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COVER IMAGE - Flying, travelling: it's all about finding the right lift... Photo: Jérôme Maupoint. CONTENTS IMAGE - Photo: Peter Wolf



Imagine you had nothing else to do for the next twelve months but fly. Your bank balance is overflowing, your new wing is winking seductively at you from the corner of the room and the family are all up for a round-the-world adventure. Now what? All you need to do now is choose your destinations and off you go. To help you decide where best to spend your time we've put together the Cross Country Magazine Travel Guide to create the ultimate free flying year.

Ok, so it will cost you tens of thousands and your carbon footprint will be the size of a small African nation, but hey, this is the ultimate guide to the 'perfect year' and who lets reality get in the way of our dreams.

The Cross Country Magazine Travel Guide traverses six continents, immersing itself in cu-peppered skies over the world's greatest flatlands, erupting skywards high above the finest mountains on the planet and leaves us gasping for drinks in the best bars and restaurants. When your body and soul is fried by the hours of amazing flying you've had, you can head to the beach and soar seductive sand dunes looking out over warm lapping oceans.

So, throw caution and your gliders to the wind and dive into the 2010-2011 season's best locations and fly your socks off. And if you can't get away this year, sit back and revel in the finest photography we can find for each site and dream of the future.

Enjoy the 2010-2011 Cross Country Magazine Travel Guide.

Blue skies.

Bob Drury
Executive Editor – Cross Country magazine

CROSS COUNTRY THANKS

Creating a global travel guide like the one you have in your hands is a massive and time-consuming job, and not one we could possibly undertake without the help and support of a huge pool of people. The extensive roll call of those who dedicated their time to produce the information and photos includes:

Adam Hill (Pokhara), Ary Carlos Pradi (Quixada), Bruce Goldsmith (Peru & Bassano), David Owen and Rachael Evans (Laragne), Godfrey Wenness (Manilla), Jan Minaar (Wilderness, SA), Jérôme Maupoint (Chamonix & Annecy), Jim Mallinson (Bir), Jocky Sanderson (Governador Valadares and Olu Deniz), Kelly Farina (Bassano), Kari Eisenhut (Interlaken), Linda Willemse (South Africa), Mark Taggart (St Andre), Micky Von Wachter (Bassano), Nick Greece (Owens, Valle de Bravo, Jackson Hole & Chelan), Olivier Laugero (Chamonix), Richard Gallon (Kössen), Richard Pethigal (Peru), Rob Manzoni (Porterville, SA), Russell Ogden (Valle de Bravo & St Andre), Shawn Kitchen (Quixada), Steve Ham (Piedrahita) & Stuart Belbas (Verbier)

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PERU CUSCO



Onboard with Olivier Laugero as he climbs out from launch above the start of the Sacred Valley that leads to Machu Picchu.
Photo: Olivier Laugero



THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Cusco pumps in the heat and rarefied high altitude air. 8 m/s climbs are the norm with 12 m/s often lurking in the cores. Base is often at over 6,000 m so if you are susceptible to altitude take oxygen. If not, drink copious amounts of mata de coca like the locals do.

At this altitude the heat and thermals create a thermal breeze so expect winds of around 20 km/h in the afternoon. Overdevelopment will cause excessive winds. Evening restitution often occurs after 4 pm.

WHEN TO GO

April to November

ALTITUDE

LAUNCH: 3,600 m ASL
LANDING: 2,700 m in the valley, 3,600 m on the altiplano behind launch
CLOUDBASE: 5,000 - 5,500 m in May going to 6,000 - 6,500 m in August

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Both launches are reached by car and are spacious enough for hang gliders

MUST BE FLOWN

The 30 km XC back to Cusco is classic. Start in the Sacred Valley, cross over the altiplano of the high mountains and end up over the Sacsayhuaman ruins and the city of Cusco. Land next to the White Christ statue near the ruins. Do not land in the ruins themselves, as it's illegal!

Follow the Sacred Valley east to Pisac. A beautiful flight over high grassy peaks with the option of good landings in the valley should you have a problem. Be careful of switching valley winds near Pisac, as four valleys meet there.

WATCH OUT FOR

Although the Peruvian approach to airspace is very relaxed due to the very small number of free flyers in the country, there is still airspace to the south and south west and over Cusco city itself, plus airlines sometimes approach from the west. When flying into Cusco, enter over the mountain range between the lake at Chincheros and Cusco to be on the safe side.

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
 XC Potential ★★★
 Fun Factor ★★★★★
 Logistics ★★★

THE LURE

Get blasted to 6,000 m in powerful thermals and look down on the land of the Incas. Then dine in historic Cusco before dancing the night away in one of South America's most popular tourist destinations. Once you're flown and partied out, use whatever energy you have left to trek the famous Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, the mysterious Lost City of the Incas.

THE SET UP

Cusco is a historic Peruvian city built on the remains of ancient Inca ruins. Just above the town is the

ruin of Sacsayhuaman, a walled complex that dates back to 1100 AD.

The city lies at 3,300 m and is one of the major tourist destinations in South America. Travellers flock to Cusco as it is the launch point for treks to Machu Picchu, so the city is brilliantly set up for visiting pilots to holiday in. There is a fantastic selection of bars, restaurants and nightclubs to keep you happy through the evening and early hours and a wealth of interesting museums and ruins to occupy you through the day. Be aware that Cusco is high, so take it easy the first few days as you acclimatise to the altitude.

The main launch is a half hour drive from town at 3,600 m ASL and 900 m over the Urubamba valley floor below, which leads towards Machu Picchu. It's a roomy, two-wing grassy launch staring straight at the Urubamba mountain range, which has three glaciers leading to peaks of over 5,600 m. Close by, Rachi launch is further away but offers a beautiful grassy hillside looking into the same valley.



Photo: Bob Drury



PERU CUSCO

MORE NITTY GRITTY

WATCH OUT FOR CONT'D

Given the altitude and ferocity of the sun, thermic turbulence is always a danger in Cusco. Dust devils can start as early as 9 am and pilots should be wary of encountering extreme lift and its associated turbulence during the day.

ACCOMMODATION

Cusco has everything from \$5 backpackers' hostels to five star luxury hotels. Choose somewhere within a few hundred metres of the Plaza de Armas, as it's a nicer area and where all the action is happening.

GUIDES AND COURSES

For great advice contact Richard Pethigal of Cloudwalker Paragliding who has been running a tandem operation from Cusco since 2000. Richard is in Cusco from May until Oct. cloudwp@gmail.com

Local pilot Leo Fantas owns the local paragliding school. www.cusco.net/leo-paragliding/

EXPERT'S OPINION

"High altitude flying made easy, in a fantastic holiday location that is only missing a beach." Bob Drury

THE BIG TICKS

Flying over ancient Inca ruins.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Great for older kids with lots of cultural and historical adventures to have. Many agencies offer tours around the Inca ruins or go rafting, horse riding or trekking.

RAINY DAYS

You'd struggle to get bored in Cusco. Visit the Sacsayhuaman ruins, take a tour of the city, raft the Apurimac River, take the train to Machu Picchu or hike the Inca Trail. If you're feeling lazy then hang in town and eat and drink in the myriad of fantastic cafes and bars whilst Inca musicians serenade you.

WEATHER INFO

Cusco is a micro-climate in a country with poor meteorological information. You need your own judgement here.

GETTING THERE

Fly into Cusco from Lima or La Paz, Bolivia. Or beat yourself sore on a Peruvian bus with chickens and goats.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

www.cusco.net



Kari Eisenhut crossing the high plateau behind launch enroute to victory at the Cusco Breitling Open. Photo: Bob Drury



Taking the high route to Pisac. Photo: Bruce Goldsmith



The importance of small details



HOOK 2

NIVIUK

www.niviuk.com

FRANCE LARAGNE



Sailplane country: big skies and wide-open landings make for one of Europe's premier sites. Photo: Steve Blenkinsop

THE LURE

The dry skies of the French Provence provide a free flying theatre of unparalleled quality. Booming thermals and lofty cloudbases cartwheel you high above knife edge ridges, vertical limestone walls and deep-forested valleys in a circuit-friendly arena that is perfect for XC pilots of all levels.

Laragne has hosted everything from FAI world championships to the friendly and popular annual Chabre Open, when pilots compete to learn. With the landing field in the town campsite itself, Laragne mixes consistently brilliant flying weather and stunning XC routes in a great atmosphere to deliver perfect flying holiday.

THE SET UP

Laragne is a small town in the western side of the southern France Alps. Dry and arid in summer, the terrain is a mixture of pine forests, sharp limestone ridges and wide valleys.

Take off is from Montagne de Chabre to the west of the town, a partly metalled road takes you to the summit. From Chabre routes lead in almost every direction: west along lower forested east-west running ridges, south, hopping along a series of similar ridges,

or north into the much higher rocky peaks of Pic de Bure and eventually the impressive Ecrins, the largest gathering of high peaks in France.

On any good day the cloudbase is high above the peaks allowing relatively secure flying over a wild landscape. Climbs are typically 3-5 m/s with the odd real ripper coming through. In general the valleys are open and wide making for safe landings and explaining why the hang gliding and sailplane communities have held Laragne in such high esteem for many years.

The main landing in Laragne campsite has a bar/restaurant and a lively flying scene throughout the season. A shuttle service runs at times from there, but check first.

Laragne is a typical Provencal town and has a weekly market, several good bars and restaurants, supermarkets and all the amenities you'll need.

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★ ★

XC Potential ★★ ★★ ★

Fun Factor ★★ ★

Logistics ★★ ★

Looking east to Chabre. The landing is in the foreground. Photo: Fred Gustafsson

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Strong, but generally smooth, mountain thermals in a drier airmass than the northern Alps, gives high bases and reliable XC flying. Chabre is affected by the influence of air drawn in from the plains to the west by the anabatic circulation of the day, so you need to get away before the westerly arrives in the afternoon. Chabre has take-offs facing south and north: the south is an easy scrub launch, but the north is a short steep cliff launch where deft ground handling skills are essential. Nearby the sites of Bergies, Buc and Aspres make up for days when Chabre fails you due to wind direction or cloudbase height.

WHEN TO GO

April till October

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 2,500 – 4,000 m

LAUNCH: Chabre 1,304 m

LANDING: Laragne campsite 735 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Laragne is a famous hang gliding venue and both launches are driveable by normal car.

MUST BE FLOWN

Take a trip north to the Pic de Bure, a moonscape mountain with vertical cliffs and a table-flat top. Once you've been blasted up the south face you get to look down on the summit with its huge observatory and collection of massive telescopes.

WATCH OUT FOR

Although there's no major airspace close by, this is sailplane country and the skies are humming with them. The drop zone in Gap is also very active and must be avoided and you need to know where the active sailplane airfields are in the area.

ACCOMMODATION

Laragne has a selection of low to mid range hotels and hostels to choose from. www.otlaragne.fr Camping Monteglin is where many pilots stay as you can land next to a bar and your tent. www.camping-monteglin.com

Or try the very popular www.allez-up.com, a beautiful gite run by knowledgeable local pilots David Owen and Rachael Evans, who offer a full pilot support package to boot.



Looking down and west on launch. Photo: Andy Busslinger

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FRANCE LARAGNE

MORE NITTY GRITTY

GUIDES AND COURSES

Ex-world champion Judy Leden and husband Chris Dawes offer thermalling and XC courses through www.airways-airsports.com as does Jocky Sanderson through www.escapexc.com.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Laragne is fantastic! It's that rare 'go anywhere' site with inviting XC routes in every direction. All the trigger points work as expected, so you learn a lot from flying there. Plus you land smack in the campsite where the cold beer awaits. It's right up there among my very special favourite places in the world."
Mads Syndergaard – PWC pilot and delegate and UP PR man

THE BIG TICKS

Head northeast over Pic de Bure and navigate your way through the deepest Ecrins, France's densest collection of 4,000 m peaks.
Or straight north and hook up with the big Grenoble valley and ride it north to Mt Blanc 200 km away.

TAKE THE FAMILY

This is a great venue for a holiday in the sun. The Gorges de la Méouge, the river valley beneath Montagne de Chabre, has many pools to play in and there are several mellow manmade lakes dotted around the place. Aerial rope parks, excellent rock climbing, tandem skydiving, karting, horse riding, nature trekking and tonnes of water based sports on the lakes make up a great holiday location. Not to mention visits to culturally beautiful towns like nearby Sisteron.

RAINY DAYS

Thankfully mid-summer rain is rare. In the event, though, Sisteron with its stunning citadel has much to offer or visit the local markets that France is so famous for.

WEATHER INFO

Daily forecasts are posted at the campsite, or use www.meteofrance.com or www.para2000.org.

GETTING THERE

Marseille Provence airport is the nearest airport, one and a quarter hours away and has good bus and train connections. Nimes airport is just over two hours drive, Grenoble and Nice both three hours. Many of the budget airlines fly to them.
A car is useful at Laragne, not least to access take off.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

www.flylaragne.com has lots of flying information and the local tourist office www.otlaragne.fr details other things you may need.



Photo: Andy Busslinger



Chabre hosted the 2009 Hang gliding World Championships. Photo: Ed Ewing



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some of us go our own way,
some of us fly paragliders,
some of us fly GIN.*

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GO FURTHER.

GIN



FRANCE CHAMONIX

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
XC Potential ★★★★★
Fun Factor ★★★★★
Logistics ★★★★★

THE LURE

Ice-capped mountains, glaciers, searing rock walls, pumping thermals with fast cable car access: Chamonix is one of the most dramatic and picturesque flying locations in Europe and lies at the foot of Mt Blanc, western Europe's highest mountain.

THE SET UP

Chamonix is the adventure sports capital of Europe. Situated at the foot of Mt Blanc the town is humming with skiers and boarders in winter and climbers and flyers in summer. It also attracts more tourists than any other mountain location in France.

The town is totally set up for holidaymakers making it a fantastic family destination. There're no end of bars, restaurants and even nightclubs for the night owls. The only drawback is the price of it all: budget holidays are difficult to come by in Chamonix.

THE FLYING

There's flying on both side of the valley. Plan Praz is on the southeast-facing side of the valley and opposite the huge rockwalls and glaciers of Mt Blanc. The site starts working as early as 10 am on a good day and is reached by the Brevent cable car from Chamonix town. Plan Praz is a perfect launch point for XCs going into the massive Wallis valley in Switzerland, or westwards towards Annecy.

On the Mt Blanc side of the valley is Plan d'Aiguille, reached by the Aiguille du Midi cable car from town. The site faces northwest and becomes soarable after around 3 pm. Flying from here gives you access to the impressive rockwalls of the Midi, the Batiere, the Grepon and the stunning granite pillar of the Dru. Flying on this side of the valley is banned during July and August due to the number of helicopters buzzing around.

Just outside the valley is Plaine Joux, a driveable launch that generally offers mellower conditions than in the valley itself. It works from midday until late and is a perfect family site with cafes, horse riding and a treetop rope adventure park.



Soaring up the huge rock walls behind Plaine Joux launch
Photo: Jérôme Maupoint



The impressive rock pillar of the Petit Dru.
Photo: Marcus King



The south side of the Midi is distinctly mountainous. Photo: Olivier Laugero

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Strong thermals and a brisk valley wind in summer. Base is generally higher here than in the surrounding areas

GETTING TO LAUNCH

Cable cars to Plan Praz and Plan d'Aiguille from Chamonix. Cable car to Les Grands Montets from Argentiere. Drivable launch at Plaine Joux, just outside the valley

WHEN

April to September

ALTITUDE

CLOUD BASE: 2,000 – 4,000 m
LAUNCH: 2,000 m
LANDING: 1,000 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Both cable cars will transport HGs with prior notice or drive to Plaine Joux. All launches are suitable for HG and there are good landings at both the Chamonix sites and Plaine Joux.

MUST BE FLOWN

Launching from the Aiguille du Midi at 3,700 m. Soaring the huge Petit Dru rock pillar in evening lift.

WATCH OUT FOR

Aggressive leeside conditions at the Brevent in a north wind.
Turbulent valley winds in the afternoon.
Flying is banned on the Mt Blanc side of the valley between Prarion and the Mer de Glace during July and August.

ACCOMMODATION

Everything from camping to five star hotels.

GUIDES AND COURSES

There are six schools offering instruction and guidance in the valley.



Next Generation XC Performance

BBHPP Technology for Sport Class XC Flying

In 2010, Ozone is taking a new and significant step forward with the release of the Delta. Born from a revolutionary leap in paraglider design, the Delta contains next generation design elements which have been proven at the highest levels of international competition. The Delta features the most advanced profile that we have ever applied to the sport class and a highly optimised line plan with 31% less drag than its predecessor. These performance breakthroughs are built on the solid foundation of a moderate aspect ratio, meaning a new level of glide performance and stability in active air in the LTF 2 / EN C class has come without any sacrifice of comfort or safety.

FRANCE CHAMONIX

MORE NITTY GRITTY

XCMAG'S OPINION

"We have an office in Chamonix for a reason: it's one of the most dramatic places to fly in Europe!"

THE BIG TICKS

Le Tour de Mt Blanc: once reputed to have a crate of champagne as a prize for the first to complete.
Annecy and back: 100 km classic XC route.
The Rhone Rider: into Switzerland and follow the huge Wallis valley to the Furka Pass.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Yes! Kids' activities galore: horse riding, climbing, biking and the Parc de Loisirs, Chamonix's kids' mini pleasure park. Not much for toddlers though.

RAINY DAYS

Indoor climbing wall, swimming pool and sports centre, library with massive games room, cinema, art gallery.

WEATHER INFO

Posted all over town. Check chemist window in the square, town hall or sports centre. Otherwise visit chamonix-meteo.com

GETTING THERE

Fly to Geneva airport where many transfer companies run buses direct from the airport to Chamonix town. See directory for listings.

Buses and trains run in and out of the valley to Geneva, Lyon, Paris and even London.

By car via the A40 Autoroute Blanche, or the Mt Blanc tunnel from Italy. Or via the Col de Montets from Martigny in western Switzerland, often closed in winter.

USEFUL CONTACTS, WEBSITES AND INFORMATION

Vol Libre is a fantastic free booklet put together by the local clubs, school and tourist boards. It's available from the Offices de Tourisme de Chamonix, les Houches and Passy, and at all the local schools

www.chamonet.com for general resort information



Soaring in front of the Agille du Midi. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint



Crossing on to the Aravis Chain on the classic XC from Chamonix to Annecy. Photo: Bob Drury

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Photo: Charlie King

GOING LIGHTWEIGHT

Cut the hassle and cut the weight – get flying for under 10 kg. By Ed Ewing

“That’s a big bag.” Travel anywhere in the world with a paraglider and you soon hear those words. Fresh-faced backpackers with light hearts and lighter luggage look at you in wonder, as you struggle to push your “big bag” onto/into/under a space on the bus. They hop on, leaving you to struggle and sweat. “It’s a paraglider,” you explain through gritted teeth. “A wing in a rucksack.”

