

Beach Bum Babylon

Mitchell Kuga - Aug 26, 2009

Nude Rules

A guide to *nude beach etiquette*

First rule: Unofficial nude beaches aren't always nude. The way nudists at Polo Beach explained it, the early bird gets the worm. "If the first one there is naked, then it's naked throughout the day," Denny explained. "And if the first person there has clothes on and keeps clothes on, then everybody else keeps clothes on."

Second rule: Sexual advances are a no-no. "It's important to give people their space," said the man from Germany. "There are some people who stay in the shade and stare, but generally the people here are pretty nice. We've never had any problems or been approached in an objectionable way."

Third rule: Put your camera away, Annie Leibovitz: The nude beach isn't a photo op.

Fourth rule: Keep a towel nearby, "in case you have to cover up for the kids," said the wife of the military man, a stay-at-home mom with a bellybutton piercing. "One time we came here and there were kids, but everyone had their clothes on. If there are kids, everyone's very respectful of that. I've never seen anyone naked."

Fifth Rule: It's impolite to stare. "You don't want to make anyone feel awkward," one woman said. "It's OK if people look, but you know..."



Can we get naked on Hawai'i beaches or not?

On a recent Saturday afternoon at Polo Beach, located on the North Shore of O'ahu, adventure abounds. Skydivers descend in a wash of neon-colored parachutes, drifting toward Dillingham Airfield like cascading leaves. Riders on horseback trot along the dirt path separating the beach from Polo Field. And beachgoers—specifically five presumably heterosexual couples and six lone males—lay out in various states of undress. Mostly one state. Other than one middle-aged man, who exchanged swim shorts for a modest oversized T-shirt, and two topless women, birthday suits

Letters to the Editor

Nude-itude

Sep 9, 2009

I have been going to Mokuleia beach

weekly for the longest time. Thanks to your exposing article ("Beach bum Babylon," 8/26), the Saturday before last was unlike any other weekend I have ever experienced at the beach and, undoubtedly, it was my last.

I have never seen police at the beach until Saturday August 29. The cops were on the look-out for nude people. I say to the cops, "Why not spend your time looking for a meth lab or some punk spray painting on a building or drug testing your own officers?"

There are nude beaches on all of the islands and I just purchased my tickets to fly out Friday night to a neighbor island for the Labor Day weekend. And yes, you can get too much sun on your piñata and it will burn.

Naked Nate

O'ahu

Mean streak

Sep 9, 2009

I read your article "Beach bum Babylon" (8/26). Actually, I didn't even read it. I just skimmed it. I was pissed. Mokuleia is a place for those of us who want to get away from the crowds. You write this article and are going to bring the crowds to Mokuleia. This island is already becoming ridiculously overpopulated for my comfort level. For all of the townies out there, stay there. Let the naked folk stay at Diamond Head.

are the attire of choice, flaunted in an assortment of colors, sizes and states of elasticity.

Exposed breasts and bare butts aside, between 2pm and 5pm it seemed to be a pretty standard afternoon at the beach—which is to say that not much happened. Romance novels were read. Plate lunches were consumed. And sunscreen, perhaps a little more than typically required, was applied at regular intervals—though on some parts more than others.

"I've never put sunscreen on my dick and it's never been burnt," one 33-year-old military guy declared triumphantly. He bared all in front of other beachgoers but declined to reveal his name. "I'm probably jinxing myself!"

"I think it's because it doesn't have any fat on it," his wife interjected as she laid next to him on her stomach. "You know, those fatty layers of your skin? They tend to get burned more."

"Yeah, one time my entire front got burned, but my penis has never been burnt! I don't know why," he continued with incredulity.

"Babe! It's the skin!" she proclaimed, slightly vexed. "I'm telling you, it's the skin!"

He nodded his head in compliance—"I believe you! You win!"—took a sip from his bottle of beer then inhaled a deep, contemplative breath.

