

WINDSURFING PHOTOGRAPHY PART 2: DSLR BASICS

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PHOTOS: ALEX IRWIN, SIMON WINKLEY



Alex in action at Hayling.
 Using a monopod (or tripod) can steady the camera to sharpen the images

IN THE EARLY-1800S JOSEPH NICÉPHORE NIÉPCE BECAME THE FIRST PERSON TO USE A CAMERA TO PRODUCE A CRUDE-QUALITY PRINT ON A SHEET OF PEWTER COATED IN BITUMEN DISSOLVED IN LAVENDER OIL. The exposure time of the picture of a building, a barn and a tree was so long (around eight hours) that the sun came from both sides of the resulting image as it had moved across the sky! Thankfully photography has come a long way since. The use of cameras over time has allowed us to capture every kind of moment and has reshaped the way we look at ourselves and the world around us.

Our world is windsurfing and, if you are reading this, you probably appreciate a good shot of a board and sail with a bit of spray and that's a good place to start. Our sport is defined by the wind and the waves as well as the stunning visuals of the kit, the speed, the moves and the aerial hits. Whether it's a high-end pro-camera or a trusty old one, windsurf photography is about being out there, capturing the good stuff and bringing it home: action photography at its very best.

In part one of this three-part series I looked at the windsurfing selfie using GoPros and specific mounts. This time I am looking at DSLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) basics before tackling the editing of images in part three. I am very grateful to pro-marine-photographer Alex Irwin - Sportography.tv for sharing some of his expertise with me.

For reference, each windsurfing photo has been labelled with the camera settings used. The format is: Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR – EF 100-400mm – 1/2500 – f/8 – 560mm – 2000 and this refers to: photographer – camera – lens – shutter speed – aperture – focal length – ISO.

Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR –
 EF 100-400mm – 1/3200 – f/8 –
 560mm – 3200 –
 rider: Leigh Kingaby





Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 1DX – EF 100-400mm - 1/3200 – f/5.6 – 153mm – 400 – rider: Simon Winkley

Equipment: camera phone limitations

As I said last time, there's nothing better like a killer close-up shot of the action and nothing worse than a wonky, pixelated phone photo from a beach 500m away. A top-spec phone now takes an exceptional photo of course. Unless you get very close to the action, however, photos with maximum zoom and heavy cropping are likely to turn out a bit thin. With windsurfing, being close enough would mean standing in the shallows (with the risk of dropping the phone in the sea) or getting the windsurfer to sail up to the beach (with the risk of running aground). Just about the only realistic way of getting a decent photo of a windsurfer with a phone is to be out in a powerboat. Not everyone has access to a boat of course and in any sort of wave conditions or rough water its just not happening. So why not restrict the phone for kit and lifestyle shots on the beach and start playing with an actual camera with a longer lens (to increase the focal length). This means that you can get you up-close-and-personal without, well, getting up-close-and-personal.

DSLR specification vs cost

A few years ago, being a keen iPhone photographer, I decided to move things up a notch. Despite the popularity of mirrorless cameras a cheap DSLR camera is still the most affordable way to get into serious photography so I started to look for one. I bumped into Andy Stallman in Weymouth who is a well-respected local windsurf photographer. When he looked at my humble budget he advised me on a used, older style of DSLR that he once owned and had enjoyed using. It was a camera where just about every possible setting could be adjusted so it would be one that, for me, would be challenging as well as having longevity. We sat down with a cup of tea and went shopping on my laptop, deciding upon this setup from wexphotovideo.com (in near-perfect condition) as I needed the peace of mind of buying from a reputable dealer:

- **Camera:** Nikon D300, 13 Megapixel (£307).
- **Lens 1:** Nikon 18-200mm f3.5-5.6 G AF-S DX VR (£224).
- **Lens 2:** Nikon 55-300mm f4.5-5.6 G AF-S DX VR (£170).

