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Anna Pulley

Learning to Love My Body at Jamaica's Infamous Nude Resort

The wildest part of *Hedonism II* wasn't the nudity or fetish wear at dinner—it was drinking a piña colada in the pool.

Learning to Love My Body at Jamaica's Infamous Nude Resort

By Anna Pulley
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Illustration by Kelsey Beyer

My girlfriend Kelsey isn't just a nudist—she's a nude *activist*. She's a regular fixture at body freedom events around San Francisco and was once detained at city hall for stripping in protest of the recent nudity ban. She even suggested that our first date be in the buff (at a "leathermen/nudist rally").

I declined that generous offer, opting instead for the much lamer first date of drinks at a bar. Because I am not a nudist. If anything, I'm a prudist. I feel risqué around cleavage. I keep my eyes fixed to the floor of my gym's shower at all times, as if savoring the fallen strands of hair and Clif Bar wrappers there.

So when a rep from **Hedonism II**—a clothing-optional resort in Jamaica—invited me to spend five days "pursuing pleasure" in my birthday suit, I said, "No thanks!"

They asked a few more times, and it so happened that the next press trip fell on Kelsey's birthday. Nothing made her happier than nudity, and if I selflessly got an all-expenses-paid vacation to the Caribbean out of it, then by gum, I guess I could try being a nudist for a week.

I never thought I would travel to Jamaica, because I am a queer person and *TIME* once called the country "**the most homophobic place on earth**." That was ten years ago, however, and many activists and artists say **the country is making strides**. So we decided to go, anticipating severe cognitive dissonance while attending one of the most progressive resorts imaginable in one of the most homophobic countries around.

Day 1

A resort pamphlet notes that Negril, the town where the resort is located, is "popular for watersports," forcing me to briefly reconsider what I've gotten myself into before realizing that they're referring to wakeboarding.

Before I can blink, a mimosa appears in my hand. Hedo's staff is bend-over-backward accommodating (not a euphemism!) and our room is pimptastic. Steps from the beach! Ceiling mirrors! Private jacuzzi! Mini fridge stocked with booze! All of it free and positively, well, hedonistic.

We're given a daily agenda of activities and encouraged fetishwear ("school attire" on one day, "leather and lace" the next). Kelsey strips down to her birthday suit immediately, and I, emboldened by vodka, take off my top on our private patio, which isn't actually so private, as anyone can walk by and say "hi" (and MANY do, and SOME don't leave for a long time).

What I notice immediately is this: When nudity is the norm, it's easy to follow suit (or suitless, I suppose). Why? Because I'm a follower. As much as I might consider myself an artsy type who flirts with the EDGE, I am 100 percent lemming. Jump off this cliff, you say? Sure! Way better than what I had in mind. I defer to you, group of strangers!

I only last ten minutes in the buff, however. I am freeeeee, yes, but also self-conscious because our room has mirrors on every surface except the floor. I now know what my back fat looks like from four unique angles, and this knowledge is not comforting.

I remind myself that everyone else at this resort is comfortable (celebratory, even!) with their imperfections, and try to force myself to not to think of my physique as a "block of cheese on toothpicks." But I struggle. Judgment-free nudity cannot make up for a lifetime of being a woman in the world.

I do receive a surprising amount of attention from strangers, which is intoxicating. But it soon becomes apparent that the real star of our vacation is Kelsey's bush. A selection of unsolicited comments she received from men:

"DAT BUUUUSH!" (Followed by vigorous pointing.)

"Can I give you a compliment? I just /oooove them hairy pussies."

"How do I put this? You are the first lady at the resort I have ever seen to be, uh, unshaved."

"Can I shave that? No? Can I lick it for you, then?"

I begin to feel weirdly competitive, wondering why nobody makes denigrating, sexist remarks about *my* bush. Admittedly, Kelsey's bush is resplendent—a fluffy cloud of curly tendrils you could comfortably nap upon for several hours. Mine, however, looks more like a 13-year-old's valiant attempt at a beard.