There was a time when your ‘wing in a rucksack’ really did fit under the bed. Then things changed and we got bigger harnesses, more padding, heavier gliders and extra electronics. Our bags swelled to around the 25 kg mark. Then, early this century, a slow revolution started. Lighter gliders made of lighter materials aimed at mountain pilots and travellers started to appear. Harnesses got the lightweight treatment next – stripped back first to essential webbing only (ouch!) and then rebuilt with a bit of discreet padding so you can actually fly in them. Reserves came next. Now, the sub-10 kg paraglider package is a reality. So how do you do it?

GLIDER
Lightweight gliders are made of lighter material and use skinnier lines in the upper levels. Risers look like bootlaces, and brake handles have been pared right back. The result is a lighter glider, but also one that compresses to about half the size of a standard glider. This is important as it is less bulk, as much as less weight, that makes travelling with your glider easier. Many manufacturers now offer gliders made out of such lightweight materials, and they weigh in at between 3 kg and 4 kg. The really lightweight ones – sub 3 kg – are often only meant for hike-and-fly mountain

descents, while the bigger ones can be used to soar, thermal and go cross country. Some manufacturers offer (for a price) lightweight versions of their entire range – just ask. Lightweight paragliders work just as well as their standard counterparts – but they won’t necessarily wear as well, so take care on launch. That said, many converted pilots now use their lightweight glider as their main glider.

HARNESS
The choice here is nearly unlimited. You can get a collection of straps at less than 300 g, or a full on bivouac harness with carbon seatplate and lightweight pod attachment for around 4 kg. Many come with a reversible airbag / rucksack, which saves you a kilo on carrying an extra bag. Before choosing, think about what you’ll use it for and what’s important. If you are climbing up and flying down, then go ultra lightweight; if you want to stay up, go for a little more comfort. Check the wing manufacturer’s recommendations – many make specific harnesses to go with their lightweight gliders. Others recommend your harness is set to a certain width.

RESERVE
Don’t skimp on your reserve. If you’re big you might find lightweight reserves aren’t big enough, so check with the manufacturer. That said, you can get lightweight reserves rated to 120 kg all-up (that’s you, plus kit) that weigh 1.75 kg – about 700 g less than a standard reserve. Again, the lightweight material offers less bulk – as important as less weight. If you pair a

lightweight reserve with a lightweight harness, then take specialist advice – it’s very easy to rig a reserve wrongly so it becomes tangled, or deploys slowly. One of the most important elements of a reserve is how quickly it deploys – you don’t want it to be slowed down, even by half a second.
Weight: 2 kg

THE REST
Lightweight doesn’t mean less flying: you can go just as far on lightweight kit as you can on standard equipment. But it does mean you have to choose your aids carefully. Solar-powered variors combined with a basic GPS are one of the lightest options: that way you get the sound and flight information. Or consider an all-in-one solution: the Ascent Watch Vario is an altimeter, vario, barograph, flight log and thermometer in a watch – it weighs 40 g, and it works. Your helmet is important, and you can go lightweight here too – but again, balance your desire to cut kilos with your need for safety. You can get good quality EN966 airsports-rated helmets that weigh less than 500 g. Don’t forget your hook-knife, whistle and emergency / in-flight rations.
Weight: 2 kg

And there you have it – a fully functioning paragliding package that weighs 10 kg or less. Result! If you are going travelling with your glider for any extended time, then consider taking the lightweight option. You’ll be thankful the next time you’re getting on a bus.



Lightweight specialist Martin Müller. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint



Wings Repair Light Concept









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LIGHTWEIGHT GEAR FOCUS

Going lightweight on your travels is all about getting the right gear. Here's a selection of great ideas to help you make up your mind.



Photo: Markus Zimmermann

APCO - MAYDAY SLT RESCUE



The classic, ultra proven rescue parachute is now available in a super lightweight form

Sizes:	16	18	20
Weight:	1.22 kg	1.56 kg	2.08 kg
Max. Load	100 kg	115 kg	130 kg
Sink Rate:	6.15 m/s	5.1 m/s	4.48 m/s
Certification:	LTF & EN		
Website:	www.apcoaviation.com		

ICARO - OXYGEN



A perfect, easy to fly wing for mountaineering & expedition paragliding and easy travelling

Sizes:	S & M (65 - 105 kg)
Weight:	3.9 kg (size S), 4.2 kg (size M)
Colours:	Red / Blue / White
Certification:	EN A / LTF 1
Website:	www.icaro-wings.com

APCO - CHAIRBAG 2



Save kilos by making your glider bag and harness one and the same.

Sizes:	One size fits all (160 - 185 cm)
Weight:	sub 2.5 kg with carbon seat plate
Colours:	Black/Red or Black/Blue
Features:	Airbag back protection, under-seat reserve pocket, straps for hiking poles, lightweight carbon seat plate (optional)
Certification:	LTF & EN
Website:	www.apcoaviation.com

SUPAIR HYBRID 2



Performance orientated harness/bag combination

Sizes:	S, M, L and XL
Weight:	4.3 kg (M size)
Colours:	Black/Red - Black/Blue - Black/Silver
Features:	Airbag back protection, under-seat reserve pocket, automatic buckles, footrest, carbon seat plate, radio pocket with microphone attachment connection & many pockets
Certification:	LTF & EN
Website:	www.supair.com

USA CHELAN

THE LURE

Big, wide thermals and huge XC potential over the flats of eastern Washington's farmlands. Booming 10 m/s are common, with a cloudbase 3,000 m above the deck. The fine Chelan soil is pulled into thermals peppering the landscape with dust devils to mark the way. Throw in multiple spacious launches and landings and you have one of the USA's free flying heavens.

THE SET UP

Chelan Butte is in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, nestled between Lake Chelan and the Columbia River. It is a transition area offering a wide variety of landscapes in different directions. East over the Columbia River brings flatlands, which spread south and east to the boundaries of the state. North takes you along the foothills towards Canada, west towards the Cascade Mountains and spectacular views. Snow-capped volcanoes are visible from the air. The top of the Butte is wide open and works in all directions.

The flatlands offer nearly unlimited routes with great landing options almost everywhere. Farmers are welcoming as long as we respect their crops and much of the land is publicly owned. With small towns throughout the area hitching is easy, although typically pilots arrange a retrieve driver.

Chelan is a popular summer destination because of Lake Chelan, a pristine, glacier-fed lake. Golden hillsides and pine-lined shores skirt the lake, and the surrounding mountains rise dramatically 2,500 m up out of the deep blue water.

As a vacation town, Chelan offers all the amenities needed for a great holiday. Luckily the town is still relatively small so the prices are reasonable. Along with numerous water sports and great swimming areas at the lake, the nearby North Cascades National Forest offers brilliant camping, hiking, climbing, biking and of course flying.



Heading north east into the big wide yonder behind launch - perfect flatland flying. Photo: Stefan Mitrovich

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
 XC Potential ★★★★★
 Fun Factor ★★★
 Logistics ★★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

The main launch is south facing and starts working around 11 am. The terrain drops away steeply for 600 m, then spreads into rolling fields that continue to the river 915 m below. This generates big, powerful thermals that are channelled right up to the Between The Rock launch, so named due to the large rock outcrops either side. There's plenty of room, but watch your heading until you're clear.

WHEN TO GO

March to October, with the best XC conditions in June to August.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 2,700 – 3,300 m over the Butte, but higher in the flats

LAUNCHES: 1,158 m

MAIN LANDINGS: Chelan Falls Park 244 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Same as paragliders

MUST BE FLOWN

Brilliant everywhere! Most days the surface flow will direct you north east across the flats towards the town of Mansfield, and beyond.

WATCH OUT FOR

Dust devils on launch! Be very watchful once hooked in. Watch the movement in the bushes and pick your launch cycles well. No airspace until near Spokane, 160 km east, but watch out for military jets flying low and very fast!

ACCOMMODATION

Lots of decent and clean motels in Chelan for around \$100. Plus nice campgrounds and fancy resorts on the lake side. Visit www.cometothelake.com for more info, camping is under '101 Things to do'.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Aerial Paragliding - www.paragliding.us.

USA CHELAN

MORE NITTY GRITTY

EXPERT'S OPINION

"I love Chelan! It's mountain access to expansive flatlands. Strong lift and high cloudbases with light enough winds to make huge triangles or downwind runs of over 200 km." Nick Greece – editor USHPA magazine

THE BIG TICKS

Long distances, out and returns and triangles. It's all about covering ground.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Yes! It's a great family location. Water sports in the lake and outdoor activities galore in the Cascades.

RAINY DAYS

What rainy days? If it's not flyable in summer it'll just be too windy, but you'll still have the sunshine. Go swimming or play in the mountains.

WEATHER INFO

www.paragliding.us has a weather page. Look for Wenatchee which has some local wind data.

GETTING THERE

Fly to Wenatchee, about 30 minutes drive away, if you can, although Seattle is just over three hours drive and usually

the easiest option. There are buses and trains, but it would require 2-3 changes, the times are infrequent, and they don't go to Chelan on the weekends. You need a vehicle to get around in Chelan.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

Aerial Paragliding, www.paragliding.us
Northwest Paragliding Club www.nwparagliding.com.
Stefan Mitrovich – www.cascadeskies.com



Heading east over the rim for the first glide of the day. Photo: Doug Stroop



Leading the Lightweight Revolution...

Ozone has been at the forefront of light paraglider development for a decade, and with the release of the Geo series we redefined this class of paragliders. The latest Geo, the *Geo II* is still the ideal light choice for **mid-range LTF 1-2** pilots.

The *Ultralite* series features 3 sizes of the **world's lightest** LTF / EN certified paragliders, and the UL 16 is available for pilots who are serious about absolute minimum weight and packing size.

The *Swift* has once again revolutionized light technology in the paraglider industry with glide performance at the top of its class, a cutting edge blend of light and ultralight materials, and agility that must be flown to be believed. Get a test flight from your local Ozone Dealer to discover why the *Swift* is now widely considered to be the new standard for lightweight performance 1-2 wings.

WWW.FLYOZONE.COM

AUSTRIA KÖSSEN

THE LURE

Rolling flatlands out front, steep mountain ridges running left and right, cable car access and the Fliegerbar in the landing to quench your thirst in after a great XC. If you sat back and designed the perfect free flying venue it would probably look like Kössen. Perched on the northern edge of the Alps, Kössen has hosted FAI world championships in both hang gliding and paragliding and is now the home of the Super Paragliding Festival, an annual outdoor event where pilots can test fly almost any paraglider they fancy.

THE SET UP

Kössen is a quiet little town on the Austrian-German border. Whilst in the plains, just south of the town the landscape rears up into the first ridges of the Alps where the Unterberg lies.

Accessed by a 15-minute cable car ride, the Unterberg has big wide grassy take offs towards the east, north and west. Kössen lies in its own microclimate and is protected from strong winds by the high mountains around it. Locals say that statistically you can fly here more days of the year than anywhere else in the Northern Alps.

There are XC possibilities for all levels of pilots from the Unterberg, you can go 20 km or 200 from here. The valleys are open, wide and friendly to land in too.

The main landing is in the Fliegerbar Arena, where the Super Paragliding Festival is held each year. It's a huge and well-maintained area with golf lawns. The Fliegerbar has a beer garden atmosphere and sells budget food and drinks for pilots.

There's even a glider repair centre in town and, being in the heart of the European free flying scene, most brands have either their businesses or representatives in the region.

Pilots prepare to try out new gliders at the annual Super Paragliding Festival held in May. Photo: Michel Ferrer



The Fliegerbar. Photo: Michel Ferrer

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Flatland and mountain thermals to choose from. Common alpine breezes set up in the afternoons but, as the area is quite green the heating isn't too intense so the winds rarely get unmanageable.

WHEN TO GO

May until the end of September

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 3,000 m
LAUNCH: 1,500 – 1,700 m
LANDING: 650 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

The cable car has special transport units for hang gliders and will take them at no extra cost. Hang gliders have to carry up 50 m to their take off.

WATCH OUT FOR

Kössen is as safe a place to fly as you can find in the Alps. The only place to watch out for is the locally known 'Bermuda Triangle', a landingless valley to the west of launch.

There are certain regulations the locals have in place

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★ ★ ★
XC Potential ★★ ★ ★ ★
Fun Factor ★★ ★ ★
Logistics ★★ ★ ★ ★

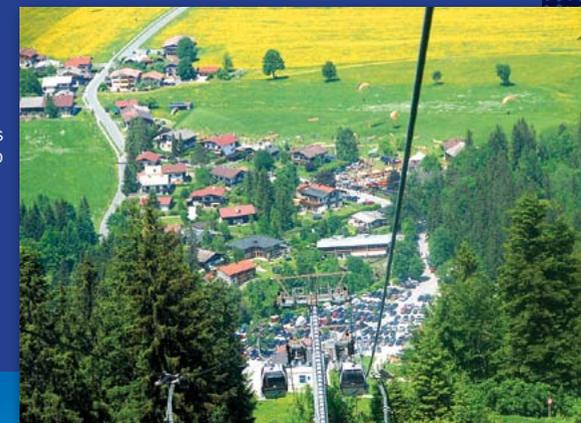
regarding landing procedures. These should be adhered to and can be found at the Fliegerbar.

ACCOMMODATION

Kössen has a range of hotels and many guest houses offering rooms to tourists – look for the word 'zimmer'. The Euro Camping is 400 m from the main landing field and within walking distance of the lift.

GUIDES AND COURSES

The Kössen Flying School and their partner schools offer paragliding tuition all summer. Tandem flights are also offered and can be booked straight at the Fliegerbar. On request, the Flying School is happy to provide assistance to all guest schools, clubs and groups and can even arrange group discounts for food, accommodation and lift tickets.



The wide-open grassy launch and quick and easy cable car access make Kössen a perfect flying location. Photo: Courtesy of Kössen tourist board



AUSTRIA KÖSSEN

MORE NITTY GRITTY

EXPERT'S OPINION

"I love Kössen, not just because it's flyable almost all of the time and logistically it's so easy to fly, but more because the atmosphere amongst the pilots is so good. It's a no stress flying site." - Richard Gallon, Kössen resident and ex-PWC champion

THE BIG TICKS

Wrap up a monster FAI triangle. 200 km plus is possible from here.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Definitely. There's tonnes to do around Kössen in summer. Swimming, hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, rafting, kayaking etc. The Fliegerbar will even provide special care for kids while parents fly.

RAINY DAYS

Walk the rocky tracks in the "Wilder Kaiser". Sightseeing in Kitzbühel, Salzburg or Innsbruck or visit the famous Swarovski Crystal Worlds in Wattens. Or make a date to visit one of the many paragliding manufacturers in the region - Airwave, Skywalk, Wings of Change, Nova and Pro-Design all have their bases close by. Contact the tourist office or get advice at the Fliegerbar.

WEATHER INFO
Official aviation weather forecast updated daily at the Fliegerbar.

GETTING THERE
Fly to Munich, Salzburg or Innsbruck then hire a car or take a bus or train. If driving take the autobahn to Kufstein then it's half an hour to Kössen.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA
www.fly-koessen.at
www.kaiserwinkl.com
www.bergbahnen-koessen.com



Great architecture even better beer. Photo: Michel Ferrer



Peaceful soaring in a lush green landscape. Photo: Max Wiener



2nd Super Paragliding Festival Kössen Austria

13.-16. May

2010
See you
at the
Flieger-
bar!





SWITZERLAND VERBIER

THE LURE

Majestic snow-covered mountains, three stunning glaciers, green valleys with chocolate-box Swiss chalets and friendly grassy launch sites and landing fields. This is a true Alpine flying experience suitable for every type of pilot.

THE SET UP

Verbier is on the south-facing slope of a deep wide valley in the southern Swiss Alps. While flying here between June and September is ideal for beginners who are looking for a first taste of big mountain flying, it is also a terrific flying site for experienced XC pilots.

With over seven beautiful grassy launches and five large official landing fields, Verbier is flyable in virtually every wind direction – and with its own microclimate it is said to have over 300 flyable days a year.

The two main launch sites are Les Ruinettes, located at the top of the main cable car and ideal for afternoon thermal flights, and La Croix de Coeur which is perfect for morning thermal flights (south-east facing) and evening soaring flights along the length of the ridge. Top landing at La Croix de Coeur is possible, even for relatively inexperienced pilots.

Access to La Croix de Coeur is by car or local navette. Les Ruinettes can be reached by cable car – although local guiding outfit Verbier Summits are allowed to drive up.

Verbier's huge XC potential was recognised when it was chosen as a location for the 1993 PG World Championships. Pilots can choose to fly a 60 km triangle over the glaciers without ever leaving the Verbier valley and the safety of their familiar landing fields, or fly far up the Rhone valley towards the Furka Pass, following the train line that can always bring them back home.

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★

XC Potential ★★★★★

Fun Factor ★★★★★

Logistics ★★★★★

Experience flying in one of Europe's premier ski resorts.
All photos: Stuart Belbas/Verbier Summits



Glaciers, rock walls and high peaks make Verbier a full on Alpine experience

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Good alpine thermals with a base that can often reach 4,000 m+. Typical Alpine valley winds that aren't generally an issue in the main landing field at Champ Sec where the valley is wide. Morning thermal flights are possible from SE facing launches Savolyere and Croix de Coeur, and afternoon flights from SW facing Ruinettes. Verbier offers smooth 1,400 m sled rides or big mountain flying and everything in between.

WHEN TO GO

June to end of September.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 3,000 – 4,000 m

LAUNCH: 2,200 m

LANDING: In Verbier 1,500 m, in the valley 650 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Easy launches for hang gliders with access only by car or local shuttle / navette.

MUST BE FLOWN

Fly over the Petit Combin and back along the Corbas-siere glacier. Absolutely breathtaking flight and possible in any wind direction when cloudbase is high enough. XC to Zermatt or Fiesch needs west wind and is only for experienced XC pilots.

WATCH OUT FOR

Angry farmers. Speak to local guides for advice on which fields to avoid

ACCOMMODATION

Chalet accommodation with Verbier Summits, hotels and unfortunately only one fairly poor camping site at Champ Sec.

COMPETITIONS

None. Just a photo competition on the Verbier Summits website to win a free holiday.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Twin brothers Stu and Mike Belbas have been flying in Verbier for over 15 years. They run Verbier Summits, an FSVL and BHPA registered school, and offer guiding and luxury chalet accommodation as well as courses to all levels.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"The most diverse flying I have ever found." Stu Belbas.

THE BIG TICKS

Around the Petit Combin.
Verbier to Zermatt.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Definitely! Fantastic outdoor swimming pool, great walks up to the glaciers, downhill mountain biking, horse riding, 18 hole golf course, suspended forest adventure trail.

RAINY DAYS

Visit the gorges with walkways bolted to the edge of the cliffs or the St Bernard monastery where you can have soup with the monks and see where the St Bernard avalanche dogs are trained.

WEATHER INFO

Daily updates posted at Verbier Summits flying school or check www.meteo-suisse.ch.

GETTING THERE

Geneva airport with direct trains to Martigny then a short mountain train to Le Chable. If driving head to Martigny, follow signs to Verbier.

ONLINE

www.verbier-summits.com
www.verbier.ch

USA JACKSON HOLE

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
 XC Potential ★★★★★
 Fun Factor ★★★★★
 Logistics ★★★

THE LURE

Jagged mountains, huge vertical faces, cable car access, and ripping climbs to 6,000 m! At the entrance to Grand Teton National Park, and Yellowstone National Park, this is one of the most picturesque and 'Wild West' locations in the United States.