I added a cheap padded bag, a couple of filters, some cleaning kit and a few SD cards and, with the monopod I already had, I was sorted. I had no idea how to use this kind of camera, however, so I went online and tried to make some sense of it. During a trip to Croatia at that time I was lucky to get a 1:1 session with Claire Edmead, owner of CE Photo which was motivating. Her parting advice was to go out and play with the camera and to use the resulting images – together with the basic technique guides she kindly gave me – to gauge my progress... and to take lots of photos.

One of Alex's professional setups



In contrast to my older camera let's look at some pro kit. Over to Alex...

- "The kit we typically use when we do a shoot is:
- **Camera:** Canon EOS 5DS R, 51 Megapixel (£2499).
 - **Lens:** Canon EF 100-400mm f4.5-5.6 L IS II USM Lens (£1999).
 - **Plus:** Canon EF 1.4x III Extender (£409).

Apart from the incredible results you can get from this kit, the reason we shoot with Canon Professional cameras is that the service from Canon Pro services is second to none. Their team offers professional advice, extremely quick turn around on repairs, the loan of a temporary camera to shoot with if needed and early trials of new equipment. We tend to shoot this set up (and even more so when using a bigger lens) using a Manfrotto tripod or monopod to provide extra stability."



Simon's affordable setup. With so much new equipment on the market there's lots of good value used kit around



Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR – EF 100-400mm – 1/2500 – f/8 – 560mm – 2000 – rider: Simon Winkley

Making sense of a DSLR

With watersports photography the key to getting a great shot is to capture the water correctly. When you get hold of a DSLR you will have to learn to embrace the settings in order to achieve this. Whilst this can take some effort at first, especially if you are used to pointing and shooting with a phone, the good news is that it's fun and gets easier over time. Here's a very basic introduction to what's what on a DSLR so that a newcomer to windsurfing photography can get started.

Shutter speed

This is a measurement of the time that the shutter is open as the picture is taken. The faster the shutter speed the shorter the time that the image sensor is exposed to light (a shorter exposure time) and vice versa. Speeds typically range from a very slow shutter speed of 30 seconds up to a very fast shutter speed of 1/8000s (one eight thousandth of a second). Changing the shutter speed when photographing a windsurfer will allow control over the extent to which the motion is shown. Use a slow shutter speed of 1/15s – 1/60s (ideally on a tripod) to introduce 'blur'. Use a fast shutter speed of 1/1000s or above to get a crisp, clean shot of the action.

