

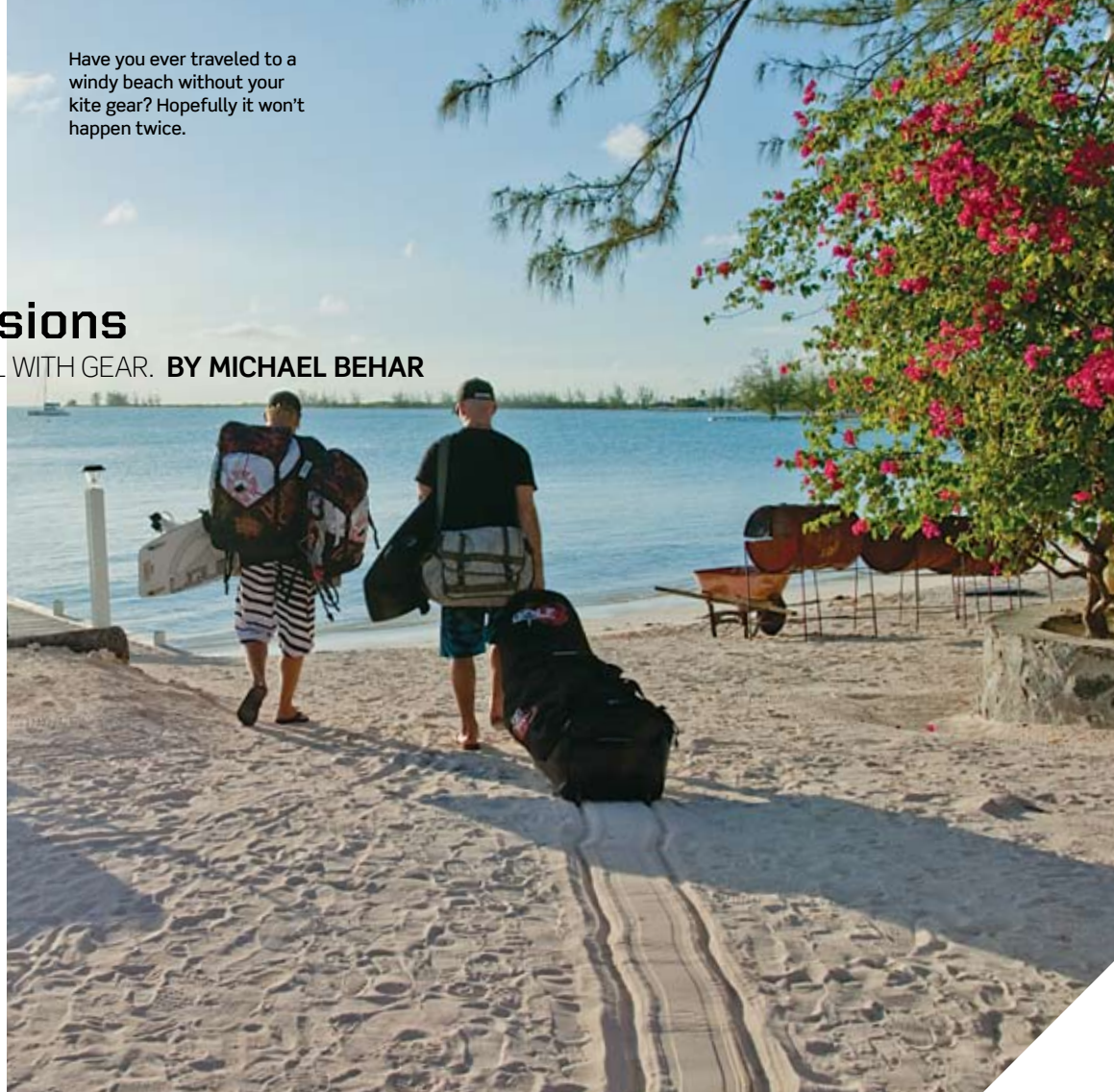
Have you ever traveled to a windy beach without your kite gear? Hopefully it won't happen twice.

Surprise Sessions

WHY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS TRAVEL WITH GEAR. BY MICHAEL BEHAR

➔ Whether you're heading to a business meeting in San Diego or a weekend wedding in Boston, don't go anywhere without your gear. No doubt I'm dating myself by referencing a 1980s television ad campaign with actor Karl Malden urging viewers to carry American Express Travelers Cheques when venturing abroad. "Don't leave home without them," he warned. I'd like to make the same case for kiting gear.

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I learned the hard way. Last year, a nonkiting-related assignment put me in Huntington Beach, California, in October. I tracked down a local rider who e-mailed me shortly before my visit: "October is stretching it ... iffy at best." Heeding this advice, I left my kites behind.

You can guess what happened next. For three days the wind pummeled the coast, gusting to 30 knots. Gale warnings were posted. Swells topped 8 feet. All I could do was lament the precious wind going to waste.

Fast-forward a month. This time it's to Merida, Mexico, for a weeklong science conference. With the beach a mere 45-minute taxi ride from the city center, I packed up two

FOUR TIPS TO MAKE EVERY TRIP A KITE TRIP

- 1 DO YOUR RESEARCH:** Don't rely on online guides to identify every rideable spot. Instead, survey potential launches with Google Earth, do keyword searches on kite forums for mention of your destination and, if the forecast isn't listed on windguru.com or ikitesurf.com, try wetsand.com, which lets you create customizable wind models for any location.
- 2 DUPE THE AIRLINES:** Aside from Southwest, all other U.S. airlines charge at least \$100 for oversize baggage; golf bags are usually free. Most kite companies market a version of the original NSI Deceiver golf bag. To avoid suspicion at check-in, keep your bag's weight under the allowable weight (typically 50 pounds for domestic flights and 70 pounds for international), don a Titleist cap to complete the ruse and when asked what's inside, lie.
- 3 CHALLENGE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:** Seasonal routines often dictate where and when locals kite. But if you have a hunch it might be windy, pack your gear. Weather is notoriously capricious.
- 4 WORK EARLY, PLAY LATE:** Wind likes to sleep in. In most places, it doesn't rustle until midday. Schedule meetings or other obligations in the mornings so you won't be stuck behind a desk if it starts to blow.

kites and a board, just in case. The conference was a bust — ruthlessly dull. Fortunately, an unexpected El Norte arrived on day three — I awoke in my

hotel room to flapping draperies beside an open window. Cut to a pearly white beach, wind at 22 knots, toasty water and a very happy kiter.



If you pack your gear, your chances of scoring a session increase 100 percent.

PHOTOS: ERIN CALMES; (BOTTOM) COURTESY FLYSURFER