THE SET UP

Jackson Hole is a magnet for the rugged adventurers of life – be prepared to run into climbing, kayaking, skiing and snow boarding legends at the coffee shop, or even Harrison Ford! The native wildlife includes moose, bison, mountain lions and even grizzly bears and the skies are home to a wide variety of birds of prey. In summer the stark beauty and huge tracts of protected national lands inspire millions to visit this small western

town. In winter the world-renowned powder attracts throngs of enthusiasts. For the free flyer 6,000 m cloudbases over high rugged peaks are the lure.

THE FLYING

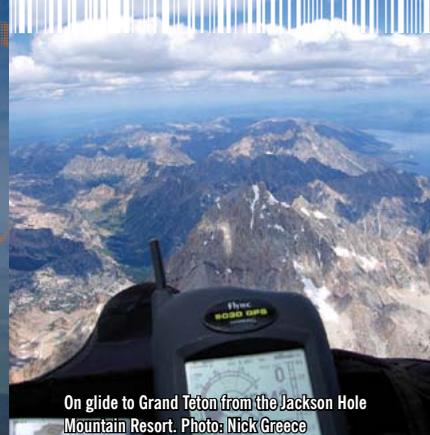
Morning and mid afternoon you fly on the west side of the valley in the Tetons, while the evening glass-off sites are on the eastern side.

The Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, with its aerial tram, and Phillips Ridge both hold state XC records. Both of these midday beauties ensconce you in the 4,000 m Teton Mountains to begin your day. Both are HG and PG friendly.

Close by lies Curtis Canyon with its sunset views of the Tetons and Beaver Mountain, some 45-minutes south of Jackson, which with a west wind provides some of the most stunning scenery in the country. On a decent evening it is possible to climb to 4,000 m in smooth conditions and take in views of the Tetons, the Wind River Range, the Wyoming Range, the Salt River Range and the great Snake River.

The Snow King Resort offers lift-accessed evening flying when a northwest breeze sets up.

Flying to Ferry Peak above Alpine. Photo: Nick Greece



On glide to Grand Teton from the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. Photo: Nick Greece



Flying above town at the Snow King Resort. Olivier Laugero

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Strong thermals and leeside midday conditions in a high alpine environment. Stratospheric cloudbases allow you to cross unbelievably remote terrain. A host of mountain flying opportunities for newer pilots round off an amazing site.

WHEN TO GO

July - September

ALTITUDE

LAUNCH: 2,500 - 3,200 m
 LANDING: 1,890 m
 CLOUDBASE: 4,000-6,000 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

The Aerial Tram at the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort will take HGs. Phillips Canyon is a drive-up site. Aerotowing is offered by Cowboy Up Hang Gliding close by.

MUST BE FLOWN

Tour the Tetons: from the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort Village north over the Grand Teton and back.
 The Pinedale Run: For an amazing taste of Wild West flying and culture, cross the valley from the Village to Snow King Resort. Then continue on over the Gros Ventre mountains into the flats to land in Pinedale.
 Fantasy Ridge: Tour the Wind River Range, one of the wildest mountain ranges in the lower 48 states, along the famed Fantasy Ridge. A local classic!

WATCH OUT FOR

This is a leeside site, so if the wind is strong over the back early in the day, go check out the myriad of other outdoor activities Jackson offers.
 National Parks are illegal to land in so only make transitions over them if you are sure you will make it. If you are forced to make an 'emergency' landing in them, pack up quickly and get out fast as the fines can be heavy. It's not uncommon for pilots to hide their gear in the forest at a marked GPS coordinate and return for it after nightfall to avoid being prosecuted.

ACCOMMODATION

Everything from camping to five star palatial hotels. Free camping is available on public land, but you need a car as it's outside of town limits.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Jackson Hole Paragliding offer a guiding service and courses. www.jhparagliding.com
 Cowboy Up Hang Gliding offer advice, tuition and a towing service www.cuhanggliding.com

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Whether it's the midday rippers to 5,500 m, crossing beautiful valleys, flying remote 4,000 m ranges or evening epic glass-offs in smooth conditions, Jackson's terrain and community of pilots are world class!" Nick Greece, USHPA editor and Jackson resident.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Absolutely yes! Millions of families come to Jackson every year to enjoy the spectacular nature and outdoor activities. Jackson's wood-lined sidewalks, daily re-enacted old time shootouts, and Million Dollar Cowboy saloon produce a true western nostalgia.

RAINY DAYS

Expect to get wet. This is an outdoor lover's paradise so make sure you bring a coat!

WEATHER INFO

<http://www.jhffc.org/weather/>
<http://www.jhparagliding.com/Weather-to-Fly/>
<http://www.xcskies.com>

GETTING THERE

Jackson Hole has an airport, but it's often more economical to fly into Salt Lake City, Utah and drive the 4½ hours north to Jackson. There is a daily bus from Salt Lake and Idaho Falls.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

Jackson Hole Mountain Resort
www.jacksonhole.com
 The Jackson Hole Free Flight Club offers free oxygen refills with membership.
www.jhffc.org



HAVE GLIDER, WILL TRAVEL

US Team member Jeff O'Brien explains how to travel with a hang glider



Airline travel can be a stressful experience for some, and trying to wrangle a hang glider on a commercial flight might seem too daunting to undertake. There certainly are nuances to travelling with your wing, but it can be done with relatively little additional hassle and the reward is worth the logistical considerations. Let me help you stack the odds in your favour.

BEFORE YOU GO

Research the airline. Each airline has different baggage limitations, and some even have provisions in their literature for hang gliders. Print out this literature and take it with you to the ticket counter. Call the airline a day or two in advance and make a reservation for your glider and have the agent note the baggage fee. Research the baggage weight and size limitations. In the US, most airlines have an absolute limit of 45 kg (100 lb). There are some airlines with an absolute limit of around 32 kg (70 lb), so research your airline in detail. When packed, my gliders have always exceeded maximum limits. I memorize the maximum weights and dimensions for

the particular airline, and when I'm asked at the counter how much the glider weighs or how long the glider is, I state something close to, but under, the maximum.

RESEARCH THE AIRCRAFT

Even if your airline has provisions to carry hang gliders, the aircraft might not be large enough to fit the wing inside its cargo hold. In general, if the interior of the cabin has at least six seats across the fuselage, a glider will fit. Four seats across may or may not accommodate your wing. Some airplanes have baggage holds with 'curtains' or partitions. These curtains must be closed during flight. If personnel try to turn you away for this reason, urge them to put your glider in the 'cargo' hold instead. This hold is for much larger items unrelated to passenger travel.

PACK PROPERLY

It will be necessary to 'short pack' your glider so see your manufacturer's owner's manual for instructions.

MAIN SHOT: Setting up in front of Mt Blanc at the Plaine Joux launch just outside Chamonix Valley. **BOTTOM LEFT:** "Regardless of where you're going, you're on the National Team travelling to the World Championships!" **BOTTOM RIGHT:** "At some point you have to release any stress over it and hope for the best." All photos: Jeff O'Brien

Once you've disassembled the glider, there are a few supplies that will help protect your wing:

- 1 PVC plastic caps for the end of the leading edges. Two-inch caps usually fit snugly and these should be padded with a bit of closed cell foam.
- 2 Closed cell foam pads. Half-inch closed-cell foam camping mats are very cheap. I tape several of these mats together to form a foam blanket which encases the glider before bagging it.
- 3 Shrink wrap. Sold in hardware stores, or moving supply stores, this stuff is THE BEST for holding everything together and creating a tight package.

Once the glider is disassembled, the sail is rolled, and all parts have been tucked inside, pad any sharp components or bolts that might wear on the sail. I used to pad quite a bit internally, now I pad only the most obtrusive brackets.

Place a 'cam strap' or velcro strap around the wing every couple of feet to make a tight cylinder. Now use shrink wrap to pull everything together and wrap the glider mummy tight as you remove the cam straps during the wrapping process.

After shrink wrapping the glider, I place one or two layers of foam pads around the glider. Even with this padding, I'm able to get the glider back in its normal bag. If you travel often, you may want to invest in a padded travel bag, but it's still feasible to get a fully padded glider in its original bag. The key is tight shrink wrapping.

AT THE AIRPORT

You've done your research. You've packed and planned. Now it's time to work your magic. As soon as you step in the doors of the terminal, people with wide eyes will be gawking at your gigantic luggage. Airline personnel may start shaking their heads before you ever speak to them saying words like, "That has to go to cargo." Remain unfazed wearing a wide smile that conveys calmness. As you approach the check-in counter, look for the friendliest face and saunter up to them uttering, "Excuse me (their name), can you please help me?"

Try to develop a rapport with the counter agent by explaining you're on your country's National Hang Gliding team travelling to the World Championships. Regardless of where you're going, you're on the National Team travelling to the World Championships. Tell them you're so excited to be representing your country and you've been preparing for this day for years. Thank them for helping you bring your dreams to fruition.

Explain that you've made a reservation for your glider and state the quoted price. If the ticket agent attempts to charge you

more, be as argumentative as you feel is warranted. Sometimes you'll get your glider on for free. Sometimes you'll be charged hundreds of dollars. A reservation doesn't guarantee the amount. Keep smiling and hope for the best. If heads start to shake, and you feel it's likely you'll be turned away, remain calm and pleasant. Mention your reservation again and explain that you've been out of this particular airport on this particular flight and aircraft in the past without difficulty. In short, don't take no for an answer. Be pleasant, yet firm, and explain that you've done it all before without problems.

In addition to staying calm and wearing a perpetual smile, be creative. Usually gliders are too awkward to weigh, but if staff insist, help them 'hold' the glider on the scale. Put one end of the glider on the scale and keep a straight face as you strain to lift a portion of the weight off the scale. After the baggage tag is on the glider, offer to help baggage personnel carry the glider to security and as far as they'll let you. Tip them and thank them profusely. On one trip through Vancouver airport, after our gliders were tagged and paid for, security personnel discovered our gliders wouldn't fit on the freight elevator down to the ramp. We'd befriended the supervisor by that point, and even though it was illegal, he ordered a pickup truck to drive our gliders from the terminal around and down to the tarmac. We got lucky, but it was only because we showed excessive amounts of gratitude for everyone who helped us along the way.

Once the glider has been checked, tagged, and transported to the tarmac, the situation is most likely out of your hands. There's no guarantee the baggage handlers won't damage your wing in transport, but at some point you have to release any stress over it and hope for the best. I've been lucky to arrive with undamaged gliders at my destinations, but there are always horror stories.

One last item that will make transport through the airports easier is a tie-down strap to hold the glider on luggage carts. Strapping the glider to a cart helps you wield the awkward package as you wind through customs or to transport.

AND FINALLY

Seeing a new part of the world from the air for the first time is an incredibly rewarding experience. An experience that easily eclipses any difficulties or costs associated with travelling with your wing. If you exude a calm, confident, friendly demeanour, and realise that there's much more to the adventure than just the flying, your trips will almost always be successful.



SPAIN PIEDRAHITA



THE LURE

Europe's flatland mecca! A laid back Spanish village, a tarmac road to a groomed launch and you can ping off into some of the finest big distance XC skies in the world. Hit the fabled convergence and you can be a long way from home very quickly. Piedrahita is one of the world's most reliable XC competition venues and host to the next FAI World Paragliding Championships.

THE SET UP

Piedrahita is a small, ancient town on the edge of the Castilian tablelands where they abruptly rise up to the Gredos mountains. It is in the perfect spot to latch onto the 300+ km convergence line that sets up here. A lively market town, Piedrahita doubles in population during August when it hosts a series of fiestas.

The principal launch, Peña Negra, is directly above the town and easily reached in 20 minutes by tarmac road. It faces NW yet the shallow slope of the mountain allows heating and thermals from late morning.

Classic XC flying can be had from April to the end of September with the most booming conditions from mid June towards the end of July. August tends to be very reliable, but with a later start (the inversions break later)... not so bad for those dedicating themselves to late nights and fiestas! The classic route follows the N-110 highway towards the NE in the flatlands and parallel to the mountains. A flight of 50 km eastwards to the medieval walled city of Avila is a regular run for even inexperienced XC pilots, and 100 km out-and-returns and even 200+ km open distances are regularly achievable.

Fast and easy access makes for quick re-flights and the big smooth magic air that sets up over the valley on most evenings is the perfect antidote to anyone feeling blue because of an early bomb out. Although famed for long distance flatland flying there is also great potential for mountain flying in the Gredos mountains to the west and south. However, be aware that the area is isolated and bombing out can involve lengthy retrieves.

Winging it down to Piedrahita town after another big XC day.
Photos: Jérôme Maupoint



AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★ ★
XC Potential ★★ ★★ ★
Fun Factor ★★ ★★ ★
Logistics ★★ ★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Good thermic conditions with little breeze in the open flatlands, though generally stronger at the pass some 20 km from launch. Base in August is generally above 3,000 m, and often in excess of 4,000m. You need to be in the air by 1.30 pm as the thermal breeze at launch can become very strong by mid afternoon. Normally reliable thermals start from 11.30 am, later in August.

WHEN TO GO

April to October offer good thermal flying and XC potential. May to September for epic cu-filled skies. August tends to be bluer and hotter but reliably flyable.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 3,200 m
LAUNCH: 1,900 m
LANDING: 1,000 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Easy. Tarmac road to launch and large car park right next to the rigging area. The site was dramatically improved in 2009 with the launch slope angle increased for improved light wind launches.

MUST BE FLOWN

Fly amongst huge gaggles of migrating storks in July. Lose yourself in the vast flatlands of Castilla chasing the convergence clouds to the NE. Look down first on the castle of Avila then later the Roman aquaduct in Segovia and know you've flown a long way

SITE RECORDS

PG: 281 km
HG: 326 km

WATCH OUT FOR

With strong easterly winds the take off is sheltered but winds further out can be strong and turbulent. With a westerly the wind will be stronger at the pass and in the next (Ambles) valley. For both strong east and west winds the safest area to land is in the flatlands near to Piedrahita. The winds increase as you move towards the pass with a westerly, and beyond the Col at Santiago de Collado with an easterly.

There is airspace beyond Avila which can be easily avoided by flying further to the north.

ACCOMMODATION

There are four hotels, many houses to rent but no official camping site.

SPAIN PIEDRAHITA

MORE NITTY GRITTY

COMPETITIONS

Pre-World PG Championships, 11 – 17 July 2010
XC-Open World Series, 28 August – 4 September 2010
FAI Paragliding World Championships, 2 – 16 July 2011

GUIDES AND COURSES

Steve Ham has lived and guided in Piedrahita since 1991 and is meet director for the forthcoming Worlds in 2011. www.flypiedrahita.com

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Easy flying with a great mix of the best of flatland and big mountain flying." Steve Ham

THE BIG TICKS

Breaking the 100 km barrier with ease, or the 200 km if you're really good!

TAKE THE FAMILY

Piedrahita is a popular summer destination for Spanish families escaping the oppressive heat of the cities in August. There are many mountain rivers and forests or there is an open air swimming pool in Piedrahita built in the grounds of an 18th century palace, modelled after Versailles.

RAINY DAYS

Salamanca, 60 km to the north, is the cultural capital of Spain with its historic university and range of monuments. Likewise the historic towns of Avila and Segovia are well worth visiting. In spring the River Tormes offers the best white water kayaking and rafting in central Spain. The area is bordered by a number of regional parks with excellent walking trails.

WEATHER INFO

For a seven day local forecast visit tinyurl.com/y96bdtm.

GETTING THERE

Madrid (Barajas) airport is 200 km away. You can get a bus from Madrid direct to Piedrahita for €14. (Take the metro from the airport to La Estacion Sur de Autobuses – metro stop is called Mendez Alvaro). By car Piedrahita lies on the National highway N-110, some 50 km east of Avila. Hitch hiking in Central Spain is uncommon and takes time!

CONTACTS

Local flying club, www.cornejadegredos.es/pages/inicio.html

Steve Ham, www.flypiedrahita.com

FAI Worlds 2011, www.piedrahita2011.com

Town hall and accommodation, www.aytopiedrahita.com



Red Bull X-Alps hero Martin Muller climbing out from Peña Negra launch



Photo: Martin Schaeel, azoom.ch

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SWITZERLAND INTERLAKEN



Open grassy launch with the Eiger in the far left

AT A GLANCE
 Thermal strength ★★★★★
 XC Potential ★★★★★
 Fun Factor ★★★★★
 Logistics ★★★★★

Interlaken: easy access to stunning high mountain terrain, and the world famous Eiger. No wonder the Swiss are so good! All Photos: Markus Zimmermann

THE LURE

Soar the legendary north face of the Eiger, or set off on one of Chrigel Maurer's monster 200 km alpine triangles, before gliding down to swim in a choice of two of Europe's cleanest lakes.

Interlaken is home to paragliding champions Chrigel Maurer, Andy Aebi, Stefan Wyss, Steve Cox, and Kari Eisenhut to name a few. Advance themselves are in Thun at the other end of the lake. In fact, Interlaken is probably the reason the Swiss are so good!

THE SET UP

Interlaken is in the Bernese Oberland on the northern edge of the main Alpine chain. The area is legendary in

mountaineering circles with the stunning peaks of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau attracting pioneers of the sport long before hang gliding and paragliding were born.

Situated in the transition between the Swiss flatlands and the Alps, Interlaken offers 15 different launches for pilots of all levels! On a stable summer day you can take off in the high mountains around the Schilthorn or Grindelwald in big mountain thermals. Or for easy, light thermal conditions launch around Interlaken from Amisbühl, the Niederhorn or take an evening flight from Schnyge Platte.

A huge grassy landing field sits in the centre of Interlaken and is reachable by all 15 takeoffs.



A Low level launch. Photo: Kari Eisenhut

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Everything from powerful high mountain flights to low level soaring above the lake. Interlaken is famous for its perfect flying weather. Protected from stronger winds by high mountains all around, statistics show you can fly here on around 300 days a year! The stronger the wind is forecast, the lower the takeoff you choose.

WHEN TO GO

Flyable all year, but best between March and October.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE 1,800 – 3,500 m
LAUNCH 1,000 – 3,000 m
LANDING 570 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Yes, reach Amisbühl by car or the Niederhorn by cable car

MUST BE FLOWN

Soar in front of the legendary north wall of the Eiger then fly down to land in the centre of Interlaken and drink a beer at Hooters.

WATCH OUT FOR

Strong winds - when there is more than 5 HPa of pressure difference between south and north of the Alps you should stop flying. The Föhn wind gets to Interlaken late, but it can still come all the way down to the ground.

Lake Thun is open to the northwest, so when the wind is from that direction it can blow out. Luckily northwest wind is very rare.

The rescue helicopter base REGA is at Wilderswil airfield so landing there should be avoided.

