windsurfing can be an expensive hobby as you all know especially since they introduced carbon into the sport !! Most of the people laugh at me and/or are worried for my personal safety when they see me open the hatch of my car. It is quite simple, I have 2 boards 3 sails 2 masts one boom (105L, 84L, 4.5m, 5.3m, 6.5m).

For me, it does not matter what you ride, it is the fun you get from riding that matters. For your information, I often feel I have as much if not more fun than many people with brand new colorful gear...

You now understand that I am your average weekend warrior windsurfer. I am deeply passionate about it, some would say obsessed by it, but far from a pro-rider. My skills and my ride illustrate well my level. With that in mind, when I got the offer to go down to San Carlos with the Makani Team, I questioned myself : You are going to follow us to this paradisiac destination and once there, since it is a pro-only spot, you will take videos of us getting pounded by the waves ??

Well this is the common idea we have about this mythical place called Punta San Carlos, unfortunately, none of this is true except for the paradisiac part...

Video link: <http://vimeo.com/114571308>





My Punta San Carlos Experience

So, a couple of weeks passed and I was sitting on a plane bound for San Diego, my head full of thoughts that I would not be able to stick one toe in the water for the whole week. Even though I was confident in myself, relying on my average windsurfing skills and my slight surfing experiences I was still very doubtful about the upcoming week... I tried to sleep but I kept waking up with failed gybes attempts in my head and missed jump landings... Maybe it was gonna be too hard for to get out of the bay? What if the swell is enormous, after all its the pacific ocean with all its power...

After a couple of relaxing days full of anxiety, excitement and uncertainties in San Diego, it was time to head down the coast all the way to the promised land, Punta San Carlos. Once our microscopic plane landed after a majestic flight over the BAJA peninsula I immediately realised I had reached the promised land, this dreamy spot everyone dreams about does exist...



As soon as you fly over the camp, you can see the perfect peeling wave all the way from the point to the other of the bay. A sand bottom bay with turquoise blue water. As we were landing, there was already a windsurfer teasing us with what our week would look like.

Imagine the feeling when you wake up after the best dream of your life, this is what I felt when arriving in PSC, times 10. It really feels like this place was created by the windsurfing god only for windsurfers. But what you will soon discover is that it is not only for pros, it is the best place on earth to learn how to wave sail...

Video link: <http://vimeo.com/114569032>

As soon as you get on the water, you realize that the wave is mellow, the wind is not crazy strong but everything is at the right place, there is not a single drop of water out of place. The wind angle relative to the wave movement is ideal (side-off) and the power of both the wave and wind lets you master this new form of windsurf.

Yes, this is the first thing you will hear from Wyatt Miller and tyson Poor my coaches for the week, it is not the type of windsurf you are used to that you will practice here. In fact, you might as well not plane one bit for the whole week, do not worry, planning will become the least of your worries as long as the week progresses.



For me, an absolute must during this week were Wyatt and Tyson's Clinics. To be honest, after the first day, I felt comfortable and completely out of danger on the water but also I felt like I was not able to ride the waves the right way. Catching a wave was almost impossible, my timing was always off, I did not know how far away from the beach I had to sail to catch the best waves. My position on the board felt wrong, not planing felt not right in my head... Bref I was almost feeling i was doing completely a new sport or that it was my first time on a windsurf. Video link: <http://vimeo.com/114566678>

The first morning when you wake up, Tyson and Wyatt put up a clinic with all the basic stuff you need to know. They cover broad, from safety to body position to timing to adapting to the new gear. The gear available in Punta San Carlos, even though it is truly top of the line gear was all new for me. I never had the occasion to ride a pure wave board before this trip, same for the 3 battens sail...What the clinic does in fact is to put you in confidence to attack the local conditions the right way. Who better to do this than Wyatt and Tyson themselves...

As soon as I got on the water after the clinic, the tips they gave me worked like magic. A couple of hours in the session, the coach come and join you on the water to show you how it should be done out there, even though the clincis work, I must admit that I will most likely never be able to ride as they do...Even though I was barely able to cath a wave a few hours prior to the first clinic, I felt like I was a new rider right after this quick « how to » clinic. As soon as you reach a certain level where you are comfortable enough to ride waves and especially you have enough knowledge to position yourself at the right spot on the water, you learnig curve really starts to improve rapidly.

What is really interesting about the coaching Wyatt and Tyson give is that they cover much more than just the « performance » wave riding aspect. They are aware that the skill level amongst sailors during a specific week can be very different from one sailor to the other. During the first few days, they give a special attention to security details regarding this wave riding spot. They cover everything from wave survival mode or what to do when a wave breaks on you, to the technique to get out of the bay properly to catch some waves. This kind of information in their lessons give you confidence and once you get comfortable in those new conditions, you can start to improve.

Video link: <http://vimeo.com/114566677>



From what I experienced during my week in San Carlos, the coaching is an absolute « must »! Without the help of Wyatt and Tyson, wether it is for the clinics, the video footage with comments or even their tips on the water, their presence during the week with us was imperative for me. Without their help, I a convinced that I would not have been able to enjoy and take advantage of this amazing spot as much as I did.

In conclusion, wether it is to improve your wave riding skills or just like me for an initiation at wave riding, Punta San Carlos is truly the best place on earth to do so. For a sport freak like me, having the opportunity to wake up early, start the day with a ride of Stand Up Paddle board, go for a mountain bike ride enjoy a couple windsurfing sessions during the same day is UNREAL. Add to this the legendary hospitaly of the people working at the camp and the all around epic food experience and you get the perfect adventure gateway. They say you dont know until you go, but I can tell you this, if you decide to go, you will always dream of going back !

Video link: <http://vimeo.com/113937495>

