



LIFE. STYLE. FLESH.

NAKED LUNCH

The friendly nudists of one shoreline town

BY TOM SOBOLESKI

“There’s something therapeutic about nudity. Take away the Gucci or Levi’s and we’re all the same.” —Kevin Bacon, *Style* magazine, 1999

Meandering down narrow lanes past centuries-old stone walls and rustic pastures on a sun-splashed Saturday in Woodstock, Connecticut, I couldn’t help thinking: this resort is isolated, but in a good way. It’s a place to relax and recreate, with a beach on a lake, tennis courts, pickle ball, bocci, and a pool.

There’s a reason why the Solair Recreation League is so secluded: you have to go nude!

For a few weeks I contemplated going, trying to get my head around the idea. But the moment of truth still feels like you’re stepping into a voyeur’s gallery with a thousand eyes focused on you.

It didn’t take long for that moment of truth. After registering for a day visit at the office, I’m told someone will come by in a golf cart to give me an orientation tour of the grounds. I stepped back outside and there he was, wearing only a ball cap. Wayne, mid-fortyish, told me to get in my car and follow him to the parking area. This was a hundred yards up behind some trees. Wayne

directed me where to park, and as I stepped out of my car, he said, “You can just leave your clothes in the car. Just grab your towel and have a seat.” So this is it? I thought. Do I chicken out and jump back in? Everyone is gonna be naked, so what’s the big deal? My curiosity and fascination with why people enjoy this was stronger than my prudishness. So, wearing nothing but flip-flops, off we went.

There are many regulars at the resort who all knew Wayne, and waved. For me, it felt like I was being showcased naked in a football stadium. We passed people playing shuffleboard and horseshoes wearing only sandals. He showed me the volleyball court, the tennis courts, the camp grounds, the pool, hot tub, bathrooms and showers (both unisex). Everywhere I looked, nobody wore a stitch other than bald headed men in baseball caps.

The last stop was the recreation pavilion, where an arts and crafts show was being held. It looked like a typical Saturday morning exhibit that could have been on any town green, with vendors’ tables and vertical folding walls displaying art and photography.



Except everyone was naked. My tour guide introduced me to his wife, who was adorned in only a slinky gold mesh chain that draped to her delta. We talked about tennis and the fact that she has been coming to Solair since she was a kid. What struck me was how casual our conversation was, as if we were in a coffee shop.

Voyeuristic Intentions

I found the whole thing a bit unnerving, initially at least. But as I talked with several couples over the course of the day, and for nudists, it's second nature. This was clarified when I spoke to some couples on the beach.

The beach is lined with lounges on clean, raked sand. An octagonal sun platform floats about 20 yards off shore. I spread my beach towel on a lounge, put on some sunscreen, and laid back. *How cool is this, I thought, to be lying nude in the morning sunshine?* Two lounges away, a 30-something couple was sunbathing and my curiosity was killing me. Are they regular visitors or curiosity seekers? "Excuse me," I said to him, "is this your first visit here?" "No," he replied, "we've been coming for a couple years."

I introduced myself, gave them my card and explained I was working on a magazine assignment. They introduced themselves as Joe and Leah and said I could use their first names.

"What is the appeal for you?" I asked.

"It's liberating," Joe said.

"Does it feel like people are voyeurs?"

"We're all in the same suit," he said. "You don't feel guilty for looking at people because they're looking at you."

"Do your friends, neighbors or relatives know that you come here? Do you practice nudism at home?"

That's a bit more complicated. Once you become a regular practitioner of nudism, Joe explained, the world outside the resort is referred to as "the textile world." They don't really go around nude at home because for them, the appeal is more in being naked outdoors and they don't have a private yard.

Another woman on the beach, Effie, said it was her first visit to any nudist facility. Effie said she was self-conscious "for about the first half-hour. Then I relaxed and I feel comfortable. Everyone is very friendly. It feels more friendly without clothes than with. Nobody is judging what kind of shoes I'm wearing, do I have a designer handbag, what kind of jewelry do I have. They just look you in the eye and talk to you as a person."

There were several hundred people of all ages, shapes and sizes, all stark naked and nonchalant about it. What struck me throughout the day was how unassuming and non-judgmental everyone was. At the beach or the pool, people just plopped onto a lounge next to you, as at any resort.

Solair has some ironclad rules that are strictly enforced, for health and safety. Rule number one: always have your towel. You

must sit on your own towel on lounges and chairs anywhere on the grounds. While it is a nudist resort, you can stay clothed in some areas, like the café, some recreation areas, and the rec hall. But Solair's rules state: "No clothing or bathing suits shall be worn in the showers, sauna, hot tub, lake or pool. Also bathing suits are not permitted on the beach or poolside." Photography is strictly prohibited.

Most important is sunscreen. You'll be exposing body parts where the sun don't shine.

With all this nudity, how do people avoid sex or sexual innuendo? Does spending so much time being nude with your spouse and with others increase or decrease your sexual desire?

Beth, a 40ish woman with her husband Mike, said, "Being here increases my sexual desire. I just love the clothes-free feeling." Fair enough—visual stimulation stirs desire. But practicing nudists insist it's all about naturism and health benefits, not sex. Resort rules reinforce that: "Any public display of affection that is deemed suggestive or could be misconstrued as sexual is explicitly prohibited and can result in ejection from the grounds."

Privates Not Private

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ist resort, you consent that you're your privates aren't really private any more. So what about the temptation to gaze? I asked Nancy Greenhouse, chair of Solair's communications committee. "It's that bikini that makes things salacious," she said. "Nudism takes the mystery out of it. Of course people glance – it's natural – but a glance is all it is."

Greenhouse, like some other visitors, feels liberated rather than leered at.

"It's freeing," she said. "And, though I didn't know it in advance, it's a special community that's welcoming, diverse, and comfortable." For those who are curious but hesitant, Greenhouse invites them to Solair. "You will find that it's not at all scary," she said, "that it's completely natural and stress-free after a few minutes, and that you will meet a friendly, compassionate community."

I have to admit that it felt very refreshing to be unencumbered all day. As one man told me, "Once you swim naked, you won't want to wear a bathing suit again." After 10 hours in the nude, I didn't want to get dressed. As I drove home, I felt more relaxed than I have in a long time. Getting that kind of joy from one's own birthday suit is, in a word, unexpected.

Solair has 350 very private acres where you can also hike or bike in the nude. Day visitors are welcome. For everyone's safety, you are required to provide a photo ID for Solair to run a background check before granting entry. Find out more at solairrl.com.

Solair is a member of the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR), which sets standards of behavior and respect for anyone wishing to practice nudism in a safe environment. ●

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