SWITZERLAND INTERLAKEN

MORE NITTY GRITTY

ACCOMMODATION

All levels are available. Try the Backpackers Paragliding Villa directly located at the landing field in the centre of Interlaken for friendly cost effective accommodation. www.villa.ch

GUIDES AND COURSES

Kari Eisenhut's Chill Out Paragliding Centre offers you all kinds of flying support from friendly advice for visiting pilots through to comprehensive thermal and XC courses and guided holidays. Kari also runs an Advance test centre. The paragliding shop is in the Backpackers Paragliding Villa. www.chilloutparagliding.com

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Interlaken is unique! You can fly high above glaciers or low down by the lake in just 30 km. It's spectacular!" - Kari Eisenhut

THE BIG TICKS

Take off at Grindelwald in front of the north face of the Eiger. Fly north to the Faulhorn, cross to the north of the ridge at Bira, then make a long final glide along the Brienz lake to land in the centre of Interlaken.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Interlaken is a great family destination with lots of outdoor sports and activities. Check www.interlaken.ch for details.

RAINY DAYS

Don't miss the Trümmelbach waterfalls when it rains or the view from the Jungfrau Joch, which at 3,454 m is the highest railway station in Europe.

WEATHER INFO

www.chilloutmeteo.com has a special flying forecast twice a week for Interlaken and the surrounding area. Or www.soaringmeteo.ch for detailed charts of this area of the Alps.

GETTING THERE

Fly to Zürich or Basel (Easyjet) and get the train to Interlaken (two hours – change at Bern).

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

www.chilloutparagliding.com for paragliding info
www.interlakenadventures.com for info on Interlaken's adventure sports.

Interlaken sits between two lakes, making it a perfect holiday location



Winding down into town after a trip around the high peaks

WISH YOU WERE HERE!

Make a movie, take a photo, blog it ... your trip deserves showcasing. Marcus King on how to get the best out of technology

Nowadays recording your trip isn't just about taking a few snaps to show off when you get back home. Technology allows us to do so much more: become a movie director, network on social media, Tweet from the goal line or report live from on the road. But if you want to show off your travels to their best you'll need some tools. Here are some of the best.



GO PRO HD

You've almost certainly seen one of these tiny devices attached to someone's helmet at a flying site near you. They are simply the easiest way to capture your flying antics. A tiny, solid-state camera not much bigger than a matchbox but capable of capturing high definition (HD) video and taking still images.

What makes it so perfect for our sports are its super-wide-angle lens, tough sports housing and a whole collection of mounts. Together they make it easy to get the camera into some really interesting places: in your lines, by a wing tip, on your boot.

The camera outputs great quality files in a format that's easy to edit. Just make sure your computer is up to the job of editing HD – if it's more than 12-months-old you may well be better off buying the standard definition Go Pro.

Available from www.xcshop.com for £ 309.99 / € 339.99 / \$ 462.99 – prices may change due to exchange rate fluctuation. The original non-HD version is still available for £ 179.99 / € 199.99 / \$ 268.99

SONY BLOGGIE

All three models of the Sony Bloggie shoot HD video, take 5 mega-pixel photos and have a colour LCD screen to see what you are shooting (something the Go Pro HD doesn't have – yet).

The two basic models have a lens that swivels, so you can use it to record those all-important blog intros. The only difference between the two models is that one comes with a clip-on lens that allows you to take 360-degree video.

All come with a built-in USB connector – no extra cables needed – and built-in software that you can run from your computer to share your pictures and videos on the web.



Bloggie costs approx. £ 190 / € 220 / \$ 290



PHONE HOME

Most up-to-date phones include a decent quality camera. With lenses not much bigger than a pinhead they'll never be as good as a decent SLR, no matter how many mega pixels they claim to have. But that's missing point – the quality is fine for sharing with your friends back home and they're always to hand. Many phones record video and some smartphones let you edit in the phone without downloading to a computer.

iPhones and other smartphones also let you upload images and video direct to the internet. You'll also find a plethora of add-on apps that allow you to edit your photos or take photos in new ways: two great examples for the iPhone are Hipstamatic and TiltShiftGen

Phones cost upwards of £ 1 / € 1 / \$ 1 depending on where you are in the world and the deal you get! Just be careful of those data roaming charges.



GETTING SERIOUS

If you plan to sell the story of your trip to Cross Country or other magazines you'll need a decent digital SLR and some good lenses. But unless you are a serious pro you don't need to go for top of the range cameras. The 'prosumer' models are good enough and are also much lighter than their expensive siblings. A perfect base kit for a traveller would be the Canon EOS 550D with a good wide range zoom such as the EF-S 18-200 mm although the reduced range of the EF-S 17-85 is maybe easier to fly with. Don't forget to add a UV filter: not only will it improve your images it will help protect your precious lens from grime and travel scrapes.

Digital SLRs cost upwards of £ 300 / € 350 / \$ 450. Lenses are extra and the sky's the limit when it comes to price. The more you pay the more you get, so let your budget decide.



EDITING

Unless you are only using your phone you will need a computer to edit your images and video. Netbooks are perfect for travellers, but if you plan to edit HD video make sure your choice is up to the job. Here at Cross Country we are Apple fans and the MacBook 13 makes a perfect travelling companion with more than enough

power to sort and publish your photos or edit your blockbuster.

Macs and PCs both come with bundled photo and video editing software – these are fine for most people. Live Photo Gallery and the Mac equivalent, iPhoto, can be used to organise and edit your photos. For video, Windows comes with Live Movie Maker and Apple has iMovie. Both work well and use templates to help you turn your rough-cut into a mini masterpiece. Publishing to DVD or the web is easy from both.

PUBLISHING TO THE WEB

Once you have the perfect image you'll want to show the world. Luckily publishing video and photographs online has never been simpler. Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, YouTube and Vimeo all allow you to publish to the web instantly. If you don't 'get it' yet, here's a crash course. All these sites are free but need access to the Internet to use (your smartphone will do). Privacy controls exist on all sites, which means you can show as much or as little of yourself to the world as you want.

Blogger.com: an online diary where you can publish words, photos and video. A simple WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) interface means it can be updated as often as you like, with as much content as you like. Perfect for documenting your travels.

Twitter.com: online post-it notes, where short updates of 140 characters or less can be posted to your personal Twitter page via text message or the web. Great for posting instant updates, ('I won!'), linking to a blog post, reporting who's first across the goal line, or following minute-by-minute action from a comp.

Facebook.com: like an online postcard stuck to the fridge Facebook lets you post photos, video, and short notes to your own page, which can then be seen by your Facebook 'friends'. Privacy controls let you set who sees what, but the general rule is the more friends the better. You also get to see what your friends are up to.

YouTube.com and **Vimeo.com:** upload your short videos to these sites and they'll be searchable and viewable by the world. Your masterpiece might only get 100 hits among your friends, but hit a nerve and you'll be seen by tens of thousands or maybe millions.

Flickr.com: the world's biggest photo-sharing site. Perfect for hosting your own photos and sharing them just with friends or with everyone. Shared-interest groups mean good photos get shared around, while comments let you know how you're doing.

Once you're set up, let us know where you are on the web so we can help tell the world. Search for 'Cross Country magazine' on Facebook, Tweet us at Twitter.com/xcmag, or post a link on www.xcmag.com. Happy travels.

SPAIN ANDALUCIA



Flying at Hermita de la Cruz, Huelcija, where Europe's only desert meets the sea. Photo: Ed Ewing

THE LURE

Andalucia offers sunshine and thermals when it's still winter in the rest of Europe. Easy access and good infrastructure completes the adventure.

THE SET UP

Andalucia is flyable all year. As a region it offers two dozen established flying sites, all within four hours or less of Malaga airport. That makes it a perfect destination for a one-week dash for the sun, or a longer road trip.

El Yelmo in the northeast of the region is the spiritual home of the Rodriguez brothers - natives of nearby Albacete, it was in El Yelmo that they first spread their acro wings. From there the 20+ sites of Andalucia are spread out in a triangle, with Algodonales in the south west in one corner, and Huelcija on the coast to the south east on the other. In between are the big mountains of the Sierra Nevada, the 'Snowy Range', where the mountains

reach 3,478 m. The peaks fall rapidly to the coast at Almunecar, another popular paragliding base, and big XC flights from mountain to sea are common.

Further inland the terrain can be either flat, hot, dry and dusty, or, towards Jaen and Pegalajar, covered in olive trees as far as the eye can see. Slot in between the groves or land on the road.

The Spanish scene is strong, and most sites will see local pilots at the weekend and have a school or club attached. Pilots, schools and clubs flock here from central and northern Europe in winter to take advantage of the open access and open skies, but it's still best to check with locals before you fly or use a site. Some sites have restrictions - you are not allowed to launch from inside the Sierra Nevada National Park, for example. But otherwise, the name of the game is hire a car and explore. You will discover the Spain of your imagination really does exist.

AT A GLANCE

- Thermal strength ★★★★★
- XC Potential ★★★★★
- Fun Factor ★★★★★
- Logistics ★★★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Andalucia is flyable all year. The south sees thermals from February, while the north stirs in March. Expect summer to be strong.

WHEN TO GO

Whenever you can!

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: Can be over 4,000 m
LAUNCHES: Around 1,200 m
LANDINGS: Down to sea level

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

The main sites have road access and often ramps. Route-finding on the access roads can be tricky.

MUST BE FLOWN

El Yelmo, Pegalajar, Sierra Nevada, Almunecar, Valle de Abdalajis and Algodonales would make a good two-week trip.

WATCH OUT FOR

Although historically locals have ignored it, airspace does exist in Spain. Check your maps.

ACCOMMODATION

From camping to luxury paradors - grand old buildings turned into smart hotels - everything is on offer.

GUIDES AND COURSES

There are guides in all the main locations. Under Spanish law they should be registered, this is not to say they all are.

XC MAG'S OPINION

Offers accessible adventure without breaking the bank at a time when the rest of Europe is wrapped in winter.

THE BIG TICKS

Boom out of Cenes de la Vega in Sierra Nevada, along the high mountains and fly to the beach, 70 km away, and Cenes de la Vega to Baza, a 90 km jaunt over the Sierra and out across the desert-like plains. Both flights need 3,500 m to 4,000 m cloudbase.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Andalucia is one of Europe's busiest tourist destinations. On the coast there are beaches, aquaparks and resorts. Inland it is much more rural. The towns and cities offer history and culture.

BLOWN OUT DAYS

Mountain biking, trekking, medieval village exploring, horse riding and fiestas can all fill a blown-out day. On the coast the beach calls.

WEATHER INFO

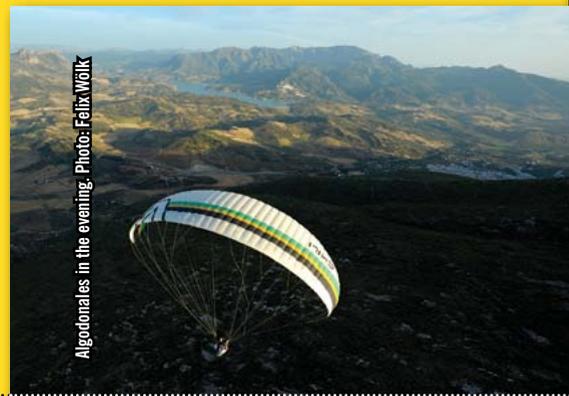
The standard meteo websites for Europe. The TV forecast gives the general picture.

GETTING THERE

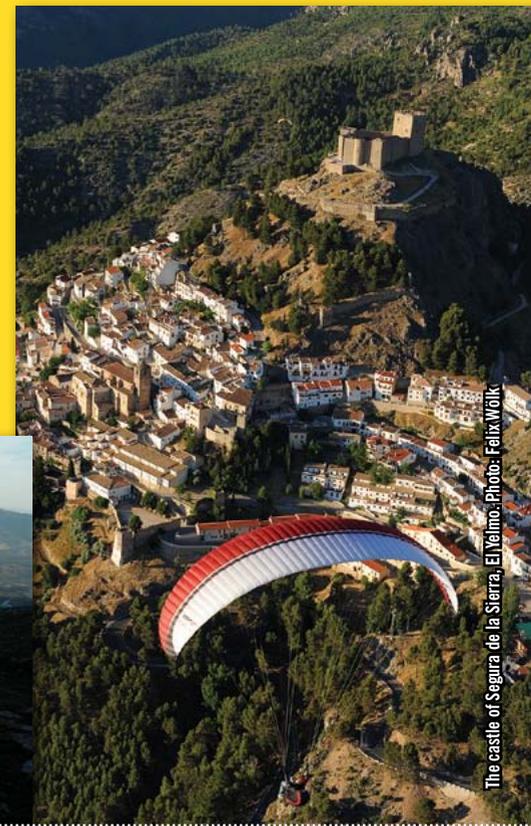
Budget airlines fly to Malaga from across Europe. Cordoba and Seville are other options. You'll need a car - competition is fierce so hunt around online for the best deal before you go.

ONLINE

www.flyandalucia.com, www.flygranada.com,
www.hotelcaliforniaspain.com,
www.vuelolibreandalucia.es,
www.andalucian-experience.co.uk,
www.transandalusia.com



Algodonales in the evening. Photo: Felix Walk



The castle of Segura de la Sierra, El Yelmo. Photo: Felix Walk



FRANCE ST ANDRÉ

THE LURE

Ride rockets high over the barren landscape of the southern French Alps as you knock off another brilliant circuit riding the complex valley winds of this maze of a flying area. Then land at the lake with a grin on your face, grab a beer and plunge into the refreshing turquoise water. St André combines everything you need to have a stunning Alpine flying holiday in one sunny package. It's considered by many to be one of the best flying sites in the world!

THE SET UP

Steeped in flying legend, St André-les-Alpes is a small village at the head of Lac de Castillon in the southern French Alps. Host to innumerable competitions over the years, including FAI Cat 1 events, St André is blessed with not only reliable flying weather but all the necessary ingredients to give you the perfect flying holiday: a tarmac road and shuttle to take offs that work from nine in the morning to last thing at night and intriguing and exciting terrain worthy of any XC pilot's dreams. Better still, as you blast yourself into orbit in powerful thermals, the family can while away the day in the cool waters of the lake.

Aerogliss, the local school, offers a great support service for pilots including daily weather reports, a navette/shuttle to launch, experienced tuition and guiding and, most importantly, a bar when you land.

St André itself is a lively place in summer with a thriving village square serviced by two bars and several fêtes throughout the season to entertain visitors.

Gliders climb away from the south-west launch into another epic sky. Photo: Benoit Morel



Booting it down the Dormillouse motorway on the route back to St André. Photo: Marcus King



Evening soaring the south-west take off. Photo: Benoit Morel

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
 XC Potential ★★★★★
 Fun Factor ★★★
 Logistics ★★★★★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Booming thermals carry you high above a complex set of valleys that offer sublime circuits through spectacular and sometimes remote terrain. Understanding valley wind circulation is paramount to your success and safety in St André. Once you have that knowledge you are free to explore a stunning mountainous area laced with valley wind convergences that form invisible bridges to help you hop from ridge to ridge. Mt Chalvet sits just above the town to the north-west and has take offs facing south-east and south-west. Use the south-east early in the day. Once the valley wind starts blowing from the Digne basin to the south-west you have to use the south-west-facing launch. Be aware, once the valley wind combines with the thermals the south-west launch blows out. This can be as early as 1.30 pm.

Land in the big field at the end of the lake next to Aerogliss. Watch out for switching valley winds in the landing, which catch people out all the time, especially hang gliders.

WHEN TO GO

April till October

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 3,000 – 4,000 m
 LAUNCH: 1,540 m
 LANDING: 883 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Both take offs are drivable and excellent for hang gliders.

MUST BE FLOWN

Surf the shear walls of Cheval Blanc before tiptoeing across the boonies to the north to the lunar landscape of Tête de l'Estrop and the motorway to Dormillouse.

WATCH OUT FOR

Thermic turbulence in the heat of summer: St André has a powerful reputation, the classic T-shirts that read "I survived St André" that were available from Aerogliss for many years are testimony to its well-earned reputation. The main launch gets blown out during the heat of the afternoon, making launching dangerous. The valley wind in the landing can switch 180 degrees in seconds as the two valley winds fight each other. Watch all the windsocks as you approach, give yourself plenty of room and be prepared to run it off if necessary.

ACCOMMODATION

St André has several hotels and gites run by locals. See www.ot-st-andre-les-alpes.fr for details.

Mark Taggart, a very experienced pilot, runs www.alittlepieceofheaven.biz, a beautiful gite just a few hundred metres from the landing.

St André has two great campsites: the municipal campsite is 100 m from landing and has a lively flying scene during the summer; Camping De L'issole is more secluded and quiet and at the bottom of the take off road just out of town.



Looking north from take off along the route to Cheval Blanc and the route to Dormillouse. Photo: Aerogliss.com

FRANCE ST ANDRE

MORE NITTY GRITTY

GUIDES AND COURSES

Local school www.aerogliss.com offer guiding and courses as does Jocky Sanderson www.escapexc.com

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Best place to race paragliders in the world! Bar none!" Russell Ogden, ex-British champion and 2009 PWC Super-final vice-champion

THE BIG TICKS

The Dormillouse run: 100 km out-and-return north from St André, past the brooding mass of Cheval Blanc, across the boonies to the sheer shale cliffs of the Tête de l'Estrop and the motorway to Dormillouse. Getting home in the evening takes you back over the boonies to wrap up a satisfying 100 km. The Montagne de Coupe 50 km triangle: head north to Cheval Blanc then west to connect with the Montagne de Coupe and surf the sheer cliffs on a long glide back home.

TAKE THE FAMILY

St André has lots to offer families with the lake to play in, tennis, mini-golf, rafting and plenty of fun in the forests.

RAINY DAYS

Visit the Verdon Gorge, a 700 m deep limestone canyon that stretches for 25 km and has some of the best rock climbing, canyoning and rafting in the world. Take the narrow gorge railway to Nice and bask in the sunshine of the Riviera.

WEATHER INFO

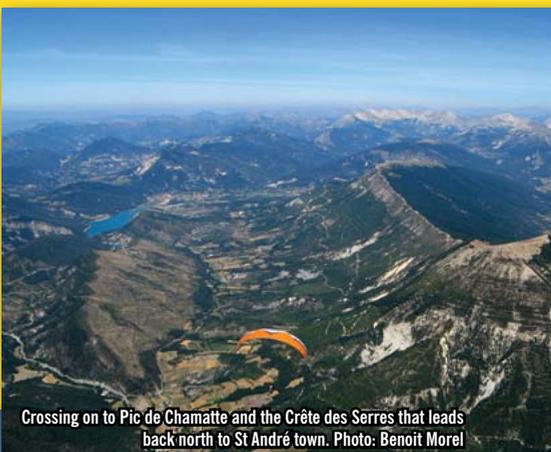
Aerogliss post daily weather at the school. Or go to www.meteofrance.com or www.para2000.org

GETTING THERE

Fly to Nice or Marseille. From Nice, a narrow gauge railway winds its way slowly through stunning countryside and sets a tone for your flying adventure. Trains also run from Marseille or hire a car from either airport.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

For flying information go to www.aerogliss.com
For general information go to www.ot-st-andre-les-alpes.fr



Crossing on to Pic de Chamatte and the Crête des Serres that leads back north to St André town. Photo: Benoit Morel



Heading back south along Côte Longue into the Thorame Haute valley and on to St André. Photo: Bruce Goldsmith



KORTTEL
DESIGN
The peak of perfection

pilot: Denis Cortella, Designer
location: Mont Blanc summit
harness: Kanibal Race

1086, avenue André Lasquin - 74100 Salanches - France info@korttel-design.com - www.korttel-design.com

SAINT ANDRE LES ALPES

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FRANCE ANNECY



THE LURE

Surf up searing limestone escarpments, cross the azure waters of Europe's cleanest lake, and soar for miles along ridges that seem almost purpose-made for XC flying. Land, take a dip in the lake then peruse the local paragliding shops for the latest gear. Anancy is a free-flyer's paradise and arguably the Alps' most popular flying area, for very good reasons.

