

# The New York Times

August 21, 2005

## A Vietnamese Resort Is Shaped by the Wind, by MATT GROSS

FOR decades, if not centuries, the wind has defined Mui Ne, a small fishing village in southern [Vietnam's](#) Binh Thuan province. Blowing in straight off the South China Sea, the wind molds and remolds the white and pink-gold sand dunes that surround Mui Ne and frustrates the fishermen, who eke out a living catching squid and tuna on the horizon.

But in recent years, the wind has altered the landscape of Mui Ne in a different way - by luring to its 12 miles of gently arcing beach windsurfers and kitesurfers, part of a vanguard of vacationers eager to make the 120-mile trip northeast from Ho Chi Minh City in search of the next new, clean, unspoiled stretch of sand. "This is one of the five top places for sailing in the world, and it's definitely the best in Asia," said Pascal Lefebvre, who maintains [windsurf-vietnam.com](#), a repository of wind data that appears to back up his claim. According to the Web site, which has data for the last five years, 2004 saw 246 days when the wind speed averaged greater than 14 miles per hour.

Ground zero at Mui Ne is Jibe's Beach Club, 90 Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, (84-62) 847-405. Damaged boards hang on the walls of this beachside bar and restaurant (owned by Mr. Lefebvre and his wife, Pham Thi Hong Phuong), and a projection screen displays windsurfing videos. Out back, however, is where the action is: an equipment-rental shop and launching pad for the day's wave-riding adventures. The acolytes come around 10 a.m., when the wind picks up, and by 11:30 two dozen kites and sails will be crisscrossing the water. By 2 in the afternoon, the wind is at its strongest, and the nonsailing beachgoers start retreating to their resorts' sheltered swimming pools. Around 4, the wind turns gusty, launching sailors to greater heights. At night, when the wind has finally died down, visitors escape their hotels to eat - there's Vietnamese seafood at Dong Su, Kilometer 11, Ham Tien, (84-62) 847-310, and Italian seafood at Luna di Autunno, 51A Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, (84-62) 847-591, among others - before returning to Jibe's or the Mui Ne Sailing Club, 24 Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, (84-62) 847 440, to drink, play pool and recount the day's greatest airs and most calamitous slams.

The scene today is radically different from just 10 years ago, when the main drag, Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, was a nameless sand track over which coconut palms formed a shady canopy and the pungent whiff of nuoc mam was the only thing floating in the air. Occasional visitors would explore the Fairy Stream, a small brook that has cut a long canyon into the red earth, or the vast, photogenic sand dunes. Today, resorts line the beach side of Nguyen Dinh Chieu Street, from the upscale Victoria Phan Thiet to the Palmira. with its Russian onion dome ,to myriad smaller hotels whose names invariably include the words coconut, beach or Mui Ne. An international airport is in the works, and a \$900 million resort complex - golf courses, casinos and a theme park - is being developed 25 miles north.

For Marek Kanievska, a film director ("Less Than Zero") who spends about five months a year in Mui Ne, the beach is enough. "I am in a constant state of ecstasy," said Mr. Kanievska. "I get up at 5 a.m. and never run out of things to do till 11 at night."