

The East Coast Sailing Centre (ECSC) Story

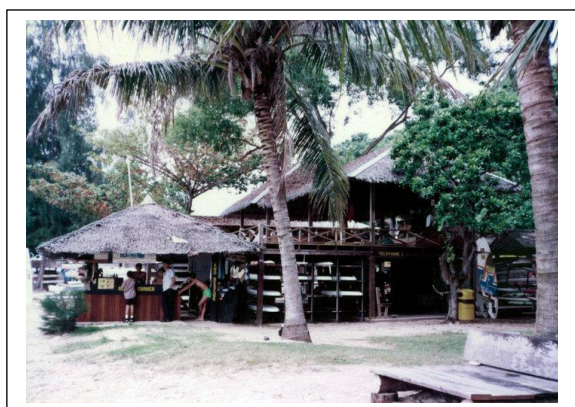
The idea of a sailing school was hatched in Vancouver by Raymond Lim in the late 1970's while based there. Inspired by the popularity of sailing and the lifestyle, he returned to Singapore and discussed his plans with his schoolmates, Jason Lim and Patrick Ng. It didn't take too much persuasion as the love for sailing swayed me to trade my teaching job for a more exciting work environment. We teamed up and the hunt for a location took us to a spot at a corner of the East Coast Swimming Lagoon - a public swimming facility run by the then Singapore Sports Council (SSC). Our plan to promote sailing and windsurfing aligned very much with their primary objective of sports promotion and we struck a deal with the SSC who allocated us a spare piece of land right next to the adjacent Hawkers Centre. Thus began our foray into a business at a time when few believed that a commercial sailing centre could be viable in Singapore. We launched the East Coast Sailing Centre (ECSC) in June 1980. Limited by a very tight budget, we kept the infrastructure of the Centre very simple and a small admin building was the only concrete structure surrounded by a series of wooden structures with thatched roofs that achieved the desired rustic atmosphere that we thought would be an oasis for the busy city folks to get away from the concrete jungle we're living in then.



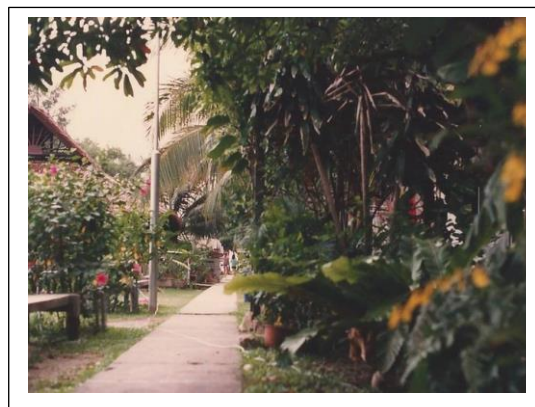
Entrance to ECSC in the 1980s



Original Signage at ECSC



Cabanas within ECSC

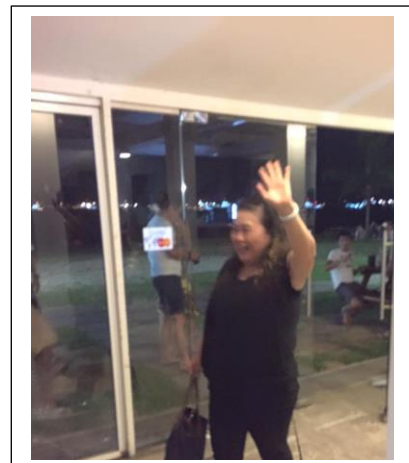


'Little John meets Robin Hood' pathway

We hurriedly recruited two key staff, Ho Kah Soon who was a student at the school where I used to teach, and Ramle Salleh, a resourceful teenager whom I met at a community centre while conducting carpentry hobby classes. Kah Soon was appointed the operations manager and Ramle assisted him as an operation assistant. Both Kah Soon and Ramle learned to windsurf as they worked at the Centre. Both took to windsurfing like ducks to water and eventually represented Singapore at regional and international competitions. Doris Ong was one of the earliest to be recruited to look after the front office. Interestingly, Kah Soon & Doris continue with life in such an environment till this very day at Constant Wind Sea Sports Centre.



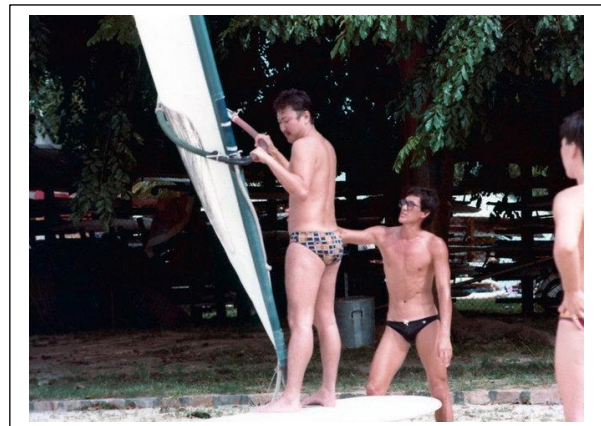
*CO-Founder ECSC, Jason Lim (extreme right, mid row)
Operations Manager, Ho Kah Soon (seated, extreme left)*



Admin Staff, Doris



Instructor Ramle (Centre)



Co-Founder ECSC, Raymond Lim (Centre)