THE SET UP

Anancy sits on the north-west corner of the Alps. The valley opens out on to the plains and allows fantastic flying opportunities, particularly when the conditions are too unstable to fly deeper in the mountains. The picturesque city of Anancy sits at the top of the 15-km-long lake, which has take offs on both sides. Pilots flock here throughout the year as the easy access and simple XC routes offer an unprecedented flying experience. The presence of the lake makes it perfect for SIV and acro courses and for manufacturers to test their wings.

The main take off is high above the southern end of the lake and faces west. It starts working around 1.30 pm on a good day. It's a simple soar north along the west-facing ridges to the Dents de Lanfon, a fantastic limestone pinnacle. From there, pilots either head across the lake, north to Anancy town or east into the bigger mountains and towards Mt Blanc. Continuous

west-facing ridges make for easy XC routes and allow big triangles and out-and-returns.

The lower take off at Planfait, a man-made cutting in the forest above the landing at Perroix, starts working a bit earlier and takes you straight on to the Dents de Lanfon. For an even earlier start it's possible to launch from a small, east-facing take off at Entrevernes. However, the launch is tiny, only a wing's width wide, and it's difficult to get away from.

To the west of the lake lies Semnoz, a sublime west-facing ridge that runs for 35 easy kilometres to the south, giving you possibly the easiest 70 km out-and-return in the world.

The XC potential of Anancy is limitless. The basic Petit Tour du Lac is a first step for many pilots on their XC careers. The longer Grand Tour du Lac crosses over the edge of Anancy city itself and is a fantastic day out. Other longer routes take you south towards Grenoble or east towards Mt Blanc.

The main landing is at the southern end of the lake near Doussard in a huge field next to the sports hall. A smaller landing at Perroix, just north of Talloires, enjoys a great bar and not one, but two, well stocked paragliding shops and a repair centre. The local community and authorities are as pro-free flying as anywhere in the world.

Shuttles service both launches from Perroix landing and hitching is a breeze as everyone knows what's in your big bag.

MAIN SHOT: Contemplating crossing the lake back to Montmin during a Tour du Lac. ABOVE RIGHT: High over Tailloires, the landing at Perroix is in the green fields to the right.

All Photos: Jérôme Maupoint



AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★ ★★
XC Potential ★★ ★★ ★★
Fun Factor ★★ ★★ ★★
Logistics ★★ ★★ ★★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Easy mountain thermal flying, giving access to XC routes of all size and grandeur. A valley breeze sets up down the lake from the north west every day - if it's coming the other way something is wrong. Anancy can be strong in spring but tends to mellow in mid summer as the area becomes more stable. Then the nearby site of Grand Bornand is a better option.

WHEN TO GO

April till October

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 2,000 – 3,500 m
LAUNCH: Montmin 1,240 m, Planfait 960 m
LANDING: Doussard 460 m, Perroix 540 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Both main launches are driveable and hang gliders are catered for with ramps at Montmin.

MUST BE FLOWN

The tours of the lake are simple but exceptional XCs. A late afternoon jaunt down the impressive Aravis chain to the east is a fantastic evening run for pilots of any level.

WATCH OUT FOR

There is a small airport in Anancy and the airspace for nearby Chambéry touches the very northern end of Semnoz. Cu Nims to the north can send strong gusts down the lake, keep an eye on the water for indications.

ACCOMMODATION

Anancy town has hotels and hostels of every variety. Camping is available close to the Perroix landing and at the end of the lake near Doussard. Ex-pat Brit Irwyn Jehu runs www.maison-du-moulin.co.uk, a pilots' B&B, from just near Doussard at the end of the lake. The Last Resort operate a great pilots' service of accommodation, transport, site guidance and advice from nearby Grand Bornand – www.paraglidingholidays.com

FRANCE ANNECY

MORE NITTY GRITTY

GUIDES AND COURSES

There are a wealth of courses and guides operating out of Anancy. Try www.lespassagersduvent.com, www.parapente-anancy.com or www.flyeo.com for experienced local guides and instructors.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"I taught XC in Anancy for ten years, as it has everything pilots need to learn in beautiful surroundings and with easy logistics." Bob Drury

THE BIG TICKS

The tours of the lake and the route to Chamonix via the Aravis.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Oh yes, they'll love it. Not only is the lake beautiful, warm and clean, there are no end of activities, both outdoor and inside in Anancy. A walk around the city itself with an ice cream by the canal is a must for every visitor.

RAINY DAYS

Peruse the well-stocked flying shops, then wander the old parts of the city or head into the hills for a big stomp.

WEATHER INFO

Daily forecasts are posted at both the shops in Perroix, or use www.meteofrance.com or www.para2000.org.

GETTING THERE

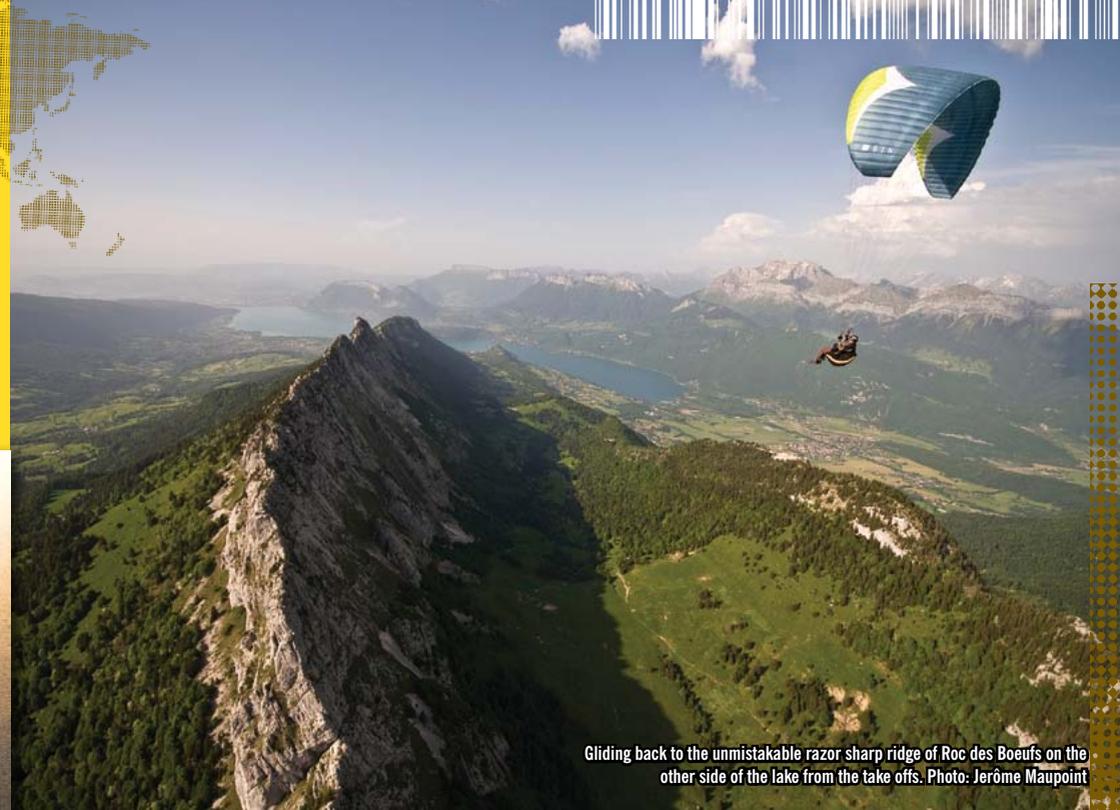
Geneva is the closest major international airport. Take a train into Geneva then on to Anancy, or hire a car.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

Try any of the schools' websites for flying information. Go to www.lac-anancy.com for general information.



Throwing down some shapes over the Lanfonnet. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint



Gliding back to the unmistakable razor sharp ridge of Roc des Boeufs on the other side of the lake from the take offs. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint

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USA OWEN'S VALLEY

Heading down the White Mountains. Photos: Andy Roberts

THE LURE

Owens is the stuff of legends: America's gladiatorial ring where only the toughest dare tread. Pick your season right however, and the valley's rocky peaks only pump powerful climbs up to a 6,000 m cloud base over the deepest valley in the United States. Owens is top end stuff, but simply unmissible on a trip to the States.

THE SET UP

Bishop is a quaint western adventure town which thrives on skiers heading to Mammoth Mountain in the winter, and climbers, hikers, and other tourists who come to spend time in the Sierras in the summer and fall. The rock climbing and bouldering is world class in the Alabama Hills.



Amenities are substantial in relation to how close visitors are to vast tracts of wilderness.

The main launches close to town are Flynn's, Paiute and Gunter in the White Mountains on the east side of the valley. 4x4 access only. Facing west they work in the afternoon. Paiute and Gunter start first as they are 800 m higher than Flynn's. Flynn's offers easier access, great XC's and beautiful glass offs.

On the other side of the valley is one of America's XC jewels: Walt's Point. The first ever 100 and 200 milers in the United States originated here on both paragliders and hang gliders. The launch is a road cutting sitting precariously at the back of a canyon. Launching a paraglider is always an intense experience: it's often difficult to get your wing into the clean cycles that swirl up and over the road cutting, the glide out is questionable and the climb right off launch can be throttling.

However, using Walt's allows you to start deep in the Sierras from where you can fly by Mt Whitney, the tallest peak in the lower 48 states. Eventually you can leave the Sierras and cross Owens Valley to the White Mountains from where you can follow the range until it ends, leave California and enter the Nevada desert - a glorious life experience.



Exhausted after another big flight in Owen's

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Strong mountain thermals and mountain desert flying. Light winds are critical. Only go flying during the suggested months as the desert floor heats too much in mid-summer for sane, or safe piloting.

WHEN TO GO

- Spring
- May - Early June (HG survive into July)
- August: Jedi only!
- Autumn
- Sept - Mid October

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 4,000-6,000 m

- LAUNCHES: Flynn's 1,500 m,
- Gunter 2,407 m,
- Paiute 2,419 m,
- Walt's Point 2,743 m

LANDINGS: Valley Floor 1,219 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

All the sites are drive up

MUST BE FLOWN

Launch off the White Mountains and head north along the range to the Nevada border (approx 60 km / 40 miles). There's something about crossing state lines that just makes you smile. Advanced XC pilots: Take advantage of the small window of opportunity in late spring or early fall for a breathtaking flight through the Sierras from Walt's. Heading north it's 60 miles to Bishop, and 100 puts you in Nevada. It's a ride you'll never forget.

WATCH OUT FOR

Extreme thermic turbulence in the height of summer. High winds! Winds typically run perpendicular along the valley floor and form strong rotor behind spines and in canyons. Strong prevailing west winds can spill over the tops of the Sierras. Check the weather carefully before flying there. Bishop has a small airport, with class E airspace, a couple miles east of town.



Gearing up at Gunter looking towards the Sierras

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USA OWEN'S VALLEY

MORE NITTY GRITTY

ACCOMMODATION

Low key, but consistent. Book whichever of the Super 8/ Holiday Inn places has a deal when you're there. The Townhouse Motel is where many pilots stay as it's central and well priced. Camping with showers at Browns Camp Ground on Highway 395 at the south end of town and plenty of other campgrounds throughout the valley. www.browncampgrounds.com

GUIDES AND COURSES

Triple HG world champion and X-Alps athlete Kari Castle is based here and runs courses and guides. www.karicastle.com
Eagle Paragliding - www.eagleparagliding.com

EXPERTS OPINION

"Owens thermals can send you into orbit at speeds that can turn your knuckles white. Personal bests are set in the Owens all the time." Nick Greece, USPHA Editor

THE BIG TICKS

Walt's Point past Janie's Ranch to the Nevada border. Gunter or Paiute to Boundary Peak and beyond.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Only if they're into nature and outdoor activities.

RAINY DAYS

Hot springs and a visit to the world famous Schat's Bakery in Bishop.

WEATHER INFO

Weather.com for a general forecast including wind directions on the valley floor. Or www.XCskies.com. Check the NOAA winds aloft for BIH (Bishop) and FAT (Fresno). Checking FAT gives a hint as to how much west winds you can anticipate when flying on the Sierra side of the Owens. For real time winds go to www.wr.noaa.gov/mesowest/index.php and select 'Hanford CWA'

GETTING THERE

Fly to Reno, Nevada and rent a 4x4 for the 3½ hour journey. Internationally, Los Angeles/Ontario airport in California is the closest city to fly into.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

For flying info: www.karicastle.com
For tourism info: www.bishopvisitor.com



Riding the Sierra Nevada from Walt's Point. Photo: Jonathan Dietch

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Photo: Duretek



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TURKEY OLUDENIZ



AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★
XC Potential ★★
Fun Factor ★★★★★
Logistics ★★★★★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Coastal mountain with 1,900 m top to bottom landing on the beach

GETTING TO LAUNCH

Trucks run from Oludeniz to the summit of Babadag all day throughout the season. The road has been paved for 2010 and now minibuses are expected to be able to do the trip in 30 minutes.

WHEN

April to November. Mid summer is stable and September and October dry and reliable

ALTITUDE

Cloudbase: 2,500 – 3,500 m
Launch: 1,900, 1,800 and 1,700 m
Landing: the beach

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Easy. HGs can be put on the trucks and taken straight to launch with minimal carrying. There was a rule in high season that the Oludeniz beach was closed to HG from July and August, and pilots were asked to land up on the Hisarano plateau – check with Skysports. (www.skysports-turkey.com)

MUST BE FLOWN

West along the coast: over the lagoon and over the deserted Greek Kayser village beyond. Fly back or land in the many fields on the plateau and get a minibus (dolmus) back. Butterfly Valley: 7 km SE of launch is a narrow gorge with a tiny looking beach. Don't worry, it's big enough. Land at the E end of the beach away from the restaurant, not in the fields behind the beach otherwise you will be fined. Once down, soak up the chilled hippy vibe and enjoy the tranquility before a 30-minute sea voyage home.

SITE RECORDS

140 km by PG towards Denizli by Bernie Kelly (AU)

WATCH OUT FOR

No immediate danger zones or airspace, but north of Fethiye is Dalaman CTZ. Careful not to crash into holiday makers on deck chairs when landing. Sand gets everywhere and in everything. If the wind is strong on launch don't go in the lee side and don't follow the tandems blindly. They are either good or mad.



High above Olu Deniz beach at sunset
All Photos: Markus Zimmermann

THE LURE

Acro and SIV heaven! Launch from Babadag in shorts and T-shirt and arrive a kilometre and a half above the warm Mediterranean Sea, ready to wring the living daylight out of your wing and loop until your eyes bleed. Land on a beach, eat, drink then head straight back up for another go.

THE SET UP

Set on a Mediterranean cove in the south west of Turkey, Oludeniz is a beautiful and reliable place to fly. The season starts in April and goes through to November, with July and August being very hot and stable.

Oludeniz is a tourist resort with all the infrastructure, hotels, cheap flights and package deals that go with that, but with the added bonus of a 1,900 m mountain. Babadag comes straight out the sea and provides a perfect flying site for every direction. Light winds, and cloudbase at 2,500 – 3,500 m are normal during the day, with smooth sunset flying in the evening.

THE FLYING

At 1,900 m Babadag is very much a mountain and it feels higher because it's so close to the sea. Take offs have been graded and there is matting on some launches. However, it is very rocky and pilots must make committed and positive take off runs. The most commonly used and biggest launch is 1700 where the trucks always stop first. 1800 and 1900 are smaller, steeper and have more reliable wind.

Once airborne the lift is above the peaks of the spineback mountain and in the house thermal, which is just to the right of the 1,700 m launch. There are often bumpy inversion layers, but once through you can often climb to over 3,000 m.

Big XCs are difficult. The most common route is across the Kemer Valley to the north east of Babadag. A second climb on Mendos, the mountain just north of Babadag, takes you over Kemer town to the NNE or go more E towards Akdag, an obvious 3,000 m peak on the east side of the wide Kemer valley. Once you connect with the other side, soar the ridge north onto the higher plateau and onto Denizli (NNE) or over the mountain range toward Antalya to the E.



A Turkish bus is never full!



The house thermal right of launch

TURKEY OLUDENIZ

MORE NITTY GRITTY

ACCOMMODATION

There are hundreds of hotels for all budgets and tastes. Package deals abound online.

COMPETITIONS

Acro comps usually take place at the end of the season, around October. The Oludeniz Air Games – Turkey's St Hilaire – is in mid October.

GUIDES AND COURSES

There are many instructors who bring groups from all over the world. If you are independent then pop into Skysports or any of the tandem operations and make friends.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"I've been running SIV and XC trips to Oludeniz every May and September since 1991, and have used the scenery and height as a location for all three of my films. It's a fun place to fly and a great place to combine a flying trip with a family holiday." Jocky Sanderson

THE BIG TICKS

Landing in the Kemer valley. It may be a short XC but you land a world away from the tourist resort of Oludeniz.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Definitely! Oludeniz is one of Turkey's premier holiday destinations!

RAINY DAYS

The ancient ruins of Tlos and Saklikent gorge are a good day trip. Also Butterfly Valley and Kayer village, or a daily boat trip around the coast.

WEATHER INFO

The best local knowledge is from Skysports or any other professional operators along the beach.

GETTING THERE

Dalaman is the nearest airport. From there it is an hour by airport/hotel transfer. Taxis from the airport are expensive.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

Skysports (www.skysports-turkey.com) are the most established tandem operators. Skysports is run by Murat Turser, a well respected local pilot who will always give sound advice. Hackan and his team at Re-action who operate from Belcekiz beach resort are very pro-active with visiting pilots. Most tandem operators will also give helpful advice and lifts up the mountain.

For mountain transport then Halil Halibol operates Badag Mountain Transfers. His trucks leave from Comsal Pide, where most free flyers land, which is away from the tandem landing areas at the eastern end of the beach.

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INDIA BIR-BILLING



Bir offers alpine style flying, but in the Himalaya. Photo: Marcus King

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
XC Potential ★★★★★
Fun Factor ★★★
Logistics ★★★



Chaca Ji's chai shop on launch. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint

THE LURE

Ride the front ridge of the fabled Himalayas accompanied by your own gaggle of Himalayan Griffin Vultures, the famous HGVs of the bird world, to the Dalai Lama's exiled home in Dharamshala.

Bir offers a fantastic and relatively safe introduction to flying in the biggest mountains of the world in an adventure that immerses you in one of the most diverse and fascinating countries and culture on the planet.

THE SET UP

Bir is a small Tibetan colony that sits at the bottom of the first ridge of the Himalayas. The ridge runs continuously for almost 100 km and offers a great out-and-return adventure on even a half decent day.

