

Naturism:

It's Not Just for Men



A Message to Women

Ruth Percey

FOR MOST WOMEN, the idea of visiting a nude beach or resort is like that sting of the bra strap snapped on our back when we were 12. Suddenly we become self-conscious of a perfectly imperfect body.

And although a naked body would draw a stare in most settings, naturists are so accustomed to the different shapes and sizes that they're bored by droopy breasts and stretch marks and surgical scars. A pimple on your butt? "Big deal," they scoff. "Out of shape? Me too."

Some women are afraid to participate in nude recreation over fear of unwanted attention or getting "hit on." And, let's be honest, it can happen. Single people are usually seeking a partner with similar interests and it stands to reason that a naturist would prefer someone who shares his or her interest in naturism. The best place to find such a person is, of course, at a naturist event. Naturist lore is full of stories of couples who met and later married at a nude beach or resort.

However, the situation is no different than if someone tried to pick you up in a nightclub or the canned goods aisle of your neighborhood grocery store. If you're not interested, say so. If the person continues to be a problem, beach volunteers and club members are more than willing to intervene. If encountering male arousal is a concern, keep in mind that naturist etiquette prohibits open sexual activity of any kind.

If you're ready to realize the benefits of naturism firsthand, the following tips will help you get the most out of your first naturist experience.

Drawings by Edna Vollmer

Where Do You Start?

NO MATTER WHERE YOU go, it's a good idea to decide beforehand what it is you hope to gain. Is going nude an attempt to reconnect to nature, or is it an act of rebellious freedom? Are you expecting to form friendships with others who share a common philosophy, or do you simply want to avoid tan lines? Would you be more comfortable with strangers you'll possibly never see again, or would you prefer to be with those who already know and accept you?

Beaches are the most popular place to try naturism for the first time. "It's so easy to step out of your clothes and simply walk into the water," said Claude Richards, president of Friends of Mazo Beach, a Wisconsin naturist group. "You're surrounded by nature, the plants, animal life, scenic views," Richards said. "Going nude fits in with the natural landscape you're enjoying at that moment. And although you can certainly participate in beach games or gather around a fire, you can also enjoy a quiet spot of your own to draw or write or simply listen to the sound of the wind through the trees."

"And because beaches are clothing-optional, a woman may find it reassuring that it's her choice what comes off and when," Richards added.

Beaches do have disadvantages. Since most nude use occurs on isolated shorelines, you're probably in for a long walk, so it's important to be in reasonable physical shape and to wear appropriate shoes for walking across hot sand or on a brushy path. And don't expect to find a concession stand.

"As far as what we expect, we ask anyone who visits the beach to respect the environment, to stay out of fragile areas, and to carry out their trash. And like most clubs, we don't tolerate sexual activity," Richards said.

Not only do clubs and resorts have written guidelines on acceptable rules of conduct, they have staff available to show you the facilities and introduce you to members.

"The people who greet you will answer questions about what to expect and address any concerns you have. That's their job," said June Hoover, co-owner of

Riverside Ranch in Texas. This may be a welcome relief to a shy person who isn't comfortable approaching strangers with questions or having to make self-introductions.

"Clubs are also a good option for someone worried about getting arrested," Hoover said. Unlike a beach where the boundaries of the clothing-optional area may be unclear, clubs have clearly defined borders and nudity within the perimeter is perfectly legal. As a private business, clubs also have control over who is admitted. "A primary responsibility of the club owner is to protect its members," Hoover said. "Visitors are required to show ID and sign in."

Some clubs also require all newcomers to go nude right away. These policies, as well as visitor fees, serve as deterrents to the person who may have ill intentions. "Many single women like the safety of a residential naturist community. In fact, we have several single women [here] who are students in San Antonio; they sleep here and drive back and forth because they feel safer than staying in the city."

If you're not the type of gal who enjoys "roughing it," visiting a club or resort may be the best option for your first naturist excursion. Often located in idyllic settings, clubs typically offer modern comforts such as indoor restrooms, a snack shop or restaurant, and recreational facilities. You'll have to sacrifice some cash and your anonymity, but for many women, it's a small price to pay for security and amenities.

A third option for the first-time experience is at a private party organized by one of the many naturist groups. Typically they're at a member's home or at a non-naturist facility rented by the group for clothing-optional activities. When cold weather sets in, many beach groups will rent a hotel pool, fitness center, or even a bowling alley for the night. In areas of the country where there aren't any nearby beaches or resorts, members will meet at someone's home. Such events are by invitation only and the person who invites you should be able to tell you what to expect and what the house rules are.

Jim and Julie Trenary, members of the non-landed club Bare Spirits in Oregon, frequently entertain other Bare Spirits

members in their home for club meetings and social events. Newcomers "usually are already comfortable with social nudity, having been to a beach or landed club," Jim said. "They are able to introduce themselves, strike up conversations and participate in events without feeling self-conscious."

Common Guidelines

REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU decide to go au naturel, there are a few commonly agreed upon rules that are helpful to know.

For hygienic reasons, always carry and sit on a towel. Ask permission before taking photos. Respect others. Leave the place (public or private) cleaner than you found it. In general, behave much as you would in any other social situation.

Everyone goes through the same nervous jitters about going nude in a social setting for the first time. Once you become a seasoned naturist, please do what you can to make newcomers feel welcome into the ever-expanding naturist family. **N**