



WIPE OUT!

Michael Franco catches a wave at Wave House on Sentosa. Well, almost. Photography by Richard Lee.

So, by now, you've heard about Wave House—Sentosa's latest sensation where you can ride waves generated by machines. In fact, we've even talked a lot about the hot spot in the pages of this magazine. But talking about swish parties and media events at the surf center is a lot different than actually putting some boardshorts on and diving in. So the team here at *I-S* decided to put their editor where their mouths have been—and they threw me straight into the deep end.

Before telling you about my first-ever surfing experience, let's get something straight. I'm a klutz. I fall even when I'm not moving. On MRT trains, I am in awe of the people who can maintain their balance without holding onto a pole or strap. If I wasn't clutching something for support, I'd become a big *ang mo* bowling ball, wiping out countless commuters as I plowed down the aisle.

So naturally, things didn't get off to a great start. In my rush to leave the office, I actually managed to get a significantly sized sliver of wood jammed into my hand as I was flailing around my desk, trying to get packed up. After removing the splinter with my exacto knife (certainly a high-risk activity for someone like me), I was off, with our art director and photographer, Richard Lee, in tow.

I should have known the waters were going to be rough the second we checked in. "We don't have any spaces left on the FlowRider" I was told by the young staff behind the counter. "But you can still learn on the FlowBarrel." Hmm. The FlowRider is the gentle wave machine where people like me start out. The Barrel is the monster. The team also informed me that they couldn't take me at my scheduled five o'clock appointment and that I'd have to wait until six (the joint is jumping). That gave me plenty of time to get good and worked up watching the other riders.

A brief interview with head instructor helped calm my jangly nerves. Or maybe that was the beer he gave me. He told me: "For first timers, we will usually put them on the body board, just to let them have a feel of how fast the water is going so they have a better idea of what it's all like before they stand up." OK, lying flat on my belly is actually a sport that I'm good at. He then added: "For beginners, we teach them how to fall before we teach them how to ride." I didn't bother telling him that I could skip that part of the lesson. Falling? I excel at it.

The Moment Of Truth

Six o'clock drew near and it was time for me to hang ten (see, I was already getting the hang of this surfing thing—note the hip lingo). The set-up here is that you can buy your time in blocks of hours. During your allotted time, you queue up with the other surf dudes and when your time arrives you give it a go.

One of the trainers stands at the end of the flowing water, gets you on your board and sort of shimmies you slowly out. The trainer also holds a tow rope which he uses to feed you slowly into the stream.

Sounds easy, right? Well, if you call standing on a large banana peel and

Catch Your Own Wave

To get your feet wet at Wave House, try the FlowRider (the one I didn't start on). Sessions cost \$35 per hour on weekends (\$30 on weekdays). If you have some surfing experience, you can jump right onto the FlowBarrel which costs \$45 per hour on weekends (\$40 during the week). To double the fun, stop by on Wednesdays when sessions—and drinks—are all 1-for-1. www.wavehousesentosa.com

getting shoved out onto a sheet of slick, slippery ice easy, then I suppose it was. Actually, make that a sheet of slick, slippery ice that's moving. Really, really fast. Oh, and what happened to the whole ride on your stomach thing? Um, that would be over at the beginner wave—you know, the one I should have been at.

The guys were nice enough to ratchet the wave down to just one jet (normally it's four). That made me look really cool in front of the other guys. Who, by the way, could all actually ride and looked like they were part of the Australian Olympic FlowBarrel wave riding team.

Needless to say, my first attempt ended in my board getting shot out from underneath me like a rocket and me getting shot out the other end of the ride in a mess of frothy water and humiliation. No matter, back on the horse.

Before my second attempt, the instructor told me that I was way too tense. Hmm, wonder why? He said that if I could relax a bit more and put most of my weight on my back foot, I'd have more luck. And I did; I stayed up for about a full second (double the time of my first attempt). When I washed out this time I nearly shot off the top of the wave (which is blessedly a fully padded, soft surface). At least wiping out made the whole thing sort of a like a reverse water slide—it was actually kind of fun getting "rag dolled."

Back to the queue, I was given some more advice by two Singaporean surfers who clearly knew what they were doing (the expat boys didn't really seem interested in me—I was kind of like the weak animal that's shunned by the pack and left as wolf fodder). Desmond Cher, a particularly awesome rider, again told me that the secret was to relax and lean back. If I didn't, he said, the front edge of my board would catch the water and I'd wipe. Yup, I proved that theory on my next go.

As a surfer himself, Richard, who was doing his best to get a shot of me during the few nanoseconds I was actually on the board, concurred. He also said that surfing correctly should feel something like walking on a pole sideways. Oh, good. No problem.

The rest of the night went pretty much along the same lines with "loosen up" being the primary piece of advice dispensed. If I heard one more person telling me to relax, I was going to smack them across their shins with my board. Fortunately after the seventh or eighth crash, most everyone—even the helpful local guys—had given up on me entirely. And, perhaps even more fortunately, my time ran out and I was able to drag my sore, sorry, sodden self off the platform and go home.

In the cab ride back, Richard pretty summed up the whole experience. "We should have sent someone younger," he said. Dude!

Surfing Lingo A to Z

Even if you can't surf, just pick up a pair of boardshorts and pepper your language with a few of these phrases. You'll look and sound like a pro in no time.

Aikona: No way; it just ain't gonna happen.

Babalaas: A hangover of the worst kind.

Cactus Juiced: To experience a type of injury that leaves you unable to surf.

Da Kine: Hawaiian for the best kind of wave or something that's better than most.

Eat Foam: What happens when you wipe out on a big wave.

FOG: Frickin' Old Guy.

Gnarmax: Something that is gnarly to the maximum ... or can't get any cooler.

Haymaker: A large rogue wave that pummels unsuspecting surfers in its path.

Innit: Used in place of "isn't it."

Jacked: To have your car trashed or to get jumped by locals in the parking lot.

Kished: To be really, really tired.

Liquid Smoke: The spray that comes off the back of a wave from an offshore wind.

Mack: To eat without inhibition, usually after a taxing surfing session.

Nar: Another term for "no."

One and Done: To catch one last wave before leaving the lineup.

Peacin': To exit, head out, leave.

Rattly: When someone exhibits wild, messy or crazy behavior.

Scab: A reef or rock.

Taco'd: To get pitched off your board onto your belly while inside a fast-moving barrel.

Urineaphoria: Brief condition of extreme content caused by a wettie warmer (see below).

Vegetable: Anyone not really into the surfing community.

Wettie Warmer: The result of urinating in one's wetsuit.

X-Factor: An intangible ingredient to good surfing.

Yard Sale: To fall with appendage flailing everywhere.

Zimzala: Free-spirited person who finds peace with the sand between their toes.

Thanks to riptionary.com—a truly gnarly website—for the above.