Take off is a 40-minute taxi ride away at a beautiful grassy meadow serviced by Chacha Ji's chai shop where food and refreshments are available. Top landing is simple, but nevertheless take care as you wouldn't be the first to crunch in a bit too hard. Indian hospitals are as appealing as a dose of typhoid and to be avoided as much as possible.

The main route heads west along the main ridge, with a choice of soaring the higher back ridge or hopping spine to spine along the front. Every flight is accompanied by a flock of vultures who play happily around your wing.

Behind the main ridge the high Himalaya glisten and gleam painting the horizon with an inspirational backdrop, reinforcing the feeling that you are flying in the Himalayas.

Most pilots head west towards Dharamshala (50 km away) Whether you make it that far or not you can ride the afternoon westerly back to Bir with much greater ease than the journey out.

The landing in Bir is often crowded with kids all keen to pack your wing for a few rupees, then a 2-minute stroll into town for a chai and a bite to eat.



Indian sunset. Photo: Fredrik Gustafsson



Gliding down over terraced fields to land in Bir. Photo: Marcus King

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Classic mountain flying in good thermals that form on almost every spine with a cloudbase that's normally around 4,000 m, but often drops during the day as the moister air from the plains is drawn in. The plains out front are very stable and harder to fly in.

Heading northeast towards Manali offers fantastic but committing flying in high mountains with difficult retrieves on foot or by mule.

WHEN TO GO

Pre-monsoon in March – May when it's stronger, higher, but less reliable.
Post monsoon in October – November when it's more stable but very consistent.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 4,000 – 5,000 m
LAUNCH: Billing 2,428 m
LANDING: Bir 1,525 m

INDIA BIR-BILLING

MORE NITTY GRITTY

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Taxi's will take HGs to launch and the take off is suitable.

MUST BE FLOWN

Dharamshala and back for a simple but satisfying 100 km out-and-return.

Cross the high mountains to Manali – wild and committing but a flight-of-a-lifetime.

WATCH OUT FOR

Overdevelopment has led to several accidents here with pilots going missing. Treat big clouds in Bir with great respect.

Don't over fly the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamshala and the Yol military base nearby get a bit shirty if you land there.

Be very careful going over the back as the terrain is committing with gorges, big walkouts and often strong valley winds.

ACCOMMODATION

There are several cheap Indian and Tibetan lodges and some rooms in local houses. Better accommodation is found at the Colonel's Resort www.colonelsresort.com, a traditional local-style place in a tea garden. Or the new French place www.namlanghimal.com, right next to the traditional landing field. Half an hour away is the Taragarh Palace, a stunning ex-Raj residence owned by the Prince of Kashmir. www.taragarh.com.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Himalayan Sky Safaris is the guiding service run by well known Himalayan pioneer John Silvester with longtime Bir resident and Hindi speaker Jim Mallinson and UK instructor Eddie Colfox - www.himalayanskysafaris.com
Steve Purdie of Airworks runs lower level courses every year. www.airworks.co.uk

TAKE THE FAMILY

Trekking, horse riding, monasteries and temples and all the other crazy cultural experiences India has to offer!

RAINY DAYS

Visit Dharamshala and meet the Dalai Lama, or wonder the temples and monasteries nearby.

WEATHER INFO

You're on your own here. Look out the window and make an assessment or try a local pilot.

GETTING THERE

Delhi is the nearest international airport. From there it's a 14 hour bus ride to Mandi followed by an hour and a half by taxi.

Dharamshala has a small airport serviced by Deccan Air, but tickets can be hard to book without an Indian credit card, or through an Indian travel agency. Or take the train to Pathankot and a four-hour taxi ride.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

www.himalayanskysafaris.com has lots of information on flying in Bir.



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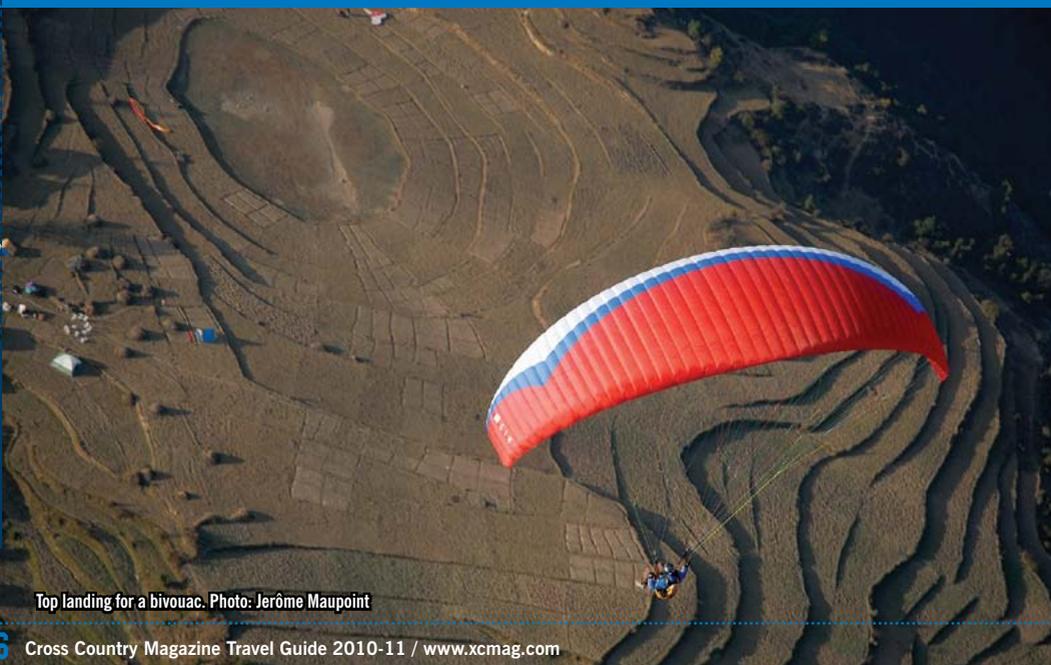
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Top landing for a bivouac. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint

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travelling paraglider's fantasy"

Greg Walsh, HSS Pilot

* John Silvester, Eddie Colfox, Jim Mallinson, Debu Choudhury

www.himalayanskysafaris.com



BRAZIL QUIXADA

THE LURE

Extreme flying! Quixada is where records are broken. It's flatlands in strong wind from 7 am until sunset. Launching is scary and you have to pick your day to fly far, but when it comes together you can go a long, long way – 500 km will be broken here soon.

THE SET UP

Traditionally the domain of the organised expedition, competition or world-record camp, Quixada can in fact be flown independently. Canadian pilot Shawn Kitchen spent December 2009 there and flew alone most of the time – he saw two other pilots the whole month. "I flew almost every day, and every time I went cross country," he said.

Paragliding here is not for the fainthearted, but it is a place to test your advanced skills. The strong winds that mark November slacken off in December, and

make it safer to launch, but also more difficult to break the 300 km barrier.

The environment can be hostile. Temperatures can hit 40°C and winds regularly blow at over 50 km/h in November and December.

For pilots on their own Hotel Pedra dos Ventos is the place to go. The owner is a hang glider pilot, speaks fluent English, has maps and waypoints, and will monitor your SPOT for you during the day. He can also arrange launch handlers (essential in the strong wind) for \$10 a day, and retrieve drivers (more expensive).

There are two launches: the comp launch, and a launch at Pedra dos Ventos 15 km away. On launch your hired handler will ball the glider and help open it during the 10-20 second lulls between 50 km/h gusts. This is standard practice and everyone appreciates the help. Their local knowledge is invaluable; they'll help get you into the air much more safely and efficiently, as

Big distance country: Quixada offers high bases, strong climbs and conditions that work from dawn till dusk. Photos: Roland Maeder

well as acting as a fixer on the ground.

Once up there are two main routes, depending on the wind. One is wilder and for longer distances, the other follows the road. Landing is not as easy as it looks from the air: green fields can be swamps; harvested fields have impaling corn stalks.

Retrieve can be complicated, but is part of the adventure. The interior here – one of the Brazil's poorest states – is a friendly, helpful place. People look out for you, buses come along and everyone hitches (expect to pay a few Reals).

If you fly 200 km or more it can be simpler to sleep where you land and return the next day, or buy a local flight or bus ticket to Fortaleza and return to Quixada from there. If you share a retrieve driver he will chase the pilot who goes furthest – so try to make sure that's you! Roads are poor and an average driving speed of 40 km/h is normal. You have been warned!

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★★★
XC Potential ★★★★★
Fun Factor ★★★★★
Logistics ★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Strong winds and committing flatland XC early on, winds slackening after 3pm when 100 km is still possible, sunset soaring in the evening.

WHEN TO GO

The dry season from September to December for long XCs.
June and July for shorter XCs and easier flying.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: to 3,500 m in November
LAUNCH: 460 m
LANDINGS: 300 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Yes, with a wooden ramp on launch.

MUST BE FLOWN

200 km to 300 km east to west following the roads (Quixada – Quixeramobim – Taua – Picos; or Quixada – Nova Russa – Pedro II).

SITE RECORDS

423 km, Betinho Schimidt (HG)
461.8 km, Frank Brown, Marcelo Pietro and Rafael Saladini (PG)

WATCH OUT FOR

Landing away from the roads in the hot, dry and inaccessible sertao (outback); strong winds on launch and again on landing.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotel Pedra dos Ventos, www.pedradosventos.com.br, Tel: +55 88 3451 2028. Run by a hang glider pilot.

COMPETITIONS

The classic XCeara is from 21 – 29 November in 2010, www.goup.com.br

GUIDES AND COURSES

Chico Santos (www.goup.com.br) runs XCeara every year.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"For the last five years I've averaged 250 km there. It's amazing." Frank Brown.

BRAZIL QUIXADA

MORE NITTY GRITTY

THE BIG TICKS

Head west for 500 km. If you hit the edge of the Amazon rainforest you have a new world record. Congratulations.

TAKE THE FAMILY

The landscape is interesting but there is not a lot for children or non-flying partners. Canoa Quebrada, 200 km east on the coast, is a famous chill-out beach spot (with soaring!).

RAINY DAYS

Canoa Quebrada and the beaches, dune bugging on the coast, Fortaleza city and Serra de Ubajara and its caves are the (quite distant) highlights.

WEATHER INFO

Nine-times Brazil champion Frank Brown's advice is: "How do you know the best days? We never know! You must be in the air."

GETTING THERE

From Fortaleza international airport Quixada is 160 km away. There are two buses a day.

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.cearavoolivre.com.br



A low save carries two pilots away from a difficult retrieve and back on their way to a big distance.



Record breaking flying! The previous PG world record was set here when Frank Brown, Marcelo Pietro and Rafael Saladini flew 485 km from here.

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SOUTH AFRICA PORTERVILLE AND WILDERNESS

Looking north along the main Porterville ridge. Photo: Greg Hammerton

THE LURE

Africa's big distance game park! South Africa has held more XC records over the years than any other country in the world. Booming upwards on another desert rocket into a cumulus-peppered sky and heading off on your way to another personal best you'd be hard pressed not to understand why. This is one of the planet's flatland nirvanas.

Yet South Africa's not just the theatre of XC dreams, its widely varying terrain can actually serve up so much more than committing big distance desert flying. This year the Cross Country Travel Guide focuses on two of the country's most popular, yet most diverse, sites: Porterville and Wilderness.

THE SET UP

Porterville is now arguably South Africa's best known free flying location having hosted several big competitions. The main launch at Dasklip Pass sets you up perfectly on a hundred kilometre long west facing escarpment from which great out-and-returns can be made with relative ease. Out front to the west lie flat plains that lead 80 km to the coasts; heading east behind launch opens up wild African terrain that only the bravest dare challenge.

Porterville now has a second launch at Pampoenfontein, three kilometres from Dasklip Pass and 200 m higher.

Rob Manzoni runs The Flyers' Lodge in Porterville, offering both accommodation and support for visiting pilots. The Flyers' Lodge is a focal point for visiting and local pilots with Rob offering excellent and knowledgeable advice on flying and the conditions.

Wilderness, in contrast, is a sublime coastal soaring site; the place to come to after the interior has served you up far too many late night retrieves after epic XC's. There are 15 different soaring sites close by, six of them within ten minutes' drive.

Wilderness itself is a seaside town on the Garden Route, a scenic section of the south east coast of the country, and is a popular tourist destination, being only five hours drive from Cape Town. The area is famous for its dolphin and whale watching as well as many outdoor sports, including flying. Most of the sites are low soaring sites and many have an airspace ceiling of 465 m ASL. Du Toits however is an inland site facing north, from which local guru Jan Minnaar has flown 93 km.

Jan and partner Khobi Bowden run the excellent Cloudbase Paragliding school which offers advice and pilot support for locals and visitors.

Sublime coastal soaring at Wilderness. Photo: Jan Minnaar

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Porterville – Typically strong South African inland desert flatland and ridge flying along the main north-south running ridge, foot launched from Dasklip Pass.

Wilderness – Mellow coastal soaring looking out over the ocean and landing on the beach.

WHEN TO GO

Porterville: Nov to March for best conditions.
Wilderness: November to mid-April. Avoid mid-December to early January as sites and accommodation get crowded.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: Porterville – mainly blue thermals stopping at inversions between 1,200 – 1,800 m. 4,000 m is the agreed legal ceiling.
Wilderness - coastal soaring and airspace restricts anyway.

LAUNCH:

Porterville
Dasklip - 713 m
Pampoenfontein - 900 m
Wilderness - 18 m to 150 m

LANDING:

Porterville - 233 m
Wilderness – The beach

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Porterville – drive up to a HG ramp
Wilderness – some launches are HG friendly

MUST BE FLOWN

Porterville: head out into the flats and climb above remote homesteads in the company of some of Africa's finest birds.
Wilderness: Paradise Ridge. An easy 20 km out-and-return in a sea breeze with plenty of photo opportunities and a chance to see dolphins, whales and sharks.

WATCH OUT FOR

Porterville: Bombing out in really remote places and meeting some of South Africa's diverse fauna. There is an air force training area to the west.
Wilderness: Chilling out too much and having too good a time.

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★ to ★★★★★
XC Potential ★★★★★
Fun Factor ★★★
Logistics ★★

ACCOMMODATION

Porterville: Rob Manzoni's renowned Flyers' Lodge - www.porterville.co.za - sleeps 20 in eight private, air-con rooms and offers a refreshing pool and even more refreshing bar. The Flyers' Lodge offers a complete holiday package for pilots including guiding, retrieve, airport transfer and even laundry.

There is great camping at the Waterfall campsite, which also has cottages. The Twin Trees and The Palms offer self-catering apartments nearby.

Wilderness has excellent pilot accommodation with the Cloudbase B&B, run by local pilots Jan Minnaar and Khobi Bowden, which has five rooms. Cloudbase also offer a full pilot support package - www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za

Cloudbase aside, Wilderness is a tourist destination and so offers accommodation of all levels.

GUIDES AND COURSES

For courses, guidance and pilot support see Rob Manzoni in Porterville - www.porterville.co.za - and Jan Minnaar at Cloudbase - www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za in Wilderness.

THE BIG TICKS

Porterville: North to Renosterhoek and back - 90 km. A thermal ridge run, but getting back can be tricky if the wind swings too much to the south.
To Clanwilliam - 100 km. Head north along the ridge past Teenage. Cross into the back valley at Bumpy peak, over Cirtusdal, north in the valley to the constriction, then continue up the valley to Clanwilliam Dam.

Wilderness: Any of the classic coastal runs, particularly Paradise Ridge.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Porterville: has lots of waterfalls to explore and wild-life galore to experience, or head to the coast - an hour and a half - and lounge on the beach or play in the sea. Strong coastal winds in the afternoon make for great kite surfing. Cape Town is two hours away.

Wilderness: This is a family holiday paradise.

Sports-wise there's golf, fishing, surfing, sailing, diving, horse riding and tons more. Or hop on a boat and go whale and dolphin watching, or just chill on some of the world's most beautiful beaches.

RAINY DAYS

Porterville: If there are any - this is a desert area - head to the beach or take a trip around the wine-lands and sample the excellent local produce.

SOUTH AFRICA PORTERVILLE AND WILDERNESS

MORE NITTY GRITTY

Or chill at the Flyers' Lodge pool and Speed Bar.
Wilderness: The area is well known for its wonderful climate; the region receives only 700 mm of rain a year. If you catch a rainy day head out dolphin and whale watching or visit the nearby national park.

WEATHER INFO

Porterville: Rob Manzoni gives daily weather briefings at the Flyers' Lodge.
Wilderness: Cloudbase are the best source of all flying information here, including weather.

GETTING THERE

Both locations are best reached from Cape Town. Porterville is two hours away and Wilderness five.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

Porterville: Rob Manzoni and the Flyers Lodge - www.porterville.co.za
Wilderness: Jan Minnaar at Cloudbase Paragliding - www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za
General flying in South Africa: SAHPA, the national association - www.sahpa.co.za
Greg Hammerton's sites guide to South Africa - www.etermitypress.co.za/siteguide.htm



Looking back at the Porterville ridge from the flats out front. Photo: Greg Hammerton



Fly, land, swim, beer... What more do you want from Wilderness? Photo: Marko Wramen



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SOUTH AFRICA

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To assist with temporary licenses, flying, training and site advice all visiting pilots should make contact with SAHPA at office@sahpa.co.za
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A full site guide to South Africa can be found at www.etermitypress.com
Remember to ask for a copy of the latest XC Africa Magazine
Photos: Walter Naser and Riaan Nieuwoudt



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MOROCCO

AGUERGOUR

AND AIT OURIR

High above Aguergour: the plains to the right offer a remote and committing XC route to the main Atlas range. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint

THE LURE

Head to Morocco, North Africa's free flying paradise, and soar the beautiful rocky escarpments of the lower Atlas mountains in warm blue thermals, dressed only in shorts and T-shirt. Then immerse yourself in the fascinating Islamic culture of the city of Marrakesh and its enthralling souks and haggle yourself some real bargains in the evening.

Morocco offers a great winter bolthole for the weather beaten free flying community of Europe at an affordable price.

THE SET UP

Morocco is in the north-west corner of Africa. The country is sliced in half by the impressive Atlas Mountains that stretch for 2,500 km across North Africa

through Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, reaching a height of 4,167 m. The terrain is dry and sandy with the Anti-Atlas foothills to the south of the main range petering out into the vastness of the Sahara.

Marrakesh, the cultural and tourist capital of the country, lies in the plains just north of the Atlas. Two fantastic sites are within easy reach of Marrakesh: Aguergour and Ait Ourir. Both sites offer fantastic soaring and thermal flying.

Aguergour is 35 km south west of Marrakesh and reached by first a metalled road, then a dirt track that leads right to the launch itself. The site faces north-west and looks out over the plains with a high plateau behind launch. XC routes extend in all directions, although going over the back takes you into the boonies where you'll need your own retrieve for sure.

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★★

XC Potential ★★

Fun Factor ★★★★★

Logistics ★

Ait Ourir is a beautiful north-westerly-facing shark's fin that lies 35 km south east of Marrakesh. The ridge offers fantastic soaring all afternoon and XC routes once the thermals get going. Like Aguergour, heading over the back leads to some isolated places and potentially difficult retrieves, unless you follow the N9 road that carves its way through the Atlas, or follow the road system that leads west. Pilots regularly fly between the two sites.

