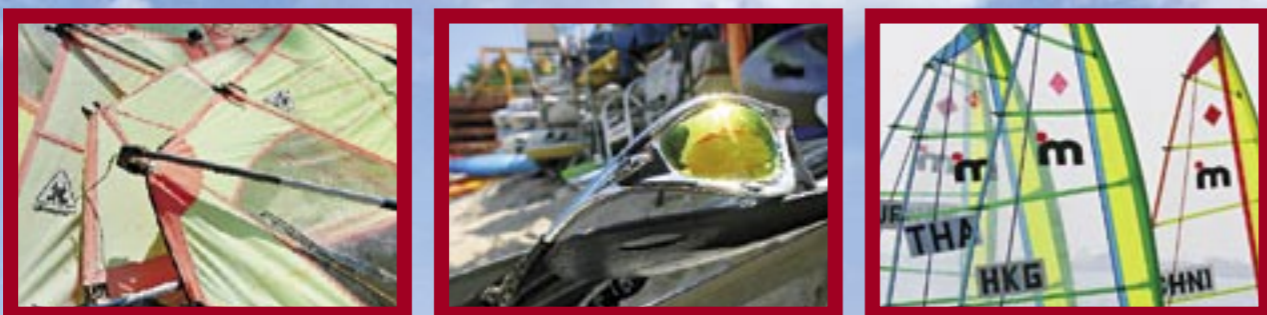


Plain sailing

The thrill of harnessing the wind to skip across the sea is sought after by an ever increasing number of windsurfers



Windsurfing is a sport that has few physical boundaries. Children as young as five or six can quickly master the skills, and continue enjoying the sport throughout their lives. Many experienced windsurfers still take to the water well into their retirement years.

The concept of windsurfing combines sailing and surfing using a one-person craft called a sailboard. American inventor Newman Darby is thought to have been the first to begin experimenting with the idea as early as 1948, but it was not until 1970 that the first commercial sailboards went into production. The sport became so popular that, within the first decade, an estimated one in three households in Europe was said to have owned one.

The sport does not require a lot of strength, nor cost much to get started. But the best part, according to lifelong devotees, is that the thrill of windsurfing never goes away. No matter how often you do it, they say, the joy of feeling the ocean at your feet, the wind whistling through your hair and fresh salty air filling your lungs is an experience that exhilarates again and again.

On a hot and sunny summer's day, it's easy to see why Stanley Main Beach is home to windsurfing. Forget the office for a while: this is living. The protected cove lets beginners learn in safety, while far out on the horizon, the green specks of distant sails can just be made out. This shows how far the breeze has carried those lucky enough to be enjoying some peaceful leisure hours in non-motorised activity on the sea.

Playing on the shore is the young girl Kwan Ching, already a champion at only 12. The leading windsurfer for her age group in Hong Kong, Kwan Ching took up the sport at the age of five, copying her parents. Her hero is Lee Lai-shan, Hong Kong's only Olympic gold medalist to date, who won gold in windsurfing at the 1996 Olympic Games at Atlanta, United States. Her brother, Kwan Lam, is only eight – but he, too, is a keen windsurfer. Both have a dream that one day they'll be good enough to compete in the Olympics.

The children are watched by instructor Ho Tak-hung, himself an Olympic windsurfer. He was picked for the windsurfing team to represent Hong Kong at Seoul, South Korea, in 1988. Ho does not compete these days, preferring a more relaxed lifestyle that does not involve the rigours of training. But, he still loves the sport and will follow with keen interest the upcoming international competition being held at Stanley.



Top: Hong Kong's very own Olympic gold medallist Lee Lai-shan. Above: Foot straps secure feet to the board. Right: Competitors race close to Stanley.
頂圖：香港土生土長的奧運滑浪風帆冠軍李麗珊。上圖：腳帶有助健兒在帆板上站穩。右圖：赤柱海域的風帆比賽。

Standing on the beach, it's impossible not to want to have a go. Apparently, within three hours, almost anyone can be windsurfing successfully. The key is balance – and this is learned in the shallows, in perfect safety.

In the early days, Ho explains, boards were long and narrow. Now that they've become shorter and wider, they are much easier to balance.

Turns are trickier – so practice is required. But it's not tedious, as a harness takes all the weight. In Ho's class, the theory comes last – no need to spoil the initial excitement with boring but necessary instruction, he believes. Let them experience the adrenaline rush first, and the rest will follow.

Within a short time, you're good to go. What lies beyond the inner harbour? Ho has windsurfed with curious dolphins before, and once encountered a submarine. But mostly, the sport delivers what he cherishes most: the serenity of feeling at one with nature, of riding the wind and waves without a worry in the world.

If Hong Kong's young windsurfers have Olympic ambitions, there is a strong body to support them. The Windsurfing Association of Hong Kong holds hundreds of youth development courses every summer. Apart from engaging children in healthy sporting activity, these programmes identify talented junior athletes who potentially could compete at the national level.

