



Laura on holiday - Lancelin, Australia



Getting some air at Lyall Bay



Laura often heads straight to the beach after work

The joys of kiteboarding

Laura Adams is a former Canadian who has been living in Wellington for the past three years. She is a corporate executive specialising in leadership, organisational learning and change management. Laura was recruited to New Zealand in 2006 to work as a Chief Executive in the not-for-profit sector. Recently, she has moved to a senior management role in the public sector. Laura currently holds the title of New Zealand Women's National Kiteboarding Wave Champion.

When did you start kiteboarding? How did you get into it?

I started kiteboarding three years ago when I first moved to Wellington from British Columbia, Canada. I was living in Seatoun a few blocks from the beach and was absolutely fascinated watching the local kitesurfers having so much fun out in the water. After talking to some of the locals, I bought some second hand gear on Trade Me and gave it a try a few weeks later.

What have you accomplished in the sport?

Two years after I started, I won the women's title at the New Zealand Kiteboarding Wave Nationals in Taranaki! I completely attribute my win to spending a week with some of the world's top female kitesurfers at Cindy Mosey's Island Odyssey in Aitutaki, Cook Islands. Cindy was the world champion for three years and now she hosts an annual event where she gathers the world's top females to coach emerging women in the sport. That week transformed my kiting and I saw that women of all ages, shapes and sizes can be good kitesurfers.

Was it hard to learn?

Not at all. However I needed to get out on the water

frequently in the first few months in order to gain my confidence and skill. Like most sports that require some balance and coordination, it's important to learn the correct techniques at the beginning, practice regularly and watch others. I had no prior background riding boards, so I needed to develop board skills and learn to fly the kite. I've watched people who are competent snow, surf or wake boarders pick it up much faster than I did.

The biggest thing I emphasise is to take lessons from a qualified IKO (International Kiteboarding Organization) instructor so you learn the appropriate skills and correct safety techniques. The first step is flying a trainer kite on the beach or at your local park. The next progression is into the water. Here you learn to body drag, which is simply flying the kite and 'towing' yourself around in the water. Then it's up and riding on the board.

Do you have to be very strong?

Definitely not. I only weigh 56 kilos, so am pretty tiny compared to most of the guys out on the water. The kite is attached to my harness, so most of the pull of the kite goes directly onto my body. The kite is controlled with

light and subtle movements of the bar. Women can learn to fly the kite quickly as it requires more finesse than strength. Guys often tend to muscle the kite around, which can get them into big trouble quickly if they fly the kite down into the power zone.

Do you have to be a total outdoors person to get into the sport?

People who see me in my corporate world may never suspect that I am a keen kitesurfer. I frequently go to Lyall Bay directly after work, arriving in my business suit and high heels and 10 minutes later I'm in my wetsuit and ready to hit the water. I get a real kick out of this! It's like transforming myself from one world to another.

How safe is the sport?

Kiting is safe assuming that you learn the safety principles when you start, avoid kiting in turbulent weather, know how to swim and never kite alone. Most of the 'kitemares' that we hear about on YouTube etc, occur when people don't follow these four principles. Kites are carefully engineered so if you let go of the bar, the kite simply floats down out of the sky. Also, they are easily detached from your harness if needed.



Enjoying the pristine Cook Island conditions - Photo by www.lantraffordphotos.com

What sort of gear do you have?

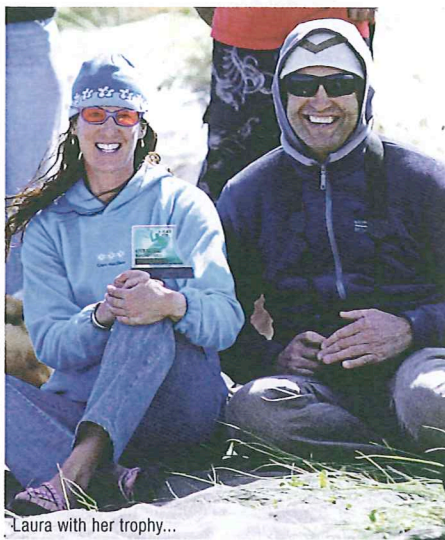
I fly SLE (Supported Leading Edge) kites in the six to twelve meter range, which have an inflatable leading edge and struts. I ride bidirectional boards in flat water and a surf style board on the waves. I am a sponsored rider for Underground Kiteboards in Christchurch and this year am riding their FLX boards.