Morocco offers an amazing experience to travellers and pilots alike. The Islamic culture is more relaxed than in many parts of the world and the locals are generally relaxed and welcoming. Marrakesh has long been a focal point for world travellers due to its fascinating street life and markets. If you are fresh out of western culture, Morocco is a great introduction to travelling in other, less familiar cultures.

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Ridge soaring and desert flying in warm dry air. Due to the warm stable air the thermals are gentle most of the time. However, things get rowdy in spring – April to June – and mid summer gets too windy due to the air being sucked into the landmass of Africa.

WHEN TO GO

October to April: the conditions become fairly benign in the dead of winter – Nov to Feb - when many pilots visit, either side the condition can be feisty and the winds strong. Mid summer the winds are often unmanageable.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 1,500 – 2,500 m
LAUNCH: Aguergour 1,258 m
Ait Ourir 946 m
LANDING: Aguergour 400 m
Ait Ourir 654 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Aguergour is a drive up with easy HG launch and landing. Ait Ourir will make you sweat though!

MUST BE FLOWN

Just being in the air hovering over Berber villages in Morocco is enough for most, and any kind of XC is a full-blown adventure.

WATCH OUT FOR

Dust devils and con men.

ACCOMMODATION

Marrakesh has such a wide range of accommodation that you can find something to fit everyone's taste and budget. Get a Lonely Planet guide and take your pick. Closer to the sites, Chez Ahmed is a small, but beautiful local residence underneath Aguergour specifically built for pilots. www.club-ahmed.com The little town of Ait Ourir has a couple of small hotels.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Many of the French schools operate guided trips to Morocco. Or look up Toby Colombé and Passion Paragliding who have been running trips there for several years. www.passionparagliding.com



Photo: Charlie King

MOROCCO AGUERGOUR AND AIT OURIR

MORE NITTY GRITTY

TAKE THE FAMILY

Morocco is a fantastic cultural adventure for adults and children alike. You'll not find theme parks and playgrounds, but immerse yourself in Moroccan life and children of every age will be entertained.

RAINY DAYS

Delve into the souks and markets of Marrakesh. You can lose yourself in the labyrinth of covered walkways and stalls for many days, and certainly until the rain stops.

WEATHER INFO

The weather charts of Europe generally cover Morocco, and a search of the Internet will produce many maps with sunny or rainy symbols on them. Otherwise, looking out the window and making your own assessment is by far the best option.

GETTING THERE

Marrakesh has a busy international airport that is serviced by not only many major carriers, but budget airlines *easyjet.com* and *Ryanair.com* now operate a service there from Spain, France, Italy and the UK.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA
www.morocco.com



The razor sharp shark's fin at Ait Ourir looking north.
Photo: Oliver Guenay



Photo: Charlie King



Soaring in front of Aguergour, looking across the plains towards Marrakesh. Photo: Fredrik Gustafsson



Winging it down over a classic Berber village. Photo: Felix Wölk

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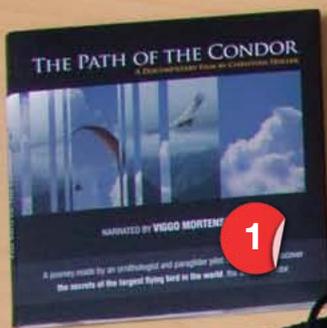
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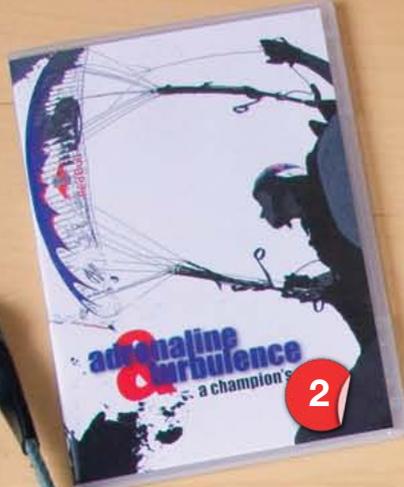
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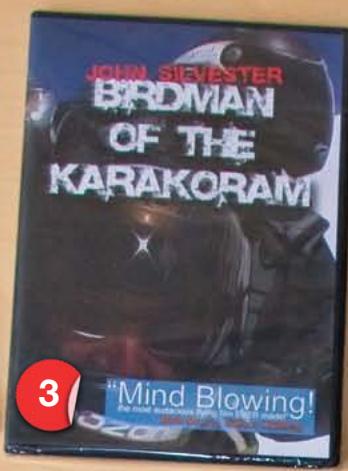
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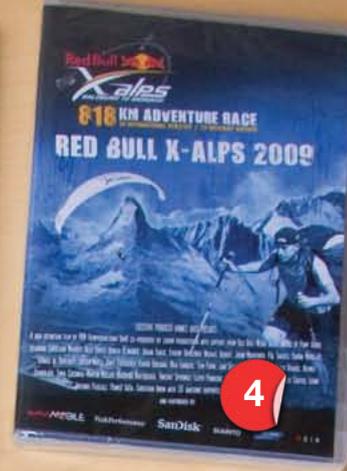
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NEPAL POKHARA

The stunning fishtail of Machaphuchare (6,993 m) dominates flying in Pokhara. Photo: Peter Wolf



Jerôme Maupoint and Scott Mason enjoy paragliding above the lake. Photo: Jérôme Maupoint

AT A GLANCE
 Thermal strength ★★★
 XC Potential ★★
 Fun Factor ★★★★★
 Logistics ★★★★★

THE LURE

Fly against the backdrop of all backdrops: the mighty snow-clad Himalaya! Warm weather, winter thermals and a super-chilled travellers' scene in an unbelievable setting combine to make Pokhara a must-stop on any serious pilot's world tour.

THE SET UP

Pokhara (800 m) is the adventure centre of Nepal. Originally a hippie hangout in the 1970s it still retains its laidback vibe while catering to the mountain thrillseeker and all the adventure activities you can think of.

Cheap and plentiful hotels, lakeside restaurants and bars make Pokhara an attractive destination for long-term seasonal bums of the flying, kayaking, and mountain biking variety. With the flying season between late September and early May, the sub-tropical climate never drops below freezing and an average daytime temperature in the mid-20°Cs makes it perfect for those northern

hemisphere migrants seeking an escape from the winter blues. Sarangkot (1,500 m) is the most accessible launch in Pokhara, situated at the south eastern end of an 8 km long ridge. A 20 minute ride from Lakeside (800 m) brings you to the numerous launches, all taking the daily light thermic breezes, which can start as early as 9 am. With three clearly defined landing zones along the lakeside road, getting back to your favourite bar is all too easy. Dickie Danda (1,520 m) is 6 km north of town and a 40-minute ride brings you to this, the best XC site in Pokhara. Set at the base of the Green Wall (2,700 m) it is the go-to site if conditions are stable. Works best after the day has heated up. Use the terrain to ride dynamic lift through the inversions and then enjoy the incredible views of three of the fourteen 8,000 m peaks in the world. Korchon (3,100 m) is a day's walk north from Pokhara and is a huge grassy plateau above the tree line. At the base of Machaphuchare (6,993 m), this is a site everyone must fly once, either for an early morning ride down to the valley floor (1,000 m) or later on for the high altitude junkies for who getting boosted above 5,000 m is all in a day's work.

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS
September to December is easy and suitable for all levels of pilot (2-3 m/s). From January to May it picks up and the spring thermals (Feb-April) in the mountains are as you would expect in the Himalayas, strong. Being closer to the equator than the Alps the sun is directly overhead and the days are short. A typical day sees flying between, 10 am and 3.30 pm, less in the dead of winter.

WHEN TO GO
October and November for cloud flying in shorts and T-shirts; March and April for big air and XC.

ALTITUDE
CLOUDBASE: 2,500 m - 5,500 m
LAUNCHES: 1,500 m
LANDINGS: 800 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS
No HG launches in Nepal

SITE RECORDS:
PG 110 km

WATCH OUT FOR
Bureaucracy. Nepal is full of it. In Pokhara, the no-fly zones are to the south and south east of Sarangkot. Due to the proximity of the airport from Sarangkot, (less than 4 km) there is no flying allowed over Lakeside and the city. Crossing the lake is also not allowed as it is on the flight path. Rotor low along the Sarangkot ridge is only an issue on those few days when the valley winds pick up during the spring.

ACCOMMODATION
Everything from \$2 budget to luxury. \$10 a night gets you basic but comfortable.

COMPETITIONS
Nepal Open is in February.

GUIDES AND COURSES
Adam Hill has guided there for 13 years, www.nepal-paragliding.com.



NEPAL POKHARA

MORE NITTY GRITTY

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Nowhere else can you fly so close to the biggest mountains on Earth in such easy conditions." Adam Hill

THE BIG TICKS

Korchon Circuit: Once you've done it clockwise, try anti-clockwise!

Sirkot to Besisahar: Starting in the low foothills hopping from one ridge to the next, a few committing glides brings you face to face with the big walls, then spur-hopping along the main Himalayan chain before ending in the shadow of Manaslu.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Nepalis love kids. Take the family trekking, elephant back safaris, jungle walks, microlighting, hot air ballooning, mountain biking, white water rafting, chilling by or on the lake - it's a great family destination.

BLOWN OUT DAYS

Pokhara is a new city, so no funky temples to visit on those rare rainy days. There are some Tibetan monasteries just outside the city and a peace pagoda on the ridge south of the lake.

WEATHER INFO

"If it's not raining then we fly." But you could try www.expeditionweather.info for winds aloft and www.accuweather.com for general synopsis.

GETTING THERE

Kathmandu is Nepal's only international airport with good connections from Delhi, Bangkok and Europe. Pokhara is a stunning 25-minute flight from Kathmandu, otherwise it's 5-7 hours by bus or taxi.

CONTACTS

www.nepal-paragliding.com
www.nepalairsport.org



Getting to launch Nepali style. Photo: Peter Wolf



Nowadays Pokhara hosts a lively tandem operation introducing adventurous travellers to the sport in stunning surroundings. Photo: Peter Wolf

Still taken from Go Pro video by Emmeline Lundström



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AUSTRALIA MANILLA



The big open skies of Manilla where Godfrey Wennes pushed the world record to 335 km in 1998. Photo: Martin Scheel
BELOW Waiting on launch to the moment. Photo: Valéry Chapuis

THE LURE

Safe, easy and relaxing XC for all levels of pilots over an interesting mixture of flatlands and low ridges and hills. Reliable weather and XC routes in every direction.

Personal bests get shattered and pilots log extraordinary amounts of airtime and kilometres in an average week in Manilla. Local guru and site owner Godfrey Wennes broke the world distance record from here with a flight of 335 km in 1998.

THE SET UP

Manilla is a typical small Aussie country town with a selection of classic pubs and friendly locals. Some 12 km away is Australia's premier flying site: Mt Borah, a purpose-developed world class launch site in a world class XC area. The hill is 500 m AGL and was extensively developed for the PG Worlds in 2007. Access is possible by 2WD car to most areas. The four astro-turfed launches are within short walking distance of each other, the landing zones are easy to reach and it is ridge soarable on all sides. The relatively flat 2 km sq mountaintop allows for safe top landings. It is surrounded by easygoing flatlands and low ridges/hills.



AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★ ★
XC Potential ★★ ★★ ★
Fun Factor ★★ ★★ ★
Logistics ★★ ★★ ★

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Flying from Mt Borah is all day long with ridge soaring into the sunset and late evening a regular occurrence. Conditions vary from light and variable (great for triangles) to windy and one direction (for open distance) over a mixture of flatlands and low ridges/hills. Thermals are generally smooth compared to alpine and dry desert areas. A good average day sees thermals between 3-5 m/s and heights up to 3,500 m (the ground is at 300 m ASL)

WHEN TO GO

For 100 km+ XC the best time Oct to late April. The most consistent period for weather is Oct/Nov and Jan-April.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 2,500 m – 3,500 m
LAUNCH: 790 – 880 m
LANDING: 350 – 450 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Easy! Drive up in your own vehicle or put your glider on the Borah Basher roof rack.

MUST BE FLOWN

With a light to moderate S-SW fly north to Bingara following the highway for a 90 km milk run of small ridges, mini flatlands and valleys with easy retrieve and a few pubs with cold beer on the way. In light to moderate E-SE fly west to Wee Waa. A 120 km flight which takes you over the ancient Mt Kaputar volcano lava fields then into the endless flatlands spotted with green squares of cotton fields and past a huge deep-space telescope facility.

SITE RECORDS

PG FAI World Record Open Distance : 335 km (1998)
PG Tandem: 223 km (2000)
HG: 380 km (2004)

WATCH OUT FOR

The only areas to watch out for are 16 km CTA around Tamworth airport 60 km south; compression on entry to the tablelands 30 km east when flying in strong westerly winds; and blue holes on generally good XC cloud days (meaning easy to sink and bomb out).



Pilots climb out at the start of a task in the 2007 world championships. Photo: Martin Scheel

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AUSTRALIA MANILLA

MORE NITTY GRIITTY

ACCOMMODATION

Cabins and camping at Manilla Paragliding on site at Mt Borah are good value with swimming pool, bar and kitchens (cabin €2 p/p and camping €5 p/p). This eliminates the need to drive in and out of Manilla and means you can land on your doorstep. There are also pubs, a caravan park and a B&B in Manilla town.

COMPETITIONS

XC Open World Series, Manilla, Feb 12-19 2011
NSW State HG Championships Feb 20 to March 5 2011

GUIDES AND COURSES

Training, thermalling clinic, XC courses, XC guiding and tandem endorsements from Manilla Paragliding are offered by Godfrey Wenness, www.flymanilla.com.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Safe, easy to do XC kms, multiple launches for nearly all wind directions, reliable weather (300+ days per year flyable), and no airspace limits." Godfrey Wenness

THE BIG TICKS

Manilla to Bingara – the 'pub run' heads north 90 km
Manilla to Wee Waa – the flatlands run west 120 km
Manilla to Bendemeer – the pretty valley run east, 60 km

TAKE THE FAMILY

Full resort style facility at Mt Borah (swimming pool, lounge, bar, coffee lounge, internet). Horse riding nearby, pristine national parks and shopping in Tamworth.

BLOWN OUT

Choose from: the Warrabah National Park (granite gorge, river swimming, coloured cliffs, native wildlife); the Golden Guitar in Tamworth; cinema in Tamworth; Moree Hot spring baths 150 km away; horse riding; glider flights at Lake Keepit.

WEATHER INFO

www.flymanilla.com for weather links and webcam

Phone or email Godfrey Wenness directly - see directory p99

GETTING THERE

Tamworth airport connects to Sydney and Brisbane. CountryLink bus from Sydney to Manilla every day; five-hour drive from Sydney or seven from Brisbane.

CONTACTS

www.flymanilla.com
www.visittamworth.com



Onboard with Bruce Goldsmith on his way to being crowned 2007 World Champion. Photo: Bruce Goldsmith



Manilla serves up a fascinating classic flatland flying with small ridges as trigger points. Photo: Martin Scheel



MEXICO VALLE DE BRAVO

Site of the 2009 paragliding world championships for a very good reason: it's always flyable in Valle!

THE LURE

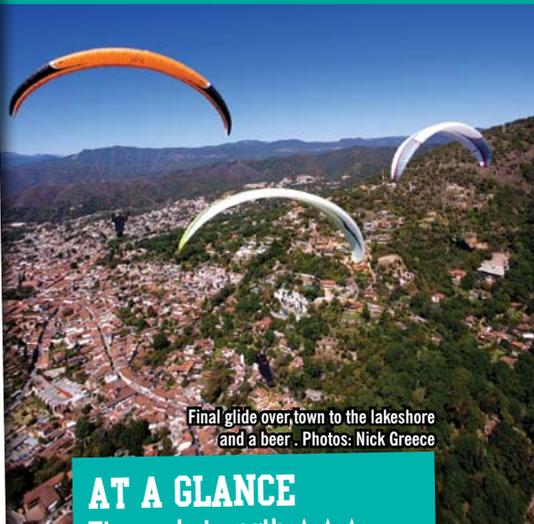
Simply, THE most consistent flying site in the World! In season, every day in Valle is flyable giving you a variety of mountain, flatland and convergence lift to fill your boots with. A chilled lakeside bar will nourish your sky shrivelled body and mind after you land. Valle was the site of the 2009 paragliding world championships for very good reasons.

THE SET UP

Valle de Bravo is a picturesque lakeside town west of Mexico City. Pilots and tourists flock to this winter paradise from December to March to take advantage of the amazingly consistent weather. The town swells every weekend with the Mexico City elite, there to take advantage of the wealth of outdoor sports and pumping nightlife.

El Penon, the main launch, is a 45-minute drive from town and starts working as early as 11 am. There is a witching hour depending on the day where take off becomes unruly. However, like clockwork the valley cools as the sun fades and patient pilots are rewarded with glorious evening glass-offs.

There is a great ridge soaring site directly above the lakeside landing zone called La Torre. The original free flight site utilised by hang gliders in the late '70's is a steep ramp which is flyable almost every afternoon and only needs a 12 km/h west wind.



Final glide over town to the lakeshore and a beer. Photos: Nick Greece

AT A GLANCE

- Thermal strength ★★ ★
- XC Potential ★★ ★
- Fun Factor ★★ ★ ★
- Logistics ★★ ★ ★ ★



THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Valle serves up a bit of everything: pumping mountain thermals kick off the day before you transition to classic plateau convergence flying and flat land crossings. Your day culminates at the lakeside landing zone conveniently located close to the town centre.

WHEN TO GO

November to February for PGs
January to March for HGs

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 3,500 m
LAUNCH: 2,340 m
LANDING: 1,790 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Both El Penon and La Torre are reached by car and suitable for hang gliders.

MUST BE FLOWN

The Valle convergence: from El Penon hop to the G-spot and gain enough height to cross the valley to the Three Kings. Take this line to the Divasadero turnpoint then follow the convergence line back across the mesa to the Monarch butterfly winter nesting area above the town of Saucos. The convergence needs a chance to set up so launch early, but wait until after 12:30 pm before you head off. After you've taken in the views of Nevada Toluca return to the lake through the mountains and use Cerro Gordo to gain the necessary altitude for your victory glide to town and the cold beer waiting for you in the landing zone.

WATCH OUT FOR

Launch conditions can blow out once the midday heat overwhelms the valley floor. Avoid the saddle behind the El Penon at all costs. Many fields have hidden power lines. Other pilots: especially around the house thermals of the G-spot and the Crazy Thermal Place.

ACCOMMODATION

From palatial Mexican estates replete with maids and cooks to sparse 'posada' digs.

GUIDES AND COURSES

There's no shortage of guides in Valle and several respected US schools go there every year. Try www.eagleparagliding.com, www.superflyinc.com, Alas

De Hombre www.alas.com.mx, www.flymexico.com or Raoul Carvalho raulcarvalho@hotmail.com

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Arguably the best place in the world to fly! Quality flying guaranteed!" Russell Ogden – triple British PG champion and 2009 PWC Superfinal vice-champion.