"I mean when else can you be in this moment, right now, and have your junk blowing in the breeze? You know?" He smiled behind darkly tinted sunglasses. "Nowhere!"

Welcome to O'ahu's nude beach scene, where unmentionables are mentioned and beach bums come to erase tan lines and let it all hang out. All of it.

Nakedville

For most of us, a nude beach on O'ahu is like cheap parking in Waikīkī: "You crazy or what? No such thing!"

This obscurity is an essential part of what allows spots like Polo Beach to exist, particularly on an island as densely populated as O'ahu. On Web sites and in guidebooks dedicated to Hawai'i's beaches, clothing

By the way, I was out there this weekend and there was a really funny incident. My son and I were swimming in the beautiful blue ocean when my boyfriend called to us laughing his head off. He was so amazed to see three naked sunbathers about 300 feet away. You could vaguely see anything but their white behinds and dark patches in the front. They stood up a lot, seemingly wanting us to see.

See, Mokuleia is not Diamond Head or the naked beaches on the Big Island. I hope it doesn't become that way, nor would I care to see it as crowded as the North Shore has become in the last few years. Places of solitude on this island are becoming more and more rare. No need to publish stories that bring crowds. It isn't the same as a restaurant or bar.

Marion Wong

Mililani

Beach bummer

Sep 9, 2009

Our first reaction to your story about Polo Beach was, "Aha! No wonder HPD was sweeping the beach on ATVs, telling people to put their clothes on (as well as spinning doughnuts on the beach)!" This article must have been shown to HPD because the first sweep in nearly three years happened this past Sunday, and then they hid behind the bushes with their binoculars watching us watch them with our binoculars.

I'm glad we weren't at the beach

optional haunts are associated primarily with the neighbor islands, where lower population density means fewer cops and more space on the coast to hang loose without fear of offending other beachgoers. So it's no surprise that to get to O'ahu's most prominent clothing optional beach, nudists must drive (fully clothed) to the outskirts of Mokuleia, where you're more likely to find cows grazing on grassy pastures than a Safeway or Starbucks.

Upon reaching the boonies, nudists must delve even deeper into oblivion, parking, (somewhat ironically) in front of a white picket fence on the side of the road, where they are greeted with a Department of Parks and Recreation sign that lists "Nudity (arrest will be made)" as a prohibited offense. From here, nudists (still clothed) must either ignore the warning or feign illiteracy. The stretch of coast unofficially designated as Nakedville is protected from prying eyes by a few trees and a 300-yard walk from the white picket fence to the beach.

The taboos associated with public nudity are palpable, even here. Despite assurances of anonymity, the slightest suggestion of publicizing beachgoers' nude activity—which primarily consisted of lying around in repose while going for an occasional swim—was enough to turn presumably audacious individuals into sheepish introverts.

The military couple, who moved to O'ahu two years ago, reduced their hometowns to a vague, could-be-anywhere locality: "The mainland." Four men and two couples declined comment. "I'm not interested," a silver haired man, drying off from a round of snorkeling, said. "Sorry, I don't think I can. Just trying to relax today," said another man in his mid-thirties who genuinely sounded remorseful.

At the mention of "journalist," one topless blond shielded her face with her arms as a man applied thick streaks of Banana Boat sunscreen down her back. "Sorry, she's not cool with it," he said, somewhat superfluously. Clearly, openness with one's body does not correlate to embrace of the media.

Nudey by nature

None of the nudists at Polo Beach would agree to let us use their names. They couldn't agree on the nomenclature either.

that day you were interviewing for your article, because we would have told you that, by publishing this story, we can now look forward to: (1) more HPD visits, (2) more "looky-lou's" (curiosity-seekers), and (3) perverts/freaks that actually masturbate while watching us.

We and our friends go to Polo Beach to relax and enjoy the ocean and the day. We don't bother anyone, we are constantly watching out (and, thus, covering up) for children and families, and just want to be as inconspicuous as possible. Some of us have screens that we sit behind.