The young people have fine examples to follow. Hong Kong's elite windsurfing squad has a strong track record in international competitions. Consistently, its members are ranked first in Asia. Last year, windsurfer Chan King-yin was placed sixth at the Beijing Olympics, Hong Kong's best result in the men's division in Olympic competition.

And not forgetting Hong Kong's other windsurfing heritage. Neil Pryde, a former New Zealander and long-time resident, sailed for Hong Kong at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico. He began a small sailmaking business, which he grew into a global enterprise with a wide range of products bearing his brand. International recognition was achieved when the Pryde Group's revolutionary sailboard design was chosen by sailing's highest authority, the International Sailing Federation, as the official board for the Beijing Olympics.

This year, the sport has an even stronger local focus. Windsurfing is one of 22 sports featured in the East Asian Games, being hosted by Hong Kong. When the region's elite windsurfers gather to compete at Stanley Main Beach, they will carry with them the fervent hopes of a generation that still dares to dream.





Windsurfing boards come in all shapes and colours. 各種形狀顏色的帆板。

碧海揚帆 夢想啟航

滑浪風帆是一種適合任何體能人士參加的運動。五至六歲的小孩已可掌握所需的技術，而且終身受用，有經驗的滑浪風帆愛好者，即使在退休後仍可享受迎風逐浪的樂趣。

顧名思義，滑浪風帆結合了風帆及滑浪兩種運動，是一項利用單人帆板進行的水上活動。追溯至1948年，有說美國發明家Newman Darby是首位嘗試這種運動的人，但直至1970年，帆板才正式投入生產。及後，滑浪風帆開始漸趨普及，不出十年間，估計歐洲平均每三個家庭便擁有一套滑浪風帆。

滑浪風帆並不需要耗用大量體力或金錢。滑浪風帆愛好者稱，這種運動所帶來的刺激，多年來從未減退。無論相隔多久出海一次，只要踏上帆板，在海上破浪前進，清風吹過髮間的感覺及海洋的氣息，箇中體驗與新鮮感都有增無減。

赤柱正灘是滑浪風帆愛好者的天堂，在炎炎夏日，他們可以忘卻辦公室的瑣事，盡情享受滑浪風帆的樂趣。這裡的內灣讓新手可以在安全的情況下學習，富經驗的則可到離岸邊較遠的地方玩樂，不受阻擾，由於風力足夠，大家都可以盡情享受這種「純天然」運動帶來的悠閒時光。

滑浪風帆在香港不乏新秀，12歲的Kwan Ching年紀輕輕已是香港同齡組別比賽的冠軍。她五歲開始隨父母練習，偶像是曾於1996年亞特蘭大奧運會為香港贏得首面金牌的「風之后」李麗珊。她的弟弟Kwan Lam只有八歲，同樣熱愛這項運動，兩人都夢想他朝可以參加奧運會。

兩位小朋友的導師是曾代表香港參加1988年韓國首爾奧運會的Ho Tak Hung，他現已從嚴謹的訓練及比賽陣線退下來，享受較悠閒的生活。不過他還是熱愛滑浪風帆，並密切留意將於赤柱舉行的國際賽事。

站在沙灘上，實在很難抗拒滑浪風帆的魅力，任何人只需三小時便可掌握基本技術。Ho Tak Hung表示，首要學會的是平衡，這可在較安全的淺水地方練習。舊式的帆板窄而長，新式的則較短和闊，讓新手更易掌握。

轉彎技巧較難拿捏，需多加練習，但繫在身上的套索可減輕負重，所以也非難事。Ho Tak Hung認為，理論反而次要，重要的是讓初學者先體會滑浪風帆的樂趣，然後才花時間鑽研技術。Ho Tak Hung就曾與海豚一同逐浪，也曾碰上潛水艇。滑浪風帆讓他最著迷的，是能與大自然合而為一，在乘風破浪間忘卻所有煩惱的感覺。

香港的年輕滑浪風帆選手若有參加奧運的決心，香港滑浪風帆會可以助他們一臂之力。該會每年夏天都舉辦數以百計培育年輕運動員的課程，除了鼓勵兒童參加有益身心的運動之外，也會從中挑選一些具潛質的選手來參加國際比賽。香港隊在國際滑浪風帆賽事上往績不俗，在亞洲區經常取得佳績。2008年北京奧運會，香港選手陳敬然更躋身第六名，創下香港男運動員在奧運滑浪風帆比賽上最佳的成績。

香港也曾出現其他滑浪風帆名將。來自紐西蘭並曾長居香港的Neil Pryde，曾代表香港參加1968年的墨西哥奧運會，隨後成立了一家專營滑浪風帆設備的小型公司，更發展成國際企業，以其名字為品牌，生產各種滑浪風帆的產品。其突破性的帆板設計，更獲國際帆船協會選為北京奧運會的指定帆板。

即將在港舉行的東亞運動會，滑浪風帆是22項運動比賽的其中一項，區內好手將於12月雲集赤柱正灘一較高下，他們的競賽精神，將成為香港新一代滑浪風帆愛好者學習的對象。