

SURF'S UP!

Waterman, ocean adventurer, and inspirational speaker
Chris Bertish is riding the wave of an extraordinary life.

By Eugene Yiga



Chris Bertish 'redefining what's possible'

Chris Bertish



When did you first fall in love with the water?

The ocean has been an integral part of my life for as long as I can remember. I grew up in Cape Town and spent a great deal of time up the West Coast at the Langebaan Lagoon. I still remember sailing with my dad on his homemade catamaran, which was always special to me. I learned everything about the water, the wind, tides, and the ocean – sailing on everything that would float – which taught me a great affinity, respect, and understanding for the ocean.

Were you adventurous as a child?

I started all the ocean-based water sports I knew between the ages of three and seven and was always trying to keep up with my two older brothers, which was never easy, but it made me tough, determined and driven. I was

waterskiing when I was five and windsurfing at seven. I think I even remember waterskiing behind my dad's catamaran at ten.

What's been your biggest professional highlight?

In 2010, I won the Mavericks Big Wave Invitational – the Olympics of Big Wave Surfing – in the biggest surf ever recorded in competitive paddle in history. I had been working for over ten years towards that one goal, which took tremendous focus, determination, and sacrifice. Just to get the invitation to compete is a milestone, as only 24 of the world's best big wave riders are invited to compete every year. It was the first time I had cracked the list.

What inspired you to stand-up paddleboard the Okavango Delta?

The sense of adventure and wanting to try something different: to go and explore a unique area that no one had ever seen before, through the sport of stand-up paddleboarding. I like to test and push the boundaries of what's possible in every sport I'm involved with.

What did you experience in Botswana?

We took five days, were on the Okavango Delta for three days, and we paddled about ten kilometres per day. We also saw most of the big five daily.

What were your concerns at the start of the trip?

Like with every successful project, it's all about the research, planning, and preparation long beforehand; that's the key ingredient

"...any ordinary person can do extraordinary adventures."

and takes 80% of the time. Then getting the right guidance and experience from local knowledge and implementing the necessary safety measures to ensure everyone always comes home safely at the end of the day.

How did you overcome the challenges you faced?

A great deal of planning with the help of Ingram Casey (Escape + Explore), local guides and Mokoro experts: ensuring we only went on the correct planned out routes,

through safe areas and routes which they use regularly and the guides flanked the team at all times. It's similar to the Mokoro adventures through the Delta, except your field of vision is exponentially better, as you are standing up, which is incredible.

What did the experience teach you?

We took a group of inexperienced stand-up paddlers – normal people from everyday life – on an amazing adventure. It just proved that any ordinary person can do extraordinary adventures. With the right planning and preparation, it's just a simple choice and then going out and doing it. I believe in what I do; I'm passionate, and I believe I'm helping others in realising their full potential.

Why do you think other people should take this trip?

Everyone with a sense of adventure could enjoy this trip. That's why we did it: to show people that anyone can. It just takes a little sense of adventure and a decision. It's a life-changing adventure that makes them reassess what's possible for themselves, for everything they do moving forward, from that point on. You never know what's possible unless you try!

What are your big plans for the rest of the year?

From November to April, I plan to solo stand-up paddle 8 000 kilometres of open ocean between Africa and America for charity. It will be an epic adventure like no other; a test of pure courage, determination, and endurance – against myself and the raw and wild elements – to redefine what's possible! 🦋

www.chrisbertish.com