Aperture

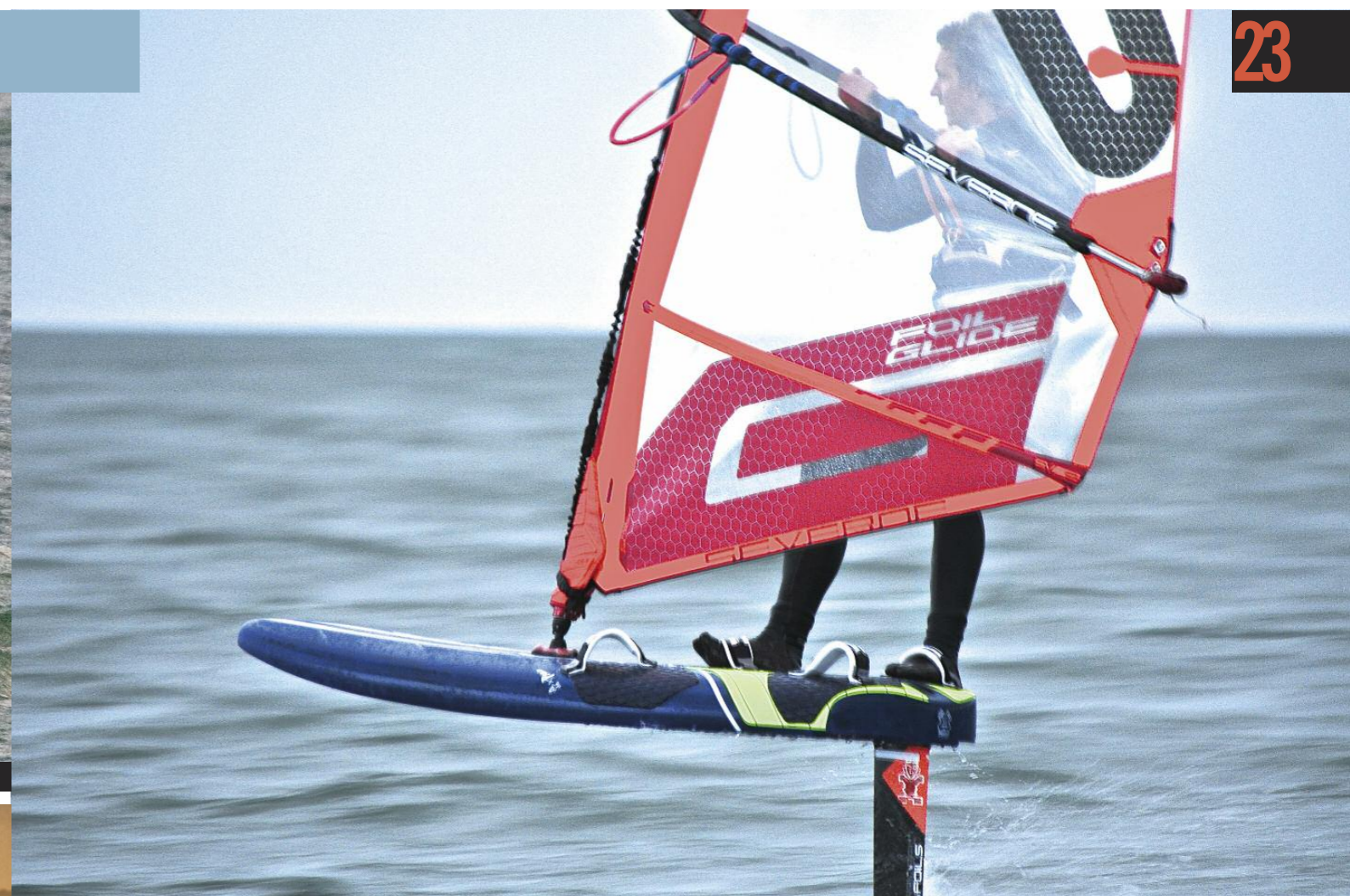
Aperture controls the amount of light (or brightness of the image) that passes through the lens and falls onto the image sensor. It is expressed as an f-number (or "f-stop") such as f/2.8, f/4, f/5.6, f/8, f/11, f/16, f/22 (the higher the f-number the smaller the aperture). Aperture adjustment works like a pupil in the eye: contracting in bright conditions to reduce the light passing through and expanding to let more light through when the light is low. Choosing a small f-stop can be used to keep a windsurfer in focus and to blur the background, known as narrowing the depth of field. The shutter speed and aperture together control the total amount of light reaching the sensor.



Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR – EF 100-400mm - 1/2500 – f/10 – 450mm – 1000 – rider: Simon Winkley



Simon Winkley – Nikon D300S – Nikkor 55-300mm – 1/400 – f/10 – 270mm – 640 – rider: Ricky Martin



Simon Winkley – Nikon D300S – Nikkor 55-300mm – 1/50 – f/5.6 – 250mm – 400 – rider: Sam Ross

ISO

ISO is a measure of how sensitive the camera's image sensor is to light. The same principles apply as in film photography – the lower the number (100) the less sensitive your camera is to light and the finer the grain. By choosing a higher ISO (3200 is common yet it's possible to see ISOs of 25600 or even higher) you can use a faster shutter speed to freeze the movement, especially if the lighting is poor, yet you can expect to get more of a grainy picture (one with more 'noise'). A typical sensible range would be from 100-400 with the rule of thumb being: select the lowest ISO you can get away with, that will allow you to take a picture at a fast enough shutter speed and/or larger aperture. In bright windsurfing conditions, where lots of light will be reflected back off the water, this can be used to freeze the spray and the action.

