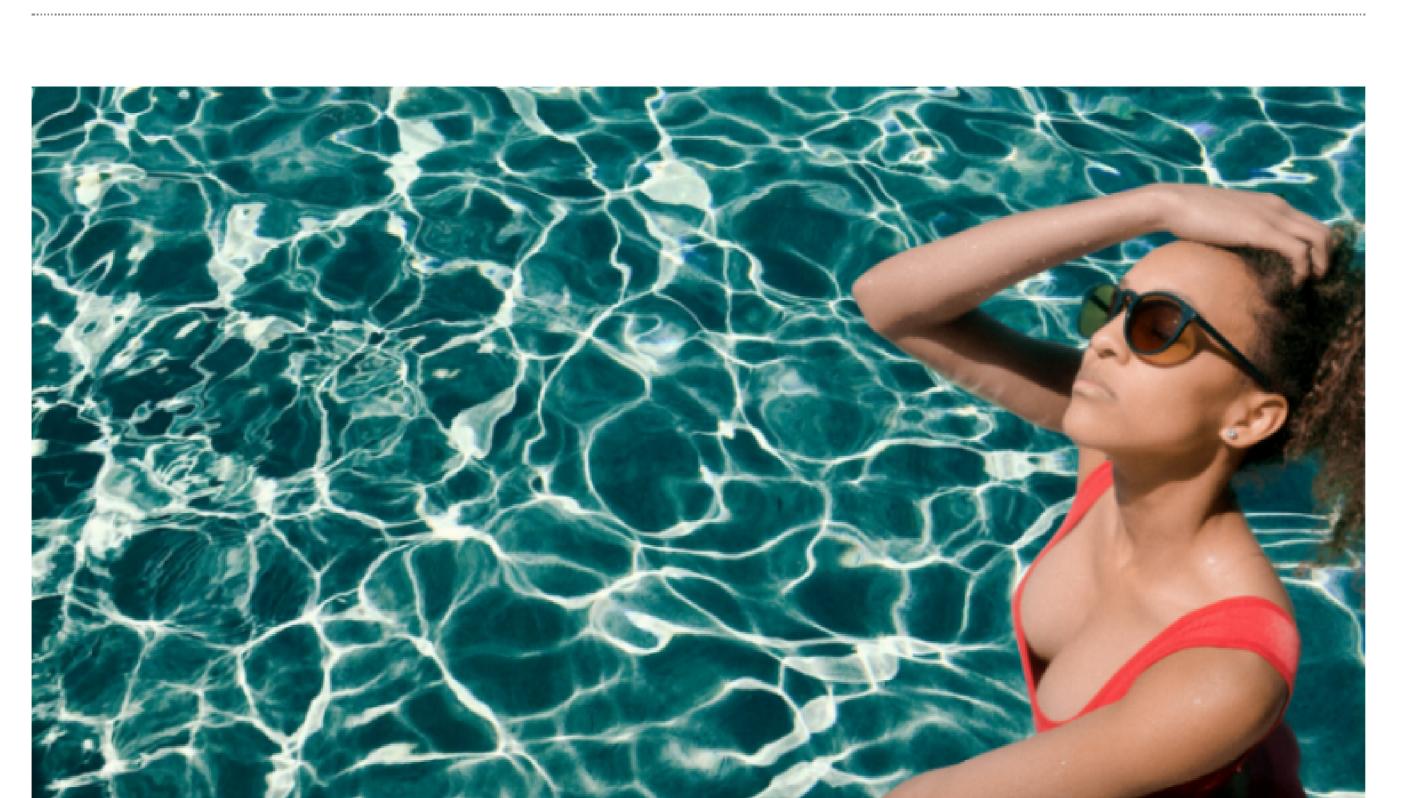
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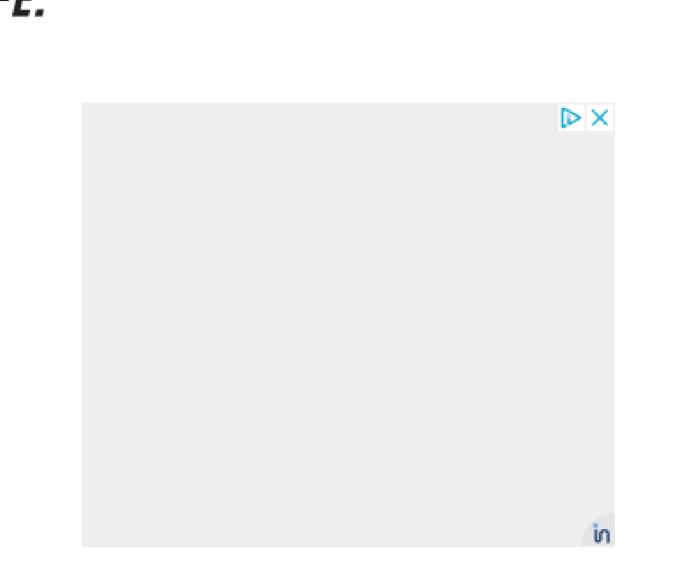


WHAT A SEX RESORT TAUGHT ME ABOUT SHAME

GUEST WRITER × JAN 2, 2020

IT TOOK A FEW DAYS AT THE RESORT TO REMEMBER THAT SEX DOESN'T DEVALUE ME AND IS, IN FACT, SOMETHING THAT ADDS VALUE TO MY LIFE.