Another reason I am so passionate about kiteboarding is the equipment is really compact. It all fits into one bag, which makes it easy to transport. I travel frequently for work and often take my gear with me if I'm flying to Auckland or Christchurch on business.

What do you love most about kiteboarding?

I love the freedom and versatility that kiteboarding offers. Propelling myself with the power of the wind is a tremendous feeling. On light wind days I can ride on glassy water and do fun tricks close to the beach and on another day surf the waves in Lyall Bay when the southerlies are blowing strong. Recently, I've been doing long, downwind coastal adventures. Christmas Eve, 2008, was definitely the highlight, when I kitesurfed from Ahipara to the top of Ninety Mile Beach on a stunning blue sky day.

It's also a sport that I can do in all seasons and in a variety of environments. You can kite on water, snow, sand and grass. This winter I spent a week snow kiting on the South Island. One day we kited approximately 60 kilometres in the Pisa range, including right up to the top of Mt. Pisa. That day will stand out in my mind forever. I grew up in Canada and started skiing when I was a little girl of three years old and I still have all 14 of my ski field season passes. That's a lot of trips up the ski lift! Now, I'm snow kiting and using the power of the wind to pull me uphill. When I get to the top, I just float the kite above me to ski down to the bottom and then power it up and get pulled back up again.



Is it an expensive sport? (Compared to say snowboarding or mountain biking etc).

The main expense in kiteboarding is the initial investment in equipment and lessons. After that, there are no costs other than getting to the beach. When you compare it to other sports like snowboarding or mountain biking, cost versus participation is probably better. Living in windy Wellington you have the possibility of being on the water 100 - 150 days of the year, snowboarders definitely wouldn't get that sort of value for money.

Is there a local retailer/school where people can enquire about kiteboarding?

Wild Winds at the Overseas Terminal is our local shop. They have a full range of wind sports equipment, clothing and accessories. They also offer lessons with qualified IKO instructors and provide information and advice about kiting locations. They've been really supportive of me getting into the sport and are keen to help more women get out on the water.

Is there much of a kiteboarding community in Wellington?

Wellington has a very close-knit kitesurfing community and this is definitely one of the main reasons that I got into the sport. People took care of me right from the beginning, helping me launch my kite, keeping an eye on me out in the water and giving me helpful tips to progress. I've made some lifelong friends and we often travel to new kitesurfing spots together. We have a Google group called Wellington Kitesurfers, which is both a networking tool as well as an excellent



source of information about local kiting spots, safety information, tips and techniques. Check us out at wellingtonkitesurfers@googlegroups.com.

Kitesurfing is a great recreational sport to do while on holiday. Tell us about some trips you have been on...

In my first year I did lots of two and three day weekend trips in the North Island. Then I spent 10 days at Lancelin, a wind sports Mecca one and a half hours north of Perth, Australia. I kited every day in crystal clear warm water and relaxed on those lovely, white, sandy beaches afterwards. There were lots of other women out on the water, which was a real inspiration to me, and my kiting improved dramatically. I've been to the Pacific Islands and more recently, to Canada, to kite the West Coast and some of the large freshwater lakes in British Columbia.

Do you have any advice for anyone tempted to get into kitesurfing?

Fly a kite of any kind in an open area to get a feel for how the wind works. Find out more about women in kitesurfing and check out some of the kitesurfing websites. Talk to the team at your local wind sports shop, get to know some kitesurfers, take a lesson and give it a try.

Learn to Kiteboard
with WildWinds

IKO qualified instructor

All kiteboarding equipment supplied including, 2010 Cabrinha kites, boards, buoyancy aids, harnesses and helmets.

Gift Vouchers also available

Call our shop Now!
(04) 384 1010
Or email: info@wildwinds.co.nz
Overseas Terminal
Oriental Bay, Wellington
www.wildwinds.co.nz

WILD WINDS
In association with **THE EDGE 917 Wellington**