This beach has been the unofficial nude beach since the 1930s, as Little Beach is to Maui, and Donkey Beach to Kauai. So, as the younger ones say, "WTF"? Thank you, Mr. Kuga for drawing unwanted attention to a bunch of people who just want to enjoy the day. It's pretty sad that you have nothing else in this beautiful state to write about.

Keoki & Kaila

'Aiea

The naked truth

Sep 23, 2009

I'm amazed how many nude people wrote angry letters to the editor fiercely protecting coverage ("Beach bum Babylon," 8/26) of their favorite spot. If only we could find a way to channel all that enthusiasm and passion for being naked into activism in support of gay marriage or universal healthcare.

"I prefer naturist," said a 55-year-old man from Germany who's been living on O'ahu for a year and a half. He and his 48-year-old wife, who sat next to him, naked except for a hat, come to Polo Beach every two to three weeks, continuing what was once a customary form of recreation in Europe. "I look at it more as a lifestyle," he said. "It's really about enjoying and getting in touch with nature, the natural way."

George Harker, a 65-year-old Maui resident, regarded labels with the same disdain he reserved for clothing. "I don't really consider myself a nudist or a naturalist," he said in a telephone interview. "I guess I shun all labels. One that was applied to me is 'compulsively laid-back.'"

Others, like the military man, weren't so particular. "I don't think it really matters," he said. "I just call ourselves 'open.' I just like being naked."

The reasons for beaching in the buff are just as varied. Denny ("First name only please"), a 62-year-old retired postman who lives in Waikīkī, said forgoing board shorts appeals to both mundane and esoteric pleasures. "There's no sand in your bathing suit," he said over the phone. "And when you're swimming it's a whole other experience. It's hard to explain. I just really enjoy it much more [nude] than when I have a bathing suit on."

For the military man and his wife, their weekly visits to Polo Beach are a way of rekindling a bygone period of freedom and youth. "Before we had kids, we would walk around naked all the time," he said, referring to the couple's two young children who stay with a babysitter while they're at the beach. "This is our way of bringing it back."

Harker said going nude is the only plausible way to experience a day the beach, and insisted that once people shed their inhibitions and insecurities, the experience is enough to convert most from prude to nude.

"Once you've tried nude sunbathing, it just becomes so natural and so convenient you can't understand how you could've done so otherwise," Harker, who goes by the alias "Dr. Leisure," said. "It becomes very normative and such a non-issue that it's hard to explain to other people who haven't been there."

Legal or not

It's a bit of a mystery as to why nude beaches haven't been officially accepted in Hawai'i, a state sporting all the necessary credentials—a vibrant tourist industry, year-round tropical weather and long stretches of sandy, unoccupied coast—for a nude beach utopia. Unlike beaches on the mainland like Haulover in Florida, which is legally sanctioned as a clothing optional beach by Miami-Dade County, no official nude beach exists in Hawai'i.

Which doesn't necessarily make nude sunbathing in Hawai'i illegal. By law, nudity is illegal at Hawaii State Parks. In Hawai'i, nudity includes women's breasts. However outside of these state-managed areas, things get a little murky. Hawaii Revised Statutes § 707-734 states that someone commits the act of "indecent exposure" if he or she intentionally exposes his or her genitals to someone other than his or her spouse with the intention of causing "affront." Genitals—which are defined as reproductive sexual organs—don't include breasts, meaning that a woman sunbathing in Waikiki has as much right as the shirtless guy lying next to her. It would also be a stretch to accuse a small group of isolated nudists, like the ones at Polo Beach, of causing "affront" or outrage to innocent beach-goers.