A Hedo attendee gets down with the Symbian saddle-plus-dildo sex toy at a lady-focused sex party. Illustration by Kelsey Beyer

Day 2

Hedo has planned a pole dancing class where we're taught "the grasshopper" and told to shake our asses "like you're salting a chicken." When I try, it looks less like seasoning poultry and more like frightening a chinchilla. So, fine—I cannot twerk. But we laugh a lot, and I post a picture on Facebook with one leg up on the pole at an awkward right angle. "I feel that there are many much more sexy dance moves than this one," my mother comments.

As the days wear on, I begin to feel more at ease in my body. I take advantage of the ceiling mirrors. I give my back fat a name (Sandra) so it feels more like a friend. I look at people's genitals but do not stare. Strangely, I find the most radical parts of Hedo aren't the nudity or fetish wear at dinner; it's that we can bring our beverages into the pool. Later that night, when I see a man receiving fellatio in the same pool, I barely bat an eye. "That? That's nothing. I enjoyed a *piña colada* in here earlier."

Day 3

A shortlist of activities I can now say I've tried nude: Ping-pong, snorkeling, playing pool while in a pool, dancing to "Baby Got Back" while wearing devil horns, and playing giant chess.

At this point, it's seeing people clothed that's shocking, partly because many male guests' wardrobes fall into the category of "Gross Dad Shirts." "This shirt was designed to distract you while I look at your chest," said one. Another simply had an erect penis, made to appear as if it was bulging up and out of the waistband of the wearer's shorts. The gentleman sporting it made it himself. "I may have embellished the size," he noted.

Truly, where else can an otherwise respectable fellow wear a shirt that reads "ASS: The Other Vagina" in public? Hedonism II might be his only chance in the world. I sympathize, and to each his own and all that, but I find it hard to smile at a sweet sexagenarian whose shirt reads, "Let's play a coin game: If it's heads, I get tail. If it's tails, I get head."

Day 4

On our last day, we meet Beth, who runs **Wild Women Vacations**, which specializes in erotic trips for bi-leaning ladies. She tells us about a lady-focused party that night in the resort's sex play area, and we get excited, because Hedo is largely straight. When we arrive, Beth greets us excitedly.

"You came!" she says.

Another host chimes in, "Well, they haven't come yet."

Sex toys are scattered about the rooms, including the Hi massager, a vibrator about the size and shape of an electric mixer that can give women orgasms through their clothes. There's a vibrating saddle-plus-dildo apparatus named the Sybian, and a Womanizer, which is like a benign vacuum cleaner hose for your nether bits. A fisting demo takes place; the woman lending the helping hand is also the dominatrix of the evening. She's mostly retired, with kind eyes, and wears a hat with sparkly stones that read "SEXY." While she flogged me, she ran her fingers lightly along my back and said, "You're so delicate. I don't want to hurt you."



Hedo's fisting demo. Illustration by Kelsey Beyer

Day 5

As we leave, I'm grateful that we experienced no outward discrimination or harassment for being a lesbian couple, but this is possibly due to the fact that Hedo is completely segregated from Jamaica itself. We rarely left those progressive walls, and when we did, it was to be shuttled to Rick's Cafe, another white tourist destination that didn't care about our queerness. Of course, most everything that took place at Hedo would have been illegal in Jamaica proper—in most of the United States, even, which tends to frown upon public nudity and overt displays of non-normative sexuality (not to mention exhibitionism, BDSM, and drinking beverages in pools). I'm glad I got to exercise my sexual freedoms abroad before they are outright outlawed by Mike Pence.

Five days of nudity didn't make me fall in love with all my body's flaws and imperfections, but it did help me realize that there are a thousand more important things that I could and should be focusing on than finding an Instagram filter that best minimizes Sandra. Spending a week consorting and chatting with hundreds of nudists, almost all of whom were exceedingly friendly, cheerful, and eager to share how much they relished the freedom that is denied to them in their day-to-day lives was refreshing, uplifting even.

After we returned home, I found myself being more cavalier—walking brazenly from my bedroom to the bathroom with no towel, even! I may not have become a #BrandNudeYouAtH2, as Hedo's hashtag proffered, but I was definitely less uptight, and far less clothes-minded. And that counts for a lot.