By Gabrielle Noel



Last summer, while my friends were on baecations, I traveled with a group of sex writers to "the world's most iconic adult playground."

Hedonism II, or Hedo as it's affectionately called, is a lifestyle-friendly resort in Jamaica frequented by nudists and swingers. The campus is divided into two sections—a nude side and a 'prude' side—with beachfront pools, swim-up bars, and even a playroom nestled between the gift shop and the tennis courts. The website describes it as a safe space where all identities are welcomed and its guests talk about it with a cult-like affection.

I, however, remained skeptical. I'm a bisexual woman from a Caribbean-American family. Because of that, I'm

familiar with the Commonwealth Caribbean's particular brand of sexual repression and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment. Same-sex conduct is still criminalized in numerous Caribbean countries, including Jamaica, thanks to buggery laws that have remained since British colonization. Those laws strengthen social stigma against LGBTQ+ folks throughout the West Indies. So the idea of a judgment-free sexual utopia in Negril, of all places, sounded pretty wild to me. I was sure someone was exaggerating. I was also eager to visit Hedo because it was antithetical to everything my family seemed to believe. Growing

up, we attended a church with a majority Caribbean-American congregation. I experienced so much sexual silence and shame there; I learned to view sexual purity as my main value. Our church even had me sign an abstinence contract as a teen, which presumed that I was straight and further emphasized their views on purity. It took a lifetime to disentangle myself from those values, to unlearn the shame that was embedded within my sense of self. And going to a clothing-optional resort in the West Indies felt like a celebration of how far I'd come.

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I thought the sex writers and I would be the resort's wildest guests but quickly learned otherwise. Hedo had a culture of radical acceptance that was a byproduct of the fact that everyone was naked, drinking, and having sex everywhere. People weren't afraid to be ridiculous. At times, they were indulgent. Bodies were so visible —"flaws," genitals, and all—that there was less pressure to look perfect. It allowed me to relax within my own body in a way I never really could.

Still, I was nervous about being naked. I thought I'd walk through the door and immediately shed my nerves and clothes—but it felt wrong somehow. Late that first night, I finally relaxed enough to go skinny dipping in a quiet part of the ocean with my group. We could see a couple having sex on a hammock stretched between two trees and for a moment, I didn't care about anyone's nakedness, not even my own. I felt completely free.

A little over a day later, I braved the nude pool. There was a DJ, a swim-up bar, and poolside karaoke. Personally, I love karaoke, but there was no way I could do it with my labia out. So instead, I made friends with a bunch of naked strangers. It felt surprisingly natural. One of the writers was on a mission to learn how to squirt; she found an older couple who said they could help and disappeared back to their room. Eventually, I found a cute guy to hook up with.

My group visited the Playroom the next day. It had water cascading into three plunge pools, mattresses spread across the floor, and a side room with BDSM furniture. There was a messy threesome happening on one of the mattresses and a couple wandering around, having sex on any flat surface they could find. Later, some of the writers demonstrated a BDSM scene, which was a first for me. I hooked up with two women on the trip as well.

I was happy to have these adventures and I learned so much about myself, but it was also uncomfortable at times. Hedo was the most sex-positive environment I'd ever been in. I was so unused to having complete freedom to explore sexuality that I constantly felt like I was doing something wrong. I wondered what my family would think. I worried about my friends' opinions, even though they've always been my biggest supporters. I was absolutely behaving in ways that aligned with my sexual ethics but I still felt so ashamed—for having sex, for waddling around in a pool of naked strangers, for being naked, for being ashamed. Wasn't I supposed to be past thoughts like this?

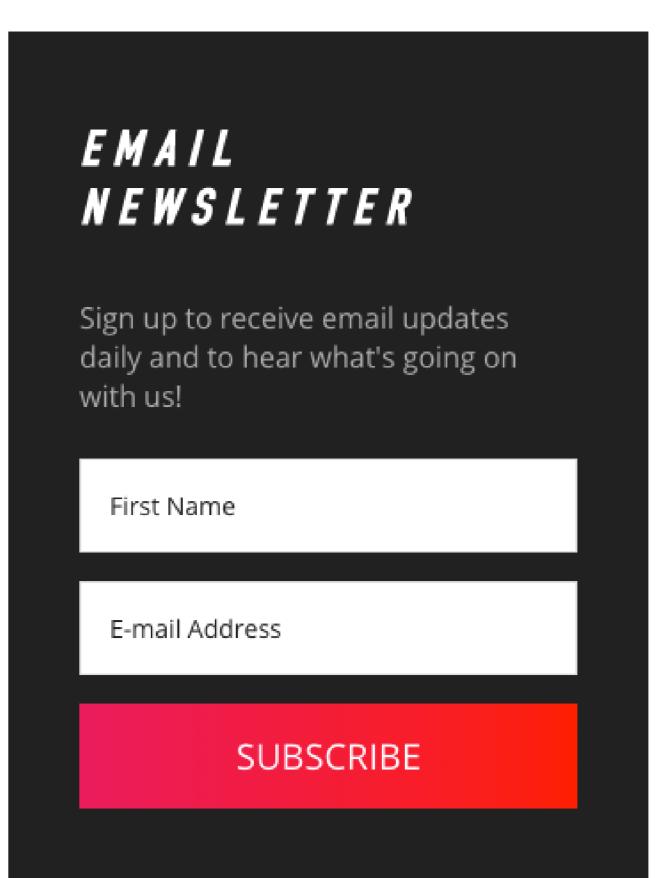
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The messy truth, and what Hedonism taught me, is that sexual liberation isn't a final resting place. I'd been treating it like one because of all the new, sex-positive messages I'd received but there were still moments that reinforced sex-negative messaging I'd grown up with.