"The whole intent of the [indecent exposure] law, from how I understand it, is for the flasher, or that guy who comes up in his raincoat, walks right in front of you and exposes himself," Harker, who wrote the *Creation and Management Guide to Public Clothing Optional Beaches and Parks*, said. "He's there to directly affront you with your situation. It's very clear that's that what the law is about. It has nothing to do with someone taking off their clothes to go swimming in the ocean or sit around nude." He paused before continuing. "Of course, the police have the ability to interpret things any way they want. If you come across someone in the law enforcement who has a particular bias or attitude they could cause a lot of problems."

Although the law may not be targeted specifically toward prosecuting nude sunbathers, a potential citation from the cops still weighs heavily on the minds of nudists. When Denny and his wife scoped out the nude beach scene at the Diamond Head lighthouse, a spot popularly known for its clothing-optional use, they were dissuaded from stripping down by the presence of cop cars. "Police are hiding out there all the time and giving out tickets, so you're constantly watching out for the police," he said. On a recent Wednesday afternoon, two cop cars could be found parked at the entrance of the walkway

leading to the lighthouse. Beach-goers, all male, were practically nude, clad in the tiniest of Speedo-style swimsuits, though things never ventured into a Full Monty. "Even though it's already been beaten in court it just isn't worth it to get into that kind of trouble," Denny added.

Denny his wife used to make regular trips to Polo Beach where they felt comfortable within a small, isolated community of fellow nudists. However, the 35-mile drive—practically a road trip by Hawaii's standards—from their home in Waikīkī proved taxing. The couple have since found a secluded spot in central Honolulu that they make a point to visit every weekend—though its exact location was undisclosed. "It would draw too many people and the police," Denny said.

According to HPD spokesperson Michelle Yu, citations for indecent exposure at the beach are largely complaint driven, and issued on "extremely rare" occasion.

Lifeguards also rarely encounter naked beach-goers, as nude-friendly spots like Polo Beach are isolated far from lifeguard supervision. According to Bill Goding, the acting lieutenant at Ala Moana Beach Park, lifeguards will occasionally receive complaints regarding topless women. "It's not illegal, but obviously if we have a complaint, we would say something to the individual because of kids or whatever. Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of the time it's not a problem and they just put their top back on," Goding said. "When it happens, it's usually a foreigner and they don't know any better and don't even think twice about it."

This hasn't stopped local "textiles"—the word some nudists use to describe people who wear clothes—from chastising nude sunbathers minding their own business.

When Denny, who'd been active in California's nudist scene, moved to O'ahu seven years ago he tested the waters by bearing all at beaches in Waikīkī. Although he'd distance himself from other beach-goers, people within eyeshot would approach him and ask him to cover up. "It's local people really," he said. "Here on O'ahu it's almost impossible. It's a strange feeling."

Harker cited local culture as the primary force preventing Hawai'i from establishing a legally sanctioned clothing optional beach. "For a lot of native Hawaiians, you've got the overlay of the Christian religion that's been imposed on them," he said, referring to the missionary influence on Hawaiian values. "They've

adopted what they perceive as an attitude towards nudity and they've imposed that on their own culture. But if you really look at their culture, it's like other cultures. Nudity is not that big a deal. It's such a non-issue that it's not even talked about."

Two nudists offered the same explanation as Harker, including Denny, who made sure to clarify his statement. "I'm not blaming the local people because I've seen local nudists," he said. "It's just a few people here who have a problem with it."

What nudists like Denny want is small—both in space and scope—yet it's something that isn't likely to exist anytime soon. "I'd just love to see a beach where you just put up a sign saying 'you'll encounter nude people' and just let them go there," Denny said. "If you warn people, and they don't want to see it they don't have to go any further. It could be a dead end or a small little section with mountains. Just a hundred yards or so, that's all I'd ask."

At 5pm, dark clouds pushed their way in front of the remaining strands of sunlight, sending nudists at Polo Beach back to their ordinary routines. "Gotta pick up the kids," said the military man, who sported a buzz cut and tattoos. "If we stay here too long the babysitter gets expensive."

"Enjoy your day!" he exclaimed. "Get naked!"