

NOT YOUR AVERAGE SURF TRIP

Central Florida Power Couple Todd and Lauren Holland Visit Sweden to Test Out the Latest in Standing Wave Technology

Most couples looking for a winter getaway this time of year are probably headed straight for the tropics — someplace warm and sandy where they can defrost and sip embarrassing fruity cocktails complete with mini umbrellas. But the Cocoa Beach, FL-based Hollands are in no way a typical couple. Todd, a former WCT warhorse, and Lauren, a former East Coast women's surfing champion, opted instead to jet off to Sweden this February to compete in the Hangloose Surfstream Open.

The contest was put on by the Swedish Surfing Association and made use of the latest in artificial wave technology developed by American Wave Machines, a California-based company that has been working closely with the Hollands to develop high-performance standing waves that work with real surfboards. The event was held during a snowstorm, but all the competitors stayed toasty indoors, and Lauren took first in the Women's division while Todd put on a show in Men's. Both left stoked by the experience and took some time to chat with EasternSurf.com about their Scandinavian adventures and the future of artificial waves.

ESM: So how did you two end up partnering with American Wave Machines?

Lauren Holland: Three years ago Ron Jon Surf Shop flew me out to the grand opening of Beaches Turks & Caicos to go showcase a brand new surf machine. It's a little tiny knee-high wave, and Todd and I had seen YouTube footage of it, so we sat down and thought, "Wouldn't that be cool to actually bring a surfboard and surf it in the machine?" So we designed a little tiny surfboard to fit in my luggage, and when I went out there, I got to meet the developer of the machine. He was real impressed with the board and saw that I actually brought a surfing style to the machine, which is what his real goal is: to create a standing wave that allows a real surfboard with fins.

American Wave Machines now uses me to showcase grand openings of their venues, and this time they invited Todd to go along with me to an event in Sweden, because he's been designing new surfboards for the machine but actually had never had a chance to ride it. So this time he got to come and bring his professional surf style to the machine, and he brought his surfboards for the other riders to check out.

ESM: Was it cool getting to visit Sweden?

LH: Yeah, this was Todd's first time coming to Sweden, and it was the first time either one of us had seen snow in probably 20-some years, so that was pretty cool. And we climbed up a mountain. Well, I'm not sure if it really was a mountain, but everything over there looked like mountains to us, because we're from Florida. But we hiked up there and found their old town that was built in 1752. It overlooked the town center, so we really got to see how water surrounds these people's culture.

Todd Holland: It was about a three-mile hike in the snow [laughs].

LH: It was a blast though. And to see a surf-stoked culture in such an out-of-place environment was kind of surreal. But those people honestly do love surfing and everything about it. They're all about promoting surfing and introducing it to the youth. They're developing a



Todd Holland



Lauren Holland

following out there, and the wave machine brought people from all over to showcase what they've learned to do over the year and half that they've it.

TH: One thing that was really cool about the machine was that, obviously, we were in Sweden, so when we landed, all we saw was snow everywhere. That doesn't really make you want to go jump in the ocean. If you were going to go surfing out there you might only last an hour. They actually did try to get us to go surfing the last morning we were there, but it got cancelled because the ice came in on the ocean. But with the machine, you're in an enclosed space, so even though there was two feet of snow outside, people in those extreme weather conditions can surf year-round and really work on their skills.

ESM: Could you tell us a bit more about the machine? How does it compare to a real wave?

TH: Well, you're not going 100 yards down the beach when you're riding the wave, but the way it's designed, you can still work on your positioning as if it was a real ocean wave. You can move out onto the shoulder or surf it more in the pocket. It's big enough that you're able to move four or five feet to change your positioning on the wave to be in a more critical or less critical spot. There are so many maneuvers you can do on it that are so similar to surfing that I think it could be a really good training tool for actual ocean surfing.



LH: You can practice a trick over and over again in a controlled environment, really learn how to stick each maneuver, and then translate it into ocean waves. Todd looked like a kid in a candy store when they brought out the high-performance barrel for us. It's a right, open-faced little tiny barrel, and he had so much fun he didn't want to get off. It's addicting, and I'd personally like to see one here in Florida for the flat spells.

TH: The other good thing about the machine is that the transition from the last surf we had there to when we got back and went surfing in the ocean on our regular boards was nothing. There's not that much you have to change about your surfing other than reading the ocean to catch your wave, so that's a real positive part of it.

ESM: How about the special boards you two have been designing for this machine?

TH: As more machines get built and this gets more popular, I'm hoping to learn more about it. After going over there and surfing on it, I've learned how far I can go with the width of the board, and I can possibly change some fin placements to make it an even better training tool for regular ocean waves.

LH: Overall though, there's not too much that's different about the boards. It's basically a surfboard that's a foot shorter because you take away the paddling power that's necessary in normal surfboards. The fin placements are very similar, and the board design is very similar. If the machine was bigger, then you could take your actual surfboard that you use in the ocean and put it in the machine. There's one in Montreal that's opening in August, and that's what the goal is, for us to be able to fly up there with our everyday surfboards and put them in the machine.

ESM: So are you guys sold? Do you think these machines have the potential to be the next big thing?

LH: Well, the company that sent us out there, American Wave Machines, not only produces standing waves, but they also make wave pools, and they're always trying to create technology that caters to the surfer. They use our input to help develop better, higher-performance waves. This is the closest you can get to actually being in the ocean. I've tried other machines that were very similar, but without fins it's really not surfing.

So with these fins, and with us showcasing what we can do on the wave, hopefully we'll attract more people. It could spark interest in surfing in places where there has never been interest before because there isn't an ocean. That's something I'd like to do, and it's really cool that they have Todd on board trying to develop real surfboards for it. There are good things to come with a bit more financing, and there is a lot of interest, so hopefully we'll see more of them built.