By ignoring that, in favor of a narrative where I was completely sexually liberated, I was treating doubt and shame like avoidable realities. I was holding myself to an impossible standard—which absolutely made it worse.

It took a few days to remember that sex doesn't devalue me and is, in fact, something that adds value to my life. I bounced back feeling that even more strongly. And since then, I take the moments of discovery and playfulness I had at Hedo with me everywhere. I remember all the naked bodies I saw and how beautiful those differences were. It's an experience that I think many people should have for themselves, at least once.

Gabrielle is a writer and digital content creator covering topics within identity and sexuality. You can find her on all social platforms under @gabalexa.



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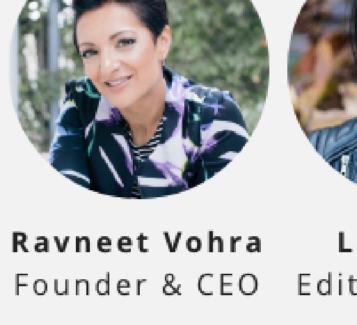
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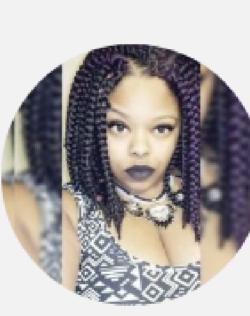
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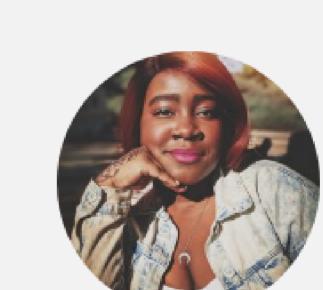


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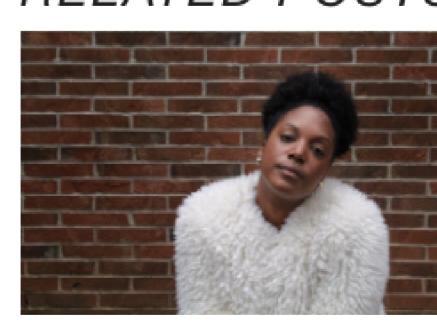
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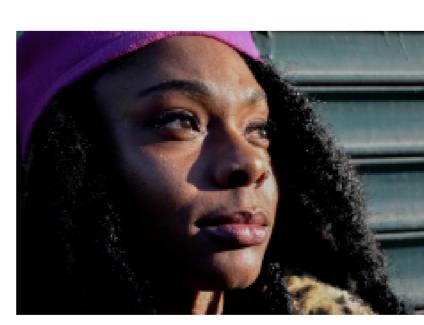
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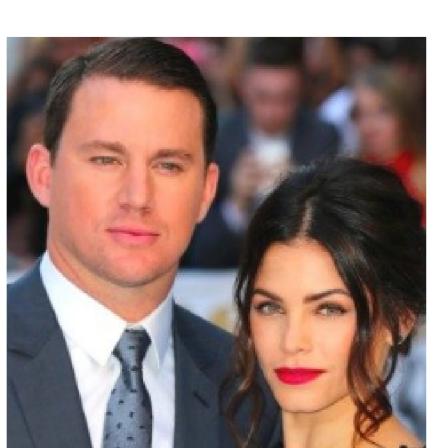
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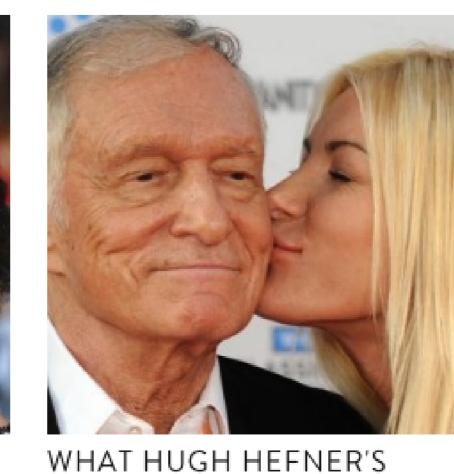


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