Metering

Metering determines where in the frame a camera 'looks' in order to set exposure. Matrix metering looks at a wide area of the frame. Centre-weighted metering pays more attention to the centre of the frame. Spot metering sets the exposure for a selected focus point in the frame and is more for the professionals. For windsurfing photography use either matrix metering or, as most shots will have the action in the middle of the frame, centre-weighted metering and, to keep it simple, set it once then leave it alone.

Exposure mode

This determines how the camera sets shutter speed and aperture when adjusting exposure. Four choices of mode are:

- **Programmed auto (P):** the camera sets shutter speed and aperture for optimal exposure. This is the one I recommend for easy windsurfing snapshots where there may be little time to adjust the camera settings.
- **Shutter-priority auto (S or Tv):** the photographer chooses the shutter speed and the camera selects the aperture for the best results. Can be used to freeze or blur a windsurfer travelling at speed.
- **Aperture-priority auto (A or Av):** the photographer chooses the aperture and the camera selects the shutter speed for best results. Can be used to blur backgrounds or bring both foreground and background into focus for windsurfing shots against an interesting backdrop. A number of decent amateur windsurfing photographers I know prefer this mode.
- **Manual (M):** the photographer controls both the shutter speed and the aperture. Getting good windsurfing photos in this mode is incredibly difficult: they can come out over- or under-exposed if you do not have mastery of these settings.

Exposure compensation

This allows the user to alter the exposure from the value suggested by the camera to make pictures brighter or darker. Whilst the camera automatically adjusts exposure in P, S, and A modes, the value it selects may not always produce the results you intend. I use this quick fix at times when I am struggling to get what I want in over-bright or dull conditions, especially in winter when the sun is low.



Simon Winkley – Nikon D300S – Nikkor 55-300mm – 1/250 – f/8 – 220mm – 250 – riders: Phil Clarke and Harry Quelch

Sports mode

This popular mode on a Canon is the one that a lot of point-and-shoot sports photographers go for – after all it has a running person on the mode dial so it must be ok! It automatically chooses the shutter speed and aperture to make a moving target easier to shoot. Sports mode disables the flash to save you from the shame of being booted out of your seat at a sports match where flash photography could distract the players. It's a good start yet it cannot identify the type of sport you are shooting: fast or slow? Also if the windsurfer is travelling across your field-of-view it will appear to be travelling faster than if it is coming towards the camera. Shutter-priority could be a better option where the user selects the optimum shutter speed with the camera looking after the aperture.

White balance

This is used to adjust colours to match the colour of the light source (and/or weather) so that white objects appear white. Normally auto white balance will produce the required results. If not the photographer can choose from incandescent, cloudy, fluorescent, shade, flash, direct sunlight, colour temperature or preset manual settings. The result of changing white balance can be that original images have a slight filter effect.

Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR – EF 100-400mm - 1/2500 – f/7.1 – 379mm – 5000 – rider: Simon Winkley



Autofocus (AF) vs manual focus (M)

"Thanks for that blurred wave shot of me," said no one ever. Getting a dynamically moving windsurfer in focus by having to manually twist the lens focus ring all the time would be hard work for most of us. Autofocus is a better setting where the camera automatically adjusts focus when the shutter-release button is pressed halfway and then the picture is taken when the button is pressed the rest of the way down. There are three distinct autofocus options:

- 1. One-Shot AF (Canon) or Single-servo AF (Nikon):** autofocus locks and remains locked onto the subject – ideal for a stationary subject like your mate on the beach showing off with some lovely new kit!
- 2. AI Servo AF (Canon) or Continuous-servo AF (Nikon):** autofocus happens continuously, adjusting to track a moving subject – perfect for actual windsurfing! Can run down the battery quickly.
- 3. Automatic Autofocus – AI Focus AF (Canon) or AF-A (Nikon):** this is a feature on some newer cameras – a default setting – where the camera jumps back and forth between one and two (above) depending on the situation – the best of both worlds!

Shooting speed (or release mode)

Every time the shutter release button is pressed the camera can take either one photo or, better for windsurfing, continuous photos (bursts). This can be up to 15 or 20 per second on a top-end pro camera yet up to seven per second is more realistic. Continuous shooting speed can be affected by the autofocus setting.

