

# what's SUP?

BY MARK SALVETTI

Photo by: Wendy Solano ([www.vistaguapa.com](http://www.vistaguapa.com))

Fitness Feature

Standup paddling (or SUP) is really not a new sport, but don't tell that to the thousands of converts to its health and fitness benefits. Different to surfing, prone paddling, or kayaking, the deck of an SUP gives you a greatly enhanced view and perspective of your surroundings.

At your normal standing viewpoint, your surrounding view is wide and long-reaching and it sure feels a lot like walking on water. Surfing on a SUP may take some experience, but what the SUP phenomenon has taught many is that paddling on flat water is easy and fun for just about anyone of any age.

While some may discuss the birthplace of standup paddling or "beach boy paddling" as Hawaii or Santa Monica, California, there is no doubt the rebirth was championed by both Laird Hamilton and Dave Kalama of Maui, Hawaii. Both surfers are acknowledged leaders in big wave tow-in surfing and have also embraced SUP as their new sport of choice. Standup paddling was first attempted in the 1950s as an alternative to traditional surfing and a way for lifeguards and surf instructors to keep an eye on people in the water. It was and still is called beach boy

paddling as the term was first used in Hawaii. While the majority of paddling in Hawaii takes place in calm waters or downwind runs, there is a large contingent who are now braving all of the famous Hawaiian surf breaks on a SUP. An easy search on YouTube can produce hours of amazing video footage of brave surfers paddling into enormous waves all over the world. Hawaii and California helped start the surge in the sport, but main street America is now beginning to embrace it.

Ried Inouye, founder of *Standup Paddle magazine*, said, "The Hawaiian beach boy lifestyle of standup paddling has come a long way since the 1950s. From Waikiki, it has gone to become a globally recognized form of water activity that is Hawaii's gift to waterways around the world and this is just the beginning."

Technology has accelerated exponentially for SUP and the changes have amazed even those who are immersed in the sport. The boards are now becoming specialized for any given discipline. There are long, sleek racing boards for distance paddling, wide stable play boards, short and maneuverable surfing boards and fast big

wave surfing boards - the list is endless. Paddles are just as varied - travel paddles, custom wood paddles, surfing specific, featherweight distance, carbon fiber and much more.

The most common board in the Gulf Coast is an all around board that is long (12'), wide (32"), stable and well-suited for local waterways. The basic board cost is between \$700 and \$1,200, a paddle can go for \$90 to \$300, depending on type. What keeps people hooked is the total ease of use and the peaceful glide on the water. Recipe: board/paddle/water...how simple is that? The boards are half the weight of most ocean kayaks and just that alone makes it much more attractive to go out for a paddle for both men and women alike.

Locally, there are endless opportunities to paddle - lakes, rivers and the Gulf Coast are all within easy travel distance. You can enjoy paddling along the coast of Lake Pontchartrain, Bayou Castine, and Bayou Lacombe, as well as the Tchefuncte River. There is also the Destin, Florida based YOLO Board. Jeff and Mitzi Archer and Tom Losee formed the company 4 short years ago. "The first year we only had

3 boards in our line,” said Jeff Archer, a former resident of Covington. “Now, we have over 14 models and are considering a few other shapes to be introduced very soon. I can’t keep boards in the shop, this is the fastest growing water based sport in the world this year. There is nothing available to the consumer that is as easy to get into that SUP is.”

Jeff and his crew really believe that this is the lifestyle sport of the South. “Our warm and calm waters are perfect for cruising and just getting out on the water. For a lot of folks, kayaking is hard on their backs and hot, SUP is more relaxing and comfortable. And you can always jump in the water and cool off.”

SUP has become a mainstream “boot camp” type workout for many groups from Hawaii to Florida. One such enthusiast is in Maui, Hawaii. Suzie Coonie is considered the ambassador to SUP fitness in Maui. Suzie provides training to locals, athletes, and visitors to Maui with SUP and beach workouts tailored to meet the clients’ needs. Suzie writes a blog for Athleta Sportswear, produces SUP events in Maui as well as does personal training and when she has some of her own personal time, she enjoys windsurfing, surfing, and SUP. Suzie said she feels the next largest group to join the SUP movement will be women between 40-65 years old. Suzie said, “The surfer’s glide is what hooks most people to SUP. You don’t have to catch a wave to feel the peaceful

glide of an SUP over water.”

In addition to traditional cardio workouts on the SUP, a large yoga/SUP movement is underway. Several groups are offering water-based yoga in Florida and California, something different from your average Saturday morning class. If you have ever attempted a balance ball for any form of exercise, you know the stabilization efforts enhance the total mind/body workout. The exercise possibilities for the sport are much more than just standing and paddling alone.

The popularity of the sport and its far reaching popularity have opened up the availability in many far off travel locations, including Costa Rica. Recently, there was the planning and implementation of the first SUP Program to be introduced to a Costa Rican surf camp. The town of Jaco sits in the central Pacific coast and is home to Vista Guapa Surf Camp. The camp recently received their first shipment of SUP boards and is now offering standup paddling along with their surfing and yoga packages. Costa Rica offers beautiful flat water paddling close to the camp along with some of the best surfing the Pacific has to offer in Central America. Within 20 minutes drive of the camp, there are over 25 surf breaks of varying degrees from expert to beginner.

There is always a place to surf, and the surf town of Jaco provides all the adventure you would expect in Costa Rica. Alvaro Solano, the co-founder of the camp and seven time Costa



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Rican national surf champion, is now passionate about SUP. On a recent trip to the camp, he said that he was completely surprised at how much he enjoyed his first SUP experience. He said, “Standup paddling is so much fun, it’s all I want to do now.”

The SUP has just arrived to Costa Rica and it is there to stay. Alvaro and his camp’s surf instructors are all hooked, and this story is similar to most that you hear about the sport. “It’s so easy,” or “So much fun,” are the comments you hear from most first timers.

Although you may not have seen an SUP on the local waters of Lake Pontchartrain or other lakes or rivers yet in the New Orleans area, you will. Eventually, you will see groups of boards with paddlers traversing the waters from Lake Pontchartrain to the Tchefuncte River.

With the ease of use, potential for a great workout from the toes to the nose and the ability to enjoy the outdoors, standup paddling will have its place in the leisure and athletic community. Keep your eyes on the horizon for a paddler, the standup boards are on their way.

Let’s go paddle.

YOLO Board:  
[www.yoloboard.com](http://www.yoloboard.com)

Travel: Vista Guapa  
[www.vistaguapa.com](http://www.vistaguapa.com)

Suzie Cooney/ Maui Hawaii:  
[www.suzietrainsmaui.com](http://www.suzietrainsmaui.com)

Resources: Dave Kalama Web Blog:  
[www.davidkalama.com](http://www.davidkalama.com)

Standup Paddle Magazine:  
[www.standuppaddlemagazine.com](http://www.standuppaddlemagazine.com)



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