

Florida's Haulover Beach: A Touch of the Riviera in America

A quiz: the Netherlands (41,543 km²) has 160 of them, while the state of Florida (151,670 km²) in the USA has only one. What could that be? The answer isn't windmills or tulip farms; it's designated clothing–optional beaches, where you can swim or sunbathe au naturel. (At least officially and publicly: Florida has a few remote, unsanctioned beaches naturists use, and dozens of private nudist resorts.)



It may seem odd to most Europeans that in the “Sunshine State” of the “Land of the Free” that “skinny–dipping” – the American term for swimming in your own skin – is so limited. Really odd, since so many prominent Americans of the past indulged in nudism: founding fathers (Benjamin Franklin), U.S. Presidents (J. Q. Adams and Theodore Roosevelt), and cultural icons (Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman). As Whitman said, “There comes moods when clothes of ours are not only too irksome to wear, but are themselves indecent.” And what an affront to Nature and to Nature’s God! But there’s one place in Florida where naturists have openly declared their independence.

The designated clothing–optional or naturist area of Haulover Beach Park is a 0.65 kilometer stretch of beautiful Atlantic shoreline where your bare skin is the most fashionable thing to wear, and where no one will question your choice. It’s visited by thousands each day, a mix of local residents and tourists; many tourists are here in South Florida largely because of this beach, and would otherwise be vacationing elsewhere in the Caribbean, or the Greek islands, or on the French Riviera.

Unlike as at many unsanctioned nude beaches in America, you don’t have to park and hike 3 kilometers, or rappel down a three hundred meter cliff to get to the beach. This naturist beach is only a few hundred meters from convenient parking. (Use of the beach is free; parking costs \$5 per car.) Nor do you need to keep your clothes handy to dress temporarily in case park rangers or law officers appear; when the police drive by at Haulover, just wave and smile, and they’ll smile back at you.



The clothing–optional area at Haulover was established in 1991 by South Florida Free Beaches, a local naturist group affiliated with America’s national Naturist Society (www.naturistsociety.com). It took a few years for local government and community leaders to realize the naturist beach was not a threat to public order and morality, but a provision beneficial to the community and accepted by a majority of citizens. Former Sunny Isles Beach Mayor David Samson in fact noted in 2002 that “the presence of naturist families significantly cleaned up and improved the area.” Within fifteen years, Haulover Beach usage quadrupled, with significant benefits to the local economy.

Today at Haulover’s naturist beach area you’