Amateur vs Professional Settings

As a professional, Alex shoots in full manual mode for every job as this gives him full creative control over aperture, shutter speed, ISO, white balance, metering and the full functions of the camera. I'm not there yet. I just want to grab the best windsurfing shot I can, quickly and without too much risk. I routinely set the metering once then use the programmed auto (P) or aperture-priority (A) modes, changing ISO and sometimes knocking the exposure compensation up or down a little when the light is challenging.

Formats

The three main file formats for digital photographs are RAW, TIFF and JPEG. Both RAW and TIFF formats do not apply any compression to the photo to save space on your memory card. When your camera saves a digital photo as a RAW or TIFF file – if indeed it can – the photo includes all of the information captured by your camera's image sensor which means that more can be done with the image later when editing it or enlarging it for printing purposes. JPEG is a far more common file format which uses compression and is popular with the consumer market because it allows good-sized SD cards to store heaps of photos and is good enough quality for most of us.

Positioning

Where you decide to put yourself relative to the windsurfing subject will determine the dynamic of the image. Sometimes you have little choice of where you can stand. Walking along a beach, however, or positioning yourself on higher ground or further around the bay in order to achieve a different angle can help to create a range of useful shots. Will you take the photo with the sailor heading straight at you/away from you or will the sailing line be at 90 degrees to your position on the shore? Is the sailor in front of you or to the side? Can you see their game face? Can you see the tip of the sail in the waves or can you somehow look into and along the wave? The ultimate shot might well be from in the water but most of us would not have the specialist kit to protect the camera (or the life insurance!) to swim around in the waves...

Camera protection

Putting your treasured camera down in the sand or getting it rained on (or splashed by the sea) is hardly a good idea yet I have been amazed to see holiday company photographers sitting out for hours in a boat (or even on a SUP!) with their DSLR wrapped in a tee shirt. Having somewhere to stow my camera safely is really important. When coaching I always have a 10 or 15 litre Curtec Wide Neck Drum with me, unless I am packing small when I use a drybag. These drums can even be taken on a plane as they fit into a holdall with clothes packed inside.

I have been using Curtec drums for years and the function, quality and durability of this product cannot be overstated. As a real bonus you can use the drum to sit on comfortably when taking photos and, if the whole thing gets kicked or knocked, everything is safe (which it not guaranteed in a drybag). In my drum I always have a small towel in the bottom to stop the camera sliding around (and to dry the camera if it gets splashed) as well as a small soft pack with a lens cleaning kit, SD cards and filters.

Over to Alex again for a professional angle on protection... "For our nautical photography we shoot with all our kit protected by a Think Tank photo bag. These amazing pieces of kit are custom made for different lens setups from a small wide angle to an extra large 800mm prime lens. They protect the equipment from the elements and minimize any salt water corrosion. We also use Peli Cases for transportation of camera equipment both on and off the water as these are the ultimate in terms of professional, rugged, waterproof protection and we can customize the layout of the internal storage for our specific needs."

Find a good position and get comfortable



A 10-litre Curtec Wide Neck Drum. Keeps camera kit clean, dry and safe



Using a Think Tank photo bag to keep the sand and water off the camera



Peli Cases: bomb-proof, five-star accommodation for professional camera kit!





Treat your lens to a filter and a hood



Specialist cleaning kit is cheap, easy to come by and your camera loves it!

Lens changes, filters and hoods

Lens changes outdoors should be minimised and done swiftly with the camera switched off with the neck strap on and camera body pointing down (to prevent dust from falling inside). The protective lens end cap should be swapped quickly from incoming to outgoing lens - maybe even using the body cap on the camera for a moment as well.