At a time when sailing was deemed an expensive sport and club membership was a pre-requisite to take up sailing, we were fortunate that windsurfing was booming in popularity around the world and pivoted our focus to actively promote it at the Centre. Our strategy was to seek sponsors' support to enable the Centre to make the sport more affordable to the public. Main sponsors then were Straits Steamship, Asia Pacific Breweries and Singapore Tobacco Company. We were also helped by a French trader named Yves Kerneis who was the MD of A Clouet & Co (famous for their Ayam brand sardines and a host of wines and fine food) who generously supplied us with 20 sets of windsurfing equipment almost at an interest-free payment by instalments without any guarantee. The basic course and in particular, the storage

facilities for windsurfing equipment were in high demand given an island nation where most people live in apartments. Word must have gone around the international fraternity of the more than 700 sailboards that were stored at the Centre. This must have prompted the publisher of Sailboarder (an American windsurfing magazine), Bonnie Crail to make a transit stopover in Singapore to take a look. She was both impressed and surprised and after capturing a few shots with her camera and gathering all the necessary details about the Centre, she featured a very flattering article about the Centre in her widely circulated magazine, crediting the Centre as arguably the world's biggest windsurfing centres. Of course, we took the opportunity to order enough copies of that issue of the magazine - not available in our part of the world then - to help in our marketing efforts and to enjoy the brief moment of fame and bragging rights.

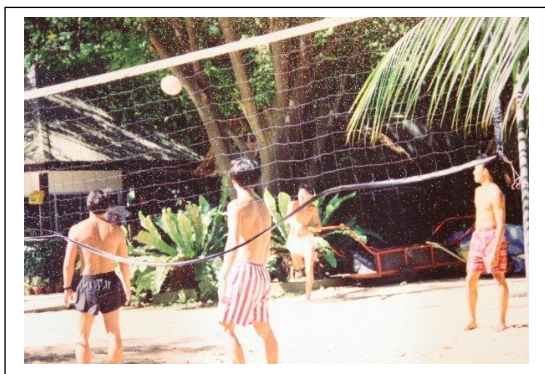


Board and sails storage areas



An event sponsored by Fosters & Adecco

The casual and no-frills centre attracted people from all walks of life. The cosmopolitan mix of locals and the expatriate community mingled well and bonded by the common love for windsurfing. Weekends will find them gravitating towards the Centre to hang out and relax or chat over a beer, play beach volleyball while constantly watching the horizon for signs of wind and whenever tree branches started to sway, it'll be a spontaneous dash to launch the windsurfing gear and chase the wind. Members also looked forward to the weekly mid-week BBQ & Members' Night featuring "the cheapest steak in town" with entertainment by a live band made up of a group of members appropriately called The Windjammers.



Playing volleyball on a windless day.



The Windjammers

Quarterly themed parties and other special events were also organised to liven up the Club calendar. Memorable ones include the fo Paco Rabanne Triathlon (involving running, swimming and windsurfing), the Batam Crossing - a straight windsurfing dash from the Centre to Batam Island and returning the following day, the annual fancy dress windsurfing contest with participants dressed in all sorts of costumes to do a short windsurfing race.



Start of the Triathlon



Launching at sea



First Batam Crossing



Christmas at Bintan



Father Christmas swapping his reindeer for a windsurfing board

With ease of moving equipment easily on car tops, many will also head for a spot popularly known as Lamp Post 150, a reclaimed beach off the Changi Coast Road that offered strong steady side shore winds during the northeast monsoon between December to February every year. An unforgettable event is the highly participated XXXX Speed Crossing to choose the season's fastest windsurfer to sail from the beach around Seafix Beacon & back to shore in record time. That site has since being further reclaimed to accommodate T5 now being developed. Many members also made regular group trips to windsurf in Jason's Bay, Kuantan & Port Dickson."



Speed Crossing sailors @ Lamp Post 150



T-shirt for the Speed Crossing

The most spectacular of the social events must be the 1989 Polynesian Carnival with authentic hangi-styled dinner, raft-race and live performance by a dance troupe from Neptune Theatre. The annual new year Countdown Parties in the early 1990's were very successful in drawing regular crowds of about 1000 members and guests who never fail to have a great time.



Guests at a Polynesian themed party



Sailing – the traditional way

The Centre also co-organised and hosted the ground-breaking event 1987 Sailing Extravaganza, an event that brought together all forms of seaports from canoeing , powerboating, jet-skiing, dinghy and keelboat sailing and windsurfing in a mass sail-past off the Centre. A boat show was also held at the Hawkers Centre car park in conjunction with this event. The event was officiated by Dr Yeo Ning Hong who was then Singapore's Defence Minister and perhaps the only government leader who was an avid sailing enthusiast. This event broke the ice to bring the various national watersport bodies together.



An XXXX (Australian beer) sponsored event

Over time, a strong sense of camaraderie developed among the members and friendship were forged that last till this very day with members who returned to their homelands or relocated across the world. There were even some who met at the Centre and eventually got hitched and had their wedding parties at the Centre.



Ladies in batik dress at ECSC

Despite the modest facilities of the Centre, it was able to host many high profile events such as the annual Singapore Open Windsurfing Championships from 1983, the inaugural Asian Optimist Championships in 1990, the best participated Asia-Pacific Laser Championships in 1992 with 118 entries, the Europa Round-The-World-Rally participated by 33 ocean-going sailing yachts which made a pit-stop in Singapore before the first marina facility was ready in 1992; and the 1993 IBSA World Windsurfing Championships participated by 223 world-class windsurfers from around the world.



Competitors from around the world – cheerio!

In 1996, the ownership of the Centre changed hands when Europa Sailing Club took over the Centre. In 2000, Pasta Franca de Salvatore took over and renamed it Pasta Fresca Seasports Centre. For close to a decade, the Centre offered both windsurfing activities and their unique Italian alfresco dining experience. This was a time when the popularity of windsurfing started to plateau. Mana Mana Beach Club then took over around 2008 when the land was taken over by NParks and ran it till 2014. The current occupier of the site is Aloha Seasports Centre who successfully tendered for a smaller piece of land in 2017.

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11th November 2020

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