THE BIG TICKS

El Penon to Divasadero and back to the lake.
El Penon to Saucos then Sacamacate and back to the lake.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Great family holiday location in a quaint Mexican town. Play on the lake, swim in pools, hike in the mountains or visit a butterfly sanctuary and see hundreds of thousands of Monarch butterflies that migrate there every year.

RAINY DAYS

Unlikely to be any!

WEATHER INFO

If it's not raining it's flyable.

GETTING THERE

Toluca is the nearest airport where taxis transfer you to Valle. Mexico City is an hour and a half further east and buses run daily from the central bus terminal. Or organize a pickup from one of the local operators in Valle who will await you at either airport – the cost-effective option for groups.

FLY MEXICO

800m from take-off to your beach hotel LZ

Weekly January beach paragliding trips

parasoftparagliding.com



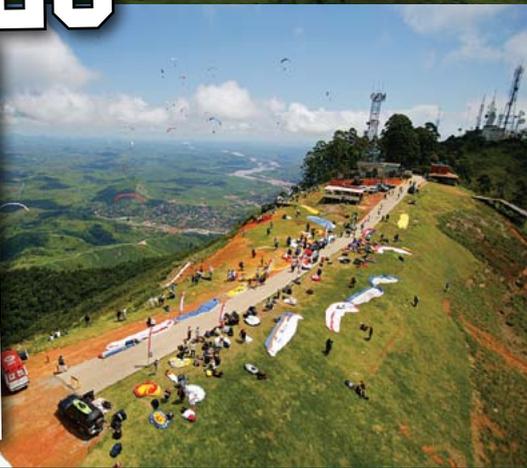
BRAZIL GOVERNADOR VALADARES

THE LURE

Governador Valadares speaks for itself. Smooth, reliable climbs to a warm 27 °C cloudbase, over a rolling landscape of green hills that extends as far as the eye can see and the pilot can fly. A great place to perfect coring skills and speed-to-fly with other free flyers or in friendly local comps.

THE SET UP

Pico do Ibituruna (911 m) is the only take off in GV. There are large grassy launch slopes on both sides of the summit ridge, with a cobbled road between, leading to two cafés and the toilets. The wind is often very light and it gets hot so keep protected. A club bus goes to launch from the centre of town, plus there are several private shuttle operators.



MAIN SHOT: Racing above the lush green rolling hills of Governador Valadares, with the town and launch in the background.

Photos: Martin Scheel

BELOW LEFT: Looking down on the double-sided launch of Pico do Ibituruna.

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Thermals are light and often in the same place, you just have to get the cycles right. It's good to get up to launch about 11 am and take off at around 12 noon to 1 pm.

WHEN TO GO

February to March

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 1,500 m to 2,300 m
LAUNCH: 911 m
LANDING: 150 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Hang gliders can go on the buses and there are ramps on both sides of the summit.

MUST BE FLOWN

The 100 km milk run is south, down the road towards Caratinga. Once you have cleared the pull of Ibituruna, which is the highest mountain for miles around, you settle into a steady pattern of

flatland XC flying. Climbing over towns, small hills and land features either side of the road. Head over Engenheiro Caldos, then Dom Cavati. At the big road junction, get to base, which will be at its highest, and it's an evening cruise from Inhapi to Caratinga. Nice!

WATCH OUT FOR

There is an airport W/SW of GV. Do not fly over the river unless you are landing in the official field, Via Dapas in GV, even then you must stay less than 300 m above the field and not fly over the town. Also, don't scratch low in front, or in the steep valleys leading up to the main cliff face. If you get flushed after launch, fly out with as much height as possible to work the fields or road.

ACCOMMODATION

All sorts: from four star to cheap sweat boxes and stylish B&Bs. There are also companies that offer accommodation and transport packages for pilots.

GUIDES AND COURSES

Many international guides run trips here, including Jocky Sanderson, www.escapexc.com. Local and ex-pat pilots also offer packages.

EXPERT'S OPINION

"Where else can you fly at cloudbase in shorts and T-shirts in such reliable and smooth thermals, over beautiful scenery?" Jocky Sanderson

THE BIG TICKS

GV to Ibituruna is about 105 km

TAKE THE FAMILY

GV is not great for the family, although there are private clubs and pools that welcome pilots and partners. They will be bored after a few days.

RAINY DAYS

Pilots head for the shopping centres or there are local waterfalls to swim in, but little else of interest.

WEATHER INFO

Wifi is everywhere and the local TV stations give good forecasts with clear pictures. It can over-develop and it is important to keep an eye on the clouds if they are growing.

GETTING THERE

GV has a small airport with flights to Belo Horizonte and onward connections to Rio and Sao Paulo. The best way in from the big cities is by bus: cheap and comfortable overnight they arrive into the centre of town early morning.

ONLINE

www.avvl.com.br
www.xcbrazil.com
www.escapexc.com

AT A GLANCE

Thermal strength ★★
XC Potential ★★★★★
Fun Factor ★★★★★
Logistics ★★★★★

ITALY BASSANO



Looking across the main ridge of Bassano with the village of Semonza below it. Photo: Kelly Farina

THE LURE

Jump from spur to spur catching climbs off picturesque Italian villages along the southern edge of the Alps, while the rest of the Alps has either ground to a winter's halt or not quite dragged itself into spring.

Bassano opens and closes the European thermal season from its beautiful grassy slopes in a warm climate and convivial Italian atmosphere that sees pilots from northern climes flock here every spring and autumn. If conditions are on then a drive one valley north to Feltre opens up even better XC potential.

A metalled road to take off, big open launches and the historic town of Bassano del Grappa to immerse yourself in when not flying, round off a fantastic flying experience and a must-visit venue on any pilot's European tour.

THE SET UP

Bassano is on the plains just a couple of kilometres from the first foothills of the southern edge of the main Alpine chain. The flying takes place on the southern facing edge of the Alps from several take offs within easy drive of town.

There are many good launches reachable from

Bassano, but Semonza is where most pilots operate from, as seven excellent launches are close by. The road to the main take offs on Monte Grappa also goes up from there. There's also an official landing, a bar, a flying shop and Tilly's, a flying-friendly hotel and bar, 100 m from the landing.

Facing south over the Italian plains, routes head east and west along the front ridge. The heat low of the Alps turns the wind west in the afternoon making an eastward return journey easy later in the day. On more unstable days, head out into the plains and look down on stunning Italian architecture as you climb out over the towns.

Bassano is connected to the main Italian rail network so getting home is easy even if you bomb out, and the locals are very used to pilots anyway so hitching is a cinch.

AT A GLANCE

- Thermal strength ★★★
- XC Potential ★★★★★
- Fun Factor ★★★
- Logistics ★★★



The picturesque town of Bassano. Photo: Micky von Wachter

THE NITTY GRITTY

FLYING CONDITIONS

Mountain ridge surfing in often strong spring thermals with little valley wind. Or dive into the plains for some classic flatland cloud-to-cloud circuits.

WHEN TO GO

March – May when it's stronger, but more prone to inclement weather.

September to November when it's more stable but very consistent.

Mid summer the plains get very stable and swamp Bassano with hot, but poor quality, air.

ALTITUDE

CLOUDBASE: 1,500 – 2,500 m

LAUNCH: 800 – 1,550 m

LANDING: 190 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

All the take offs are easily reached by car and most have ramps.

MUST BE FLOWN

A big out-and-return: head west first as far as you dare, then head back past Bassano and go east as far as you dare before working back west and home. Whether it's 20 km or 200, a ride along the front ridge of the Alps is a fantastic start or end to your year.

WATCH OUT FOR

Getting stuck in unlandable valleys as you head along the ridge – there are a few. Get high before you cross them.

Overdevelopment in the big mountains behind can cause the main valleys to draw a lot of air.



greenland shoot: m.nesler
artwork: bueromaniama.de



Woody Valley



WoodyValley Voyager Plus

Rucksack  Harness 

ARE YOU
ready
to touch
the clouds?

ITALY BASSANO

MORE NITTY GRITTY

ACCOMMODATION

Bassano has an excellent selection of hotels and hostels, but to be closer to the flying you need to stay in Semonza where there is a smaller selection. Tillys offers great value B&B right next to the landing and has been a favourite of pilots for many years.

There are two campsites close to the landing and a couple of B&Bs.

GUIDES AND COURSES

The Monte Grappa Airpark www.montegrappa-airpark.com offers local instruction and guidance. Kelly Farina and www.austrianarena.com run guided XC weeks there too.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Italians are big family people, so children are really well catered for.

RAINY DAYS

Wander the old town and find bullet hole ridden walls from the Second World War, or take a day trip to Venice and feast on ice cream whilst singing "Just a one Cornetto, give it to me!" at the top of your voice from a gondola.

WEATHER INFO

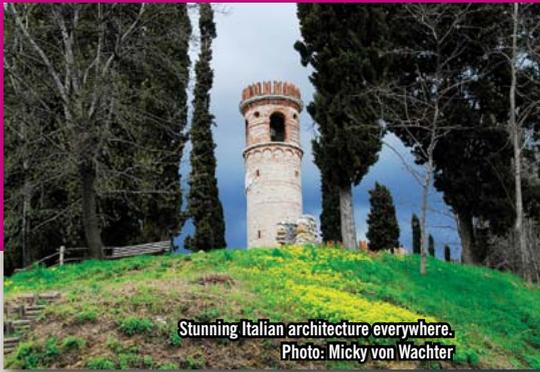
Monte Grappa Airpark post daily weather reports to their site or use www.para2000.org or www.meteo.it

GETTING THERE

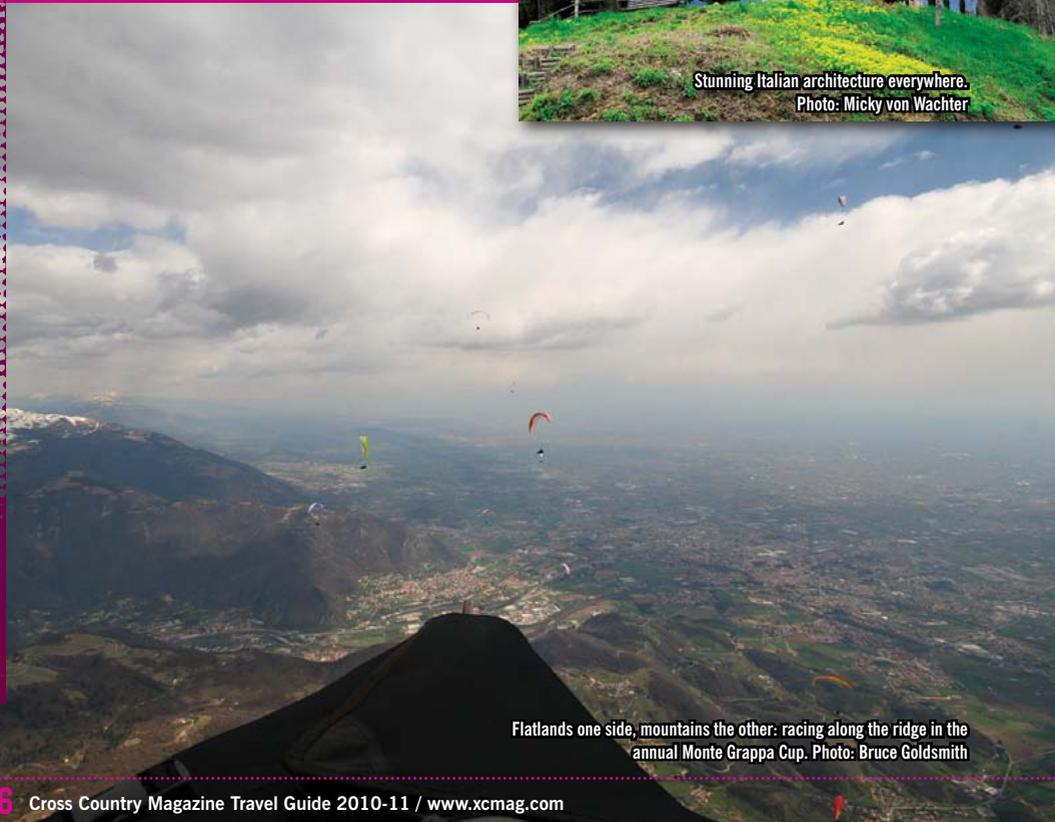
Milan is the nearest major international airport. Venice is reachable from most European cities, but try and fly to Venice Treviso airport, as that is actually in Treviso, not Venice, and only half an hour from Bassano. Bassano is also easily accessible by rail and bus, and is just east of the A31 autoroute.

USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES FOR THE AREA

www.montegrappa-airpark.com



Stunning Italian architecture everywhere.
Photo: Micky von Wachter



Flatlands one side, mountains the other: racing along the ridge in the annual Monte Grappa Cup. Photo: Bruce Goldsmith



Just behind Bassano lie the mighty Dolomites. Photo: Martin Scheel

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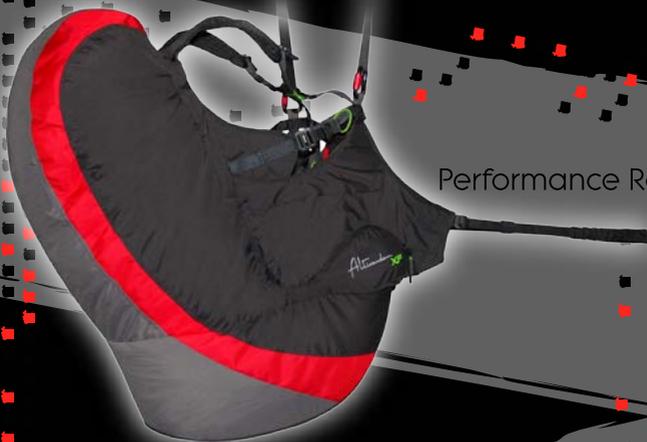
PAGE	SITE	COUNTRY	COMPANY	NAME	ACCOM	GUIDING	WEBSITE	CONTACT TELEPHONE
06	Secret Valley	Penu	Cloudwalker	Richard Pethgal	no	yes	cloudwp@gmail.com	
12	Laragne	France	Aliez-Up Holidays	David Owen / Rachael Evans	yes	yes	www.aliez-up.com	0033 4 92 62 20 53
12	Laragne	France	Escape	Jocky Sanderson	no	yes	www.escapexc.com	0044 (0) 17687 71442
12	Laragne	France	Always	Chris Davies / Judy Leefen	no	yes	www.always-airsports.com	0044 1335 344 308
16	Chamonix	France	Alpine Flying Centre	Dennis Troft	yes	yes	www.flyers-lodge.com	0033 6 10 63 45 58
16	Chamonix	France	Absolute Chamonix	Caroline Brille	no	yes	www.absolute-chamonix.com	0033 608 239 265
24	Chelan	USA	Aerial Paragliding	Doug Stroop	no	yes	www.paragliding.us	001 509 782 5543
24	Kössen	USA	Cascade Skies	Stelan Mitrovich	no	yes	www.cascadeskies.com	001 206 819 0962
28	Kössen	Austria	Fly Kossen	Sapp Himberger	no	yes	www.fly-kossen.at	0043 537 56 559
32	Verber	Switzerland	Verber Summits	Stuart Bebas	yes	yes	www.verber-summits.com	0041 079 913 5677
34	Jackson Hole	USA	Jackson Hole Paragliding	Scott Harris	no	yes	www.jhparagliding.com	001 307 690 8726
34	Jackson Hole	USA	Cowboy Up Hang Gliding	Steve Ham	no	yes	www.cuhanggliding.com	001 307 413 4164
38	Piedrahita	Spain	Fly Piedrahita	Karl Eisenhut	yes	yes	www.flypiedrahita.com	0034 920 360550
42	Interlaken	Switzerland	Chill Out Paragliding	Dirk Bormans	no	yes	www.chilloutparagliding.com	0041 33 826 71 71
42	Interlaken	Switzerland	Backpackers Villa	Mark Pertot	yes	no	www.villa.ch	0041 79 33 99 3 98
48	Andalucia	Spain	Hotel California	Dirk Bormans	yes	yes	www.hotelcaliforniaspain.com	0034 958 88 10 38
48	Andalucia	Spain	Trans Andalusia	Mark Pertot	yes	yes	www.transandalusia.com	0034 630 368 891
51	St Andre	France	Aeroglass	Philippe Larni	no	yes	www.aeroglass.com	0033 4 92 89 11 30
51	St Andre	France	A Little Piece of Heaven	Mark Taggart	yes	no	www.alittlepieceofheaven.biz	0033 4 92 89 09 41 Mob 0033 6 76 57 56 08
54	Anecy	France	Passager du Vent	Pierre Naville	no	yes	www.lespassagersduvent.com	0033 450 60 71 21
54	Anecy	France	The Last Resort	Al Swindles	yes	yes	www.paraglidingholidays.com	0033 450 02 36 71
54	Anecy	France	Maison Du Moulin	Iwyn Jehu	yes	yes	www.maison-du-moulin.co.uk	0033 6779 759 57
54	Anecy	France	Paratroc	Michel Falzone	no	no	www.paratroc.com	0033 4 50 64 02 32
58	Owen's Valley	USA	Kari Kastle	Kari Kastle	no	yes	karikastle.com	
62	Ou Deniz	Turkey	Escape	Jocky Sanderson	no	yes	www.escapexc.com	0044 01768 771 442
66	Bir	India	Himalayan Sky Safaris	John Silvester	no	yes	www.himalayansky Safaris.com	
66	Bir	India	Parosoft	Steve Purdie	yes	yes	www.airworks.co.uk	0044 01273 858 108
70	Quixada	Brazil	XCeara	Chico Santos	yes	yes	www.xceara.com.br	
74	Everywhere	South Africa	SAHPA	Louise Liversedge	no	no	www.sahpa.co.za	0027 12 668 3186
74	Wilderness	South Africa	Cloudbase Paragliding	Jan Minaar	yes	yes	www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za	0027 44 877 1414
74	Porterville	South Africa	The Flyers Lodge	Rob Manzoni	yes	yes	www.porterville.co.za	0027 22 931 3416
78	Everywhere	Morocco	Passion Paragliding	Toby Colombe	no	yes	www.passionparagliding.com	0044 208 123 7427
84	Pokhara	Nepal	Sunrise/Frontiers Paragliding	Adam Hill	no	yes	www.nepal-paragliding.com	00977 98041 25096
84	Pokhara	Nepal	Parahawking	Scott Mason	no	yes	www.parahawking.com	00977 98066 47917
88	Manilla	Australia	Fly Manilla	Godfrey Wrenness	yes	yes	www.flymanilla.com	61 2 67 856645
92	Vale de Bravo	Mexico	Parasoft	Granger Banks	no	yes	www.parasoftparagliding.com	001 303 494 2820
94	Governador Valadares	Brazil	Escape	Jocky Sanderson	no	yes	www.escapexc.com	0044 (0) 17687 71442
94	Governador Valadares	Brazil	XC Brazil	Steve Barton	no	yes	www.xcbrazil.com	0055 33 3277 9282
96	Bassano	Italy	Monte Grappa Air Park	Andreas Brauer	no	yes	www.montegrappa-airpark.com	0039 042391 04 45 Mob 0039 329 159 79 44
96	Bassano	Italy	Austrian Arena	Kelly Farina	no	yes	www.austrianarena.com	0043 676 9313 500

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