

INTRODUCTION TO SAFE SURFING

When people are "surf aware" they are much more likely to be safe and have a lifetime of fun in the surf.

Surf Culture Australia is the original Surfing Australia Surfschool in South Australia.

We hope that our qualified coaches provide you with a safe, enjoyable surfing experience as we have been for thousands of others since 1991.

The information which follows is a basic guide to being a safe and sun smart surfer.

THE SUN BITES

Nearly 2 out of 3 adult Australians will experience one of the 3 types of skin cancer. As surfers we are exposed regularly to the harsh Australian sun. Following are some tips for being sun smart:

- a) Cover up – Hats, rash tops, wetsuits and helmets will all help keep the sun off our skin
- b) Sunscreen – apply water resistant 30+ sunscreen 10 – 20 minutes before hitting the surf.
Use zinc cream for vulnerable areas, eg lips, ears, nose.
- c) Drink up – water is essential for physical activity, drink plenty
- d) Out of the water – keep out of the sun, find some shade and always wear quality sunglasses to help protect your eyes.

SURF AWARENESS

- The term 'surf awareness' covers knowledge of the basic hazards that may be encountered in ocean and beach environments.
- Being surf aware helps keep people safe in the surf and enables maximum surfing enjoyment.

Reading the surf

Changing weather and wave conditions can mean that a beach can change from relatively safe to quite nasty in a few hours. Correctly identifying rips, reefs, wave types and weather maps can determine whether you have a great surf experience or a dangerous one.

The most important factor is knowing your own limitations. **If it doesn't feel right - don't go.**

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Wave formation

Waves are formed by the wind blowing across the surface of the ocean. The intensity of the wind, the length of time the wind is blowing and the distance over which it blows all determine the size of waves. The stronger and longer the wind blows the greater the wave action and lines of swell begin to appear. These swells travel in groups or sets separated by a gap or 'lull' in waves. As the swell approaches land the waves become higher and begin to form breaking waves depending on the shape of the ocean floor. The number of waves in each set and the lull between sets is varied depending on the origin and intensity of the swell. It is important to "read" the surf so you can maximise surfing time and minimise paddling effort by paddling out in the "lull".

Wave types

1. **Plunging waves or dumpers** - these will usually occur at low tide when sand banks are shallow and there is less water for the waves to break. The bottom slopes steeply upward as in a reef break and causes waves to break with great force.
2. **Spilling waves** – these waves occur when the top of the wave tumbles gently down the face of the wave producing a more gentle ride. This type of wave occurs when sandbanks are lined up and on some reefs where sand is built up to form a more gradual change in the depth.
3. **Surging waves** – these waves never break as they approach the waters edge; the wave comes from deep water and surges up against rocks or groynes. These can be dangerous as they are difficult to see approaching and can knock peoples feet from under them.
4. **Left, right or closeout** – both plunging and spilling waves can "close out" where a wide section crashes at once with no face for the surfer to ride across. Alternatively, they can peel off to form left or right handers which are much more preferable and allows a surfer to ride across the open face. Whether or not a wave closes out or peels off depends on the direction of the swell and the contour of the bottom. A right hander is on the forehand of a "natural" and the backhand of a "goofy" and vice versa.

Rips

- A rip is the current of water moving back out to sea.
- A rip is formed by the water 'seeking its own level', usually as a result of large sets of waves approaching the beach and building up water which later returns to sea, thus causing a drag outwards.
- The larger the surf the stronger the rip.

How can I tell if there is a rip?

- Discoloured water caused by sand stirred off the bottom
- Foam on the surface extending beyond breaking waves
- Waves breaking more cleanly out on both sides of the rip
- A rippled appearance where the surrounding water is calm

Escaping from a rip

- Stay with your board and DON'T PANIC
- If injured or unable to paddle, float with your board and raise one arm for help. If possible paddle across the rip (usually parallel to the shore) for 50m or so and then return to shore with the broken waves

Winds and tides

All good surfers study the weather and tides daily on maps, surf reports or as they get up and look out the window or a morning. This important ritual often will decide the location and time to surf. Generally the seas reach their highest level on shore twice a day with an interval of approximately 12 hours. The best way to keep aware of tidal movements is by an official TIDE CHART available at fishing stores and some surf shops; the easiest is to check it out in the weather information in the media daily.

Negotiating the surf

All good surfers constantly monitor the surf conditions, when noted correctly you will find the safest part of the beach to surf and quickest way to return to the take off position. The following tips can start you in the right direction:

1. Before entering the surf always look for a fixed landmark to maintain your position in the surf.
2. Observe experienced surfers patterns as they make their way in and out of the surf.
3. Use rips to your advantage once experienced, this makes returning to the take off position much quicker and conserves energy.
4. Keep well clear of surfers already up and riding on a wave. If you are unsure of which way to paddle while they are heading toward you, paddle in the opposite direction to their intended direction.
5. NEVER DROP IN ON A SURFER WHO IS ALREADY UP AND RIDING – this is not only a dangerous situation but very annoying for that surfer who may have ridden that wave from out the back. The surfer up and riding close to the broken part of the wave has absolute right of way.

This is only a brief guide to help you become surf aware, however, with practice and courtesy you will become a well disciplined surfer and be well respected in the water for doing so.



KEEP ON SURFING

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