

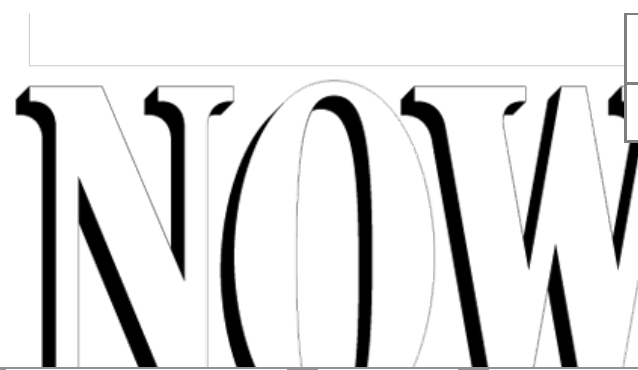


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WINTER SURFING IN TORONTO CAN BE MORE FUN THAN SURFING IN MEXICO

Says a real Mexican human

BY **KATE ROBERTSON** JANUARY 31, 2015 6:28 PM

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When Xavier Campos was offered a dream job learning under one of the best eye surgeons in North America here in Toronto, he knew he couldn't turn down the offer. But moving from his native Mexico would mean making a few sacrifices: the weather, for one; but more importantly, his passion for surfing.

"It's funny because when I told people back home I was moving to Canada, they said, 'Man, what are you gonna do without surfing?'" the 35-year-old says. "It's always been such a big part of my life. It's my release, it's my temple. It's such a big part of me." As his friends and family worried, Campos found **Surf the Greats**, a community of surfers and enthusiasts based primarily in and around the Bruce Peninsula.



Photo by David Wyman / wymandesign.ca

Dr. Xavier Campos

“I thought it was just a bunch of weirdos,” he says. “I never thought you could catch a good wave, and I’d be taking weekend trips to the east coast, to Halifax.”

He was wrong.

The Toronto Surf Club’s Facebook group boasts 880 members, with a core group of about 20 men and women popping in to find out from east-enders how the surf is in Ashbridges Bay (“Abay”) and at the Bluffs. There’s about a two- to three-hour window of surf time, says Campos, so when surf’s up, he drops everything and gets a carpool from fellow surfers from his Queen West home out to the Beaches.

And not only do Lake Ontario waves get up to 10 feet high on a good day, but Campos says it can be even more fun than surfing in Mexico.

This bears repeating: Campos says surfing in Toronto in January can be even more fun than surfing in warm Mexican waters.

What makes it so fun is how unpredictable it is. Ocean waves are more powerful, but Lake Ontario winds can get up to 40 knots, turning a surfboard into a kite in an instant.



Campos catches a wave in this video he made with a GoPro camera.

Because catching a wave is so dependent on wind, the cruel irony is that Toronto surfing is exclusively a winter sport.

“People think of surfing as all bathing suits, with no shirt, sunny kind of sport,” Campos says. “Here in Toronto it’s the opposite – the best surfing is when it’s most miserable.”

So, snow or shine, as long as the ice on the lake isn’t in the way, the Toronto Surf Club suits up if surf’s up. The board works the same in winter and summer waters, but Toronto’s surfers require a 6 mm-thick neoprene wetsuit, booties, gloves and a hood. Many bring a thermos of hot water to pour directly into their hand and footgear when their extremities lose feeling. And because the whipping cold winds can give you a nice case of face burn, it’s important to apply coconut oil, shea butter or vaseline on exposed skin before hitting the icy waves.

Doesn’t float your boat? Campos swears there’s nothing better.

“It’s more than a sport, you know? It happens with surfing,” he says. “It just brings a very deep connection with the elements and with nature because you’re not using any equipment. You’re using energy generated by the wind and ocean. It sets you in a very special rhythm that can only be experienced. It can’t be described.”

Daring souls can find out more about learning how to winter surf [here](#).

A previous version of this article named [Great Lake Surfers](#) instead of Surf the Greats as

Campos' first entry into Canadian surfing. The piece has been updated and corrected.

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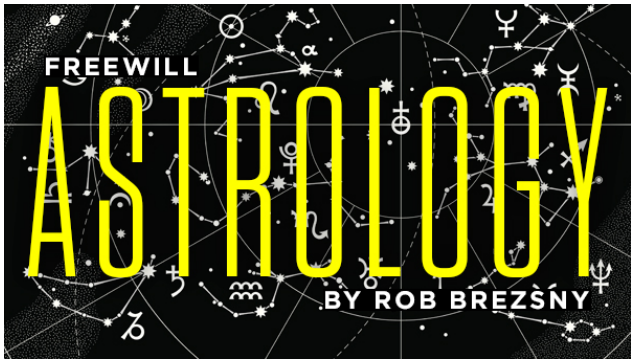
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