Most lenses will have a filter thread to allow you to fit a lens filter. Get the best quality you can such as Hoya or Zeiss. I always use a clear UV filter simply to protect my lens from dirt, damage and scratches. I also have a circular polarizing lens as an option. Working like polarized sunglasses this has a front ring that is rotated until you get the effect you want which is typically bluer blues and greener greens and can help to reduce reflection from water. Make sure you get the right size filter (check the back of your lens cap if you are not sure) or use a cheap set of step-up lens filter adaptor rings if the filter differs in size from your lens.

Even with newer, expensive cameras light can hit the lens side-on causing a softening of colours and blacks, glare and lens flare (unwanted haze, starbursts of light or coloured circles in a row across the image). So you get a better chance of a cleaner, sharper image in bright sunlight using a lens hood (a bit like putting your hand across your forehead or using a visor in bright sunlight to be able to see better). The other advantage of using a lens hood is that it protects the lens from knocks.

Cleaning your camera

Cleaning your camera and lens is a really important part of the game. Dust will find its way over time into the lens optics which is not too much of a problem as it is unlikely to be picked up by the sensor so will not affect images. Water droplets, water marks or oily fingerprint smudges on the lens are a different matter as they can strip an image of its sharp focus. Avoid acetone or household cleaners: only use dedicated lens cleaning solutions or wipes or use alcohol or deionized water. If in doubt check which is the best cleaning solution for your brand of camera and lens. Apply cleaning solution to soft microfibre cloths, avoiding the temptation to spray it directly onto the lens as this could cause beads of liquid to enter it. Clean with gentle pressure in concentric circles from the centre outwards to push any dirt to the edges. Great care is needed when cleaning the mirror and the cleaning of the sensor is best left to the professionals. I prefer small, disposable lens tissues for the lens as they give a deeper, sharper clean. For a really good clean of the lens consider a pre-moistened lens wipe such as those made by Zeiss. Other cleaning options include soft brushes, lens pens with a carbon-charged felt tip (to absorb oil and other particles) and bulb air-blowers (to help to remove abrasive dirt, like sand).

Alex's take on cleaning...

"At the end of every shoot we have a full clean down of the external camera and lens with alcohol wipes in order to keep

any dirt or salt water out of the camera and clean for the next shoot. We also carry our sensor cleaning kit for all the kit we shoot with which on some events is up to four cameras."

Give it a go!

How do you take the perfect windsurfing photo? Easy answer: *"It depends."* There's no right or wrong way and there's so much to learn. Pulling out a DSLR is way cooler than waving a phone around and, if you have not crossed over yet from pocket photography, I would very much encourage you to do so. Maybe show a bit of love to the windsurfing community by taking photos of the locals when not on the water yourself. Creating a social media group for sharing the photos could help the number of regulars to grow. If you're really lucky then Alex or another top photographer will be on hand for some pro-shots. The next issue will look at editing windsurfing images to ensure that your best windsurfing images look as good as they can. In the meantime, happy snapping!

Head to:

- windsurfingukmag.co.uk to subscribe for future FUNDAMENTALS articles
- www.simonwinkley.com/windsurfing-uk to view previous articles

Many thanks to Alex Irwin – Sportography.tv for help with this article and for enduring cold, UK winter photo shoots.

Alex Irwin – Canon EOS 5DSR – EF 100-400mm – 1/3200 – f/10 – 560mm – 1250 – rider: Ben Lockett



Simon Winkley is a RYA Advanced Windsurfing Trainer and Instructor.

Sponsors: Starboard, Severne, K4 Fins, Flymount, Bollé, Bray Lake Watersports & Spinlock.

Overseas Coaching Clinics via Sportif:

www.sportif.travel – 01273 844919

Costa Teguise, Lanzarote 16 March (last few places!)

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2020 Weymouth Coaching Weekends at the OTC:

(bookings: info@simonwinkley.com)

18/19 & 20/21 April (full), 6/7 & 8/9 June, 25/26 &

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30 November/1 December

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DSLR Cameras can capture some of your very best windsurfing moments. Photographers: Alex Irwin, Simon Winkley, Ben Luckett, Mikael Linder, John Humphries, Lisa Kuhn and Miles Firth



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LANZAROTE: 16 - 23 MARCH **LAST TWO PLACES**
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