

First in Flight

A kiteboarding program takes off at Vietnam's Princess d'Annam Resort & Spa.



NGUYEN THANH TRUNG raises his finger in the air to test the wind. "It's gusty," says Trung, sport coordinator at the Princess d'Annam Resort & Spa in Vietnam, "but we'll be OK."

Trung and I are standing on the shore of the secluded Ke Ga Bay, in southern Vietnam, on a perfect balmy day in August. I have come to the beach, and to the 57-villa Princess d'Annam, to learn how to kiteboard. The resort, where some villas feature private pools and rates reach as high as \$1,370 per night, is located on a mile-long bay, where windy conditions—gusts in the area reach as high as 46 mph from November to March and 17 mph from March to November—make for an ideal spot for this nascent extreme sport.

A certified instructor in the International Kiteboarding Organization, Trung has taught the sport for the last five years. He launched the kiteboarding program at the Princess d'Annam in February, just one year after the property's grand opening.

I begin my five-hour session with Trung by practicing on the sand with a small training kite. A metal stick similar to a trapeze bar controls the contraption. "It's like driving a motorboat or a bicycle," he says. "Just relax your shoulders."

My kite nose-dives repeatedly into the sand, but I learn to control it after about an hour. Trung's assistant then hands me a life jacket and a harness, and Trung clips the harness to a 20-foot Naish kiteboard sail. (The resort also has 30- and

40-foot sails and four board sizes, which are chosen according to weight, skill level, and wind conditions.)

The pull of the big kite feels like being attached to a whale. It tugs away from me once released into the air, and I fight to keep my feet planted in the sand. Over the course of two hours, I gradually master the technique of staying put. Then Trung starts me on the next lesson: learning to fly the kite with one hand so my other hand can carry the board. Another hour passes.

Finally, Trung hands me a kiteboard. I sit in the sand and slip into the foot slots while holding the kite. I attempt to stand so the sail can carry me into the water, but I fall over—over and over again. All I can think about is how I would rather be eating a grilled lobster dinner at the Princess d'Annam's beach restaurant or taking a dip in the pool at my 1,991-square-foot Empress Villa. But Trung refuses to give up. "You're almost there," he encourages me.

Holding the kite with one hand, I wipe the sand from my face, slip my feet into the board, grab the bar with my other hand, and start to stand up, letting the wind pull me into the surf. Suddenly I am up—and flying! I quickly lose my balance, and the kite goes down, but adrenaline has erased all thoughts of pools and lobster. All I can think about is getting back on the board. —MARGIE GOLDSMITH

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Princess d'Annam's kiteboarding instructor catches some wind in Ke Ga Bay, a three-hour drive east from Ho Chi Minh City.