You may have tired of spending your holiday lying by the pool and have seen huge kites drifting over the sea and decide you would like the challenge of a new sport. You remember the little single string kites you flew on the beach when you were a child, but this seems to be a sport in a new dimension! These kites pull you over the sea and allow you to make huge jumps into the air. You decide to have a go and perhaps become hooked on the adrenaline rush of the world of modern power kites.

A Brief History of Kites

Kites have been objects of interest and fascination to people throughout the world for at least 2000 years. Some people think that kites may have been invented even earlier, suggesting that kites were being flown in China as long ago as 1000 BC. It is currently thought that kites may have been independently invented in both China and Malaysia, and that this new invention then spread through the rest of Asia from these two countries. There certainly is documentary evidence to suggest that kites were being flown in China as long ago as 200 BC when a general in the Han Dynasty is recorded as having used a kite as an instrument of war, by using it as a method of determining the correct distance to dig a tunnel to enter a palace and end a siege. In some Asian countries the kite had considerable religious significance. In Korea, newly born children had kites flown and released for them, taking away any bad luck they had been born with.

Over the last centuries kites held a fascination for scientists in their search for a means of transport using a “heavier than air” machine. Such flight was thought impossible, which seems strange now in our age of jet transport, but the development of the aerofoil shape of the kite wing led directly to an understanding of powered flight. Kites were used for scientific experiments, for rescue and had a role in war.

Kites again attracted attention in the 1950s and 1960s when Francis Rogallo developed a completely flexible kite, with no rigid supporting spars. Instead of spars, this kite uses the wind itself to hold it open and maintain its shape. Rogallo was an aeronautical engineer working for NASA. He was searching for a controllable recovery system for spacecraft. This kite was the first to be developed with the assistance of wind tunnel testing, and is an indication of how far kites have come since they were simply a child's toy. Today there is an experimental ship which uses a kite to supplement its power and to save fuel.

Traction power kites offer some of the fastest growing sports in the world. These include power kiting activities such as kite surfing, kite buggies, snow kiting, land boarding and paragliding. These sports all relate to existing sports but use wind to power the vehicle.

Before you use a kite to ride, you need to learn to fly it. A two line kite is easy to learn to fly. One line is attached to each wrist and you pull the left one to make the kite go left. Pull the right strap and the kite goes to the right. Landing these types of kites requires sending the kite to the edge of the window, making sure it is low in the window, and letting it land on the ground. The “window” is the cone shaped area down wind in front of you. At the top of the window the kite flies high and to the sides it will fly lower.

A four line kite is needed for surfing, boarding, gliding, etc. The top two lines are the power lines and the bottom two provide the brakes. The lines are connected to a handle or bar, and, by pulling on the power lines, the kite will take off and rise. Pulling the brake lines causes the kite to come down and land. It is possible to launch and land most of these kites without the assistance of another person. Once you can launch, land and fly your kite safely, you can learn to use the power of the wind to pull you in your chosen vehicle.

Here are some basic safety rules that you should always follow:

Do not attempt to learn power kiting without training

Insure yourself with third party insurance

Always wear safety protection (helmet and pads)

Never fly near power lines, roads, airports, or trees

Never fly in stormy weather

Never touch the lines of a kite when under tension

Never fly upwind of a group of people

Never over estimate your own ability

Use kite killers

Never fly attached to a fixed point!

If you follow all these rules, you will also maximise your chances to have a great time flying your kites!

Although you will probably start with a small kite, you may soon want a larger or more powerful one. Here are some small kites suitable for a beginner, some of which will still be suitable as you progress to intermediate skills:

For kite surfing you need a special surf board as well as a suitable kite. These are generally large in area, and need to be inflatable to float on the water. You will probably need help to launch this type of kite. Once you can surf, you can achieve exhilarating speeds over the water and then learn to jump and perform aerial acrobatics.

Talk to any kite surfer and they will all recommend that you get professional lessons before you take to the seas. Not only will this enhance your safety and that of others too, but it will give you the chance to try kite surfing without spending lots of money on kit you may not use. We help you to organise your holiday and suitable courses.

Here are some courses you might want to take:

If you do not want to surf with your kite, there are several other sports you can take up. These include land boarding, snow kiting, buggy racing and paragliding. These sports generally match a similar sport so that a land board is similar to a skate board and for snow kiting you use a board similar to a snow board.

A kite buggy is a light, purpose-built vehicle powered by a traction kite (power kite). It is similar to a land yacht, but the driver steers the single front wheel with his feet, while he controls the kite, usually attached on a harness, with his arms. The speed achieved in kite buggies by skilled drivers can range up to around 110 km/h (70 mph), hence protective clothing, including a safety helmet, is commonly worn. The kite buggy was probably invented in China around the 13th century. It was introduced by George Pocock in the UK in 1827 and kite buggies have been available commercially in the USA and UK since the late 1970s.

Warm air thermal currents are used to paraglide. The pilot who knows how to read the atmospheric conditions can soar into the sky and hang in the air for several hours. They may watch the birds of prey circling in the thermals and follow their lead. The experience is said to be extraordinary, with sounds of voices curiously clear above villages and the scents of pine forests carried up on the air.

With all these sports you may take them up just for fun, or you may take part in competitions if you become serious. You might take up kite surfing at resorts in Egypt, or book a snow kiting holiday to Norway. You might kite with your buggy in the sand dunes of Dubai, or paraglide from the mountains in the USA.

The following chart indicates the growing popularity of kite sports: