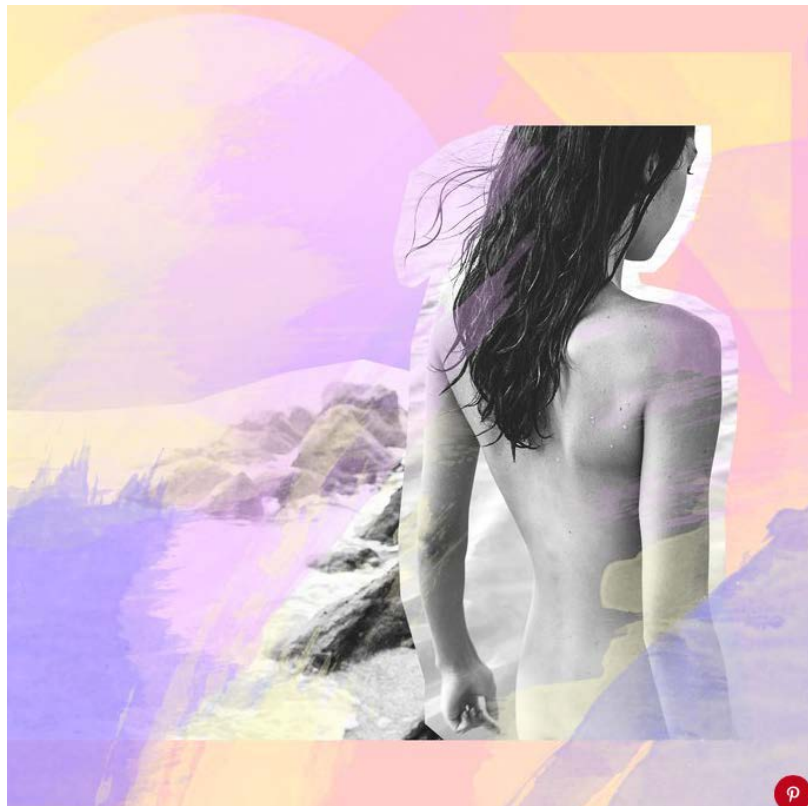




HOME • NEWS

Want More Body Confidence This Summer? Go to a Nude Beach



I have felt an ocean breeze on my undercarriage, and I highly endorse the sensation. (Ever since Melissa McCarthy purred about the heat from her “undercarriage” to an object of seduction in *Bridesmaids*, that’s been my term of choice for the area, but for those unaware I’m talking about the lowest part: my crotch, okay?)

Last summer, I went to a clothing-optional resort in Jamaica on a solo trip that was half dare, half self-care adventure. The locale—Hedonism II in Negril—has a playfully erotic vibe and nightly parties (plus a “romping shop”) where couples and wannabe couples can connect. I didn’t leave with any new notches on my belt, but I gained something I could never have anticipated: a sunny, new DGAF attitude toward my own body.

I dislike the assumption that every woman has body-image issues, like they're handed out with your first bra or tampon purchase. But over 31 years of femaledom, I have discussed the subject with enough women to know that, of course, body concerns are more than common. I've been lucky enough not to have any major ones, but sure, there are things I would change; sometimes an unfortunate photo at a bad angle will have me reconsidering my laissez-faire approach to pasta and Cheetos. Still, I don't hate my medium-sized, curvy-in-good-spots-I-think-sorta-probably body. I feel grateful about that.

Of course, there's a whole universe between not hating the sight of yourself in a mirror and wanting to strip down naked in public on a beach of strangers. I've always paused at that moment of arrival at a regular beach, with friends or family, when we throw down our towels and bags and umbrella and suddenly it's time to ... take off every item of clothing, until I'm essentially standing there in public in my underwear. What a concept! Hanging out with my friends or my aunts and uncles or, on more than one occasion, coworkers, with the possibility of their glimpsing an errant nipple. How do we pretend this is normal?!

I assumed that moment of unveiling would be even more terrifying at a nude beach. So I took my time with it, removing my bikini top first, waiting 45 minutes, and then tearing off the bottoms. Aside from the immediate surprise of wind whistling between my upper thighs, I was struck by how un-different the experience was from the typical undressing. A bikini is truly so little fabric to begin with. And when I was finally naked, no one on the nearby lounge chairs even batted an eye. They had been naked the whole time.

It wasn't the small triumph of undressing that gave me the confidence boost that persists today, however; it was looking at all the other people's bodies. It may sound counterintuitive, but I got a boost just standing among them.

Women at the resort ranged in age from their early twenties to their mid-sixties. Some of the younger couples were super fit, and probably chose the resort to revel in each other's hard-earned conventional beauty. I toasted my all-inclusive frozen drinks to them. I admired those impossibly sexy dimples above the women's butts, or, on the men, those V-shaped muscles that seem to point directly to their junk. They were like sculptures, careful paintings. Art.

But the majority of the crowd, which eventually included me, weren't trying to be art. We were the walls. Our bodies were like furniture: functional, practical, something to rest on. The weirdness of sitting on a beach with 100 naked people wore off within about an hour, honestly, and I was left with just shapes and objects.

I looked at them, of course I looked. After that first hour, women's nipples were no more shocking than men's nipples, which I've always seen at the beach. Butts get lower and lower with age but they're all kind of goofy-looking, even when they're good butts! Some women have pubic hair, some don't. I saw C-section scars and errant bruises. Almost all women have some cellulite, somewhere. No one cared. Maybe nude beaches have their own set of rules, a specific set of unspoken rules, but whatever the norm is, people seemed to be looking at each other less, not more. I worried that the men, especially the older ones, would skeeve me out, that I would feel their leering eyes on me. But truly no one cared about my body. All that flesh blurred together, and my body was just part of that blur.

It felt great. On my lounge chair, I stretched out with my book and threw one arm casually over my head like I was being photographed for a swimsuit catalogue. I rolled over for a nap, even though I know that positioning meant my belly would pool unpleasantly downward; what was the point in sucking it in? My body is my body is my body. There are no Spanx on a naked beach, and for whom would I even be wearing them? More importantly it reminded me that for all of our own weird body stuff, people are rarely spending a lot of mental energy on us. You, reading this, don't care about my thighs, and I don't care about yours, and thank god for that.

The lesson I was left with regarding body positivity is not eloquent enough to appear in nice typography on an Instagram slide, but here it is: Go hang out around naked people. If it's not a nude resort in Jamaica, maybe it's a different nude beach—so many states have them! I had felt glimmers of this sensation in other instances where nudity was acceptable or expected, like the gym locker room or a hammam in Istanbul where a gruff woman scrubbed at my bare breasts and the breasts of the women lying naked nearby until layers of our skin came off. If you happen to find yourself in Turkey, I recommend that experience. Those women don't give a fig about your nudity.

If even a locker room or spa is too much, just look at photos or paintings of naked people or strip down at home! Courbet's "L'Origine du Monde" with the generous thighs converging with butt cheek, or Rembrandt's "Bathsheba at Her Bath" with her sagging belly, or any nude female of Rubens and her lumpy love handles. They are the masters of Western art not because they invented flawless bodies with their paint brushes but because they transformed normalcy into majesty.

Maybe you don't think your belly rolls are so majestic. But they *are* so common that they're honestly almost boring. You can come to this conclusion any way you want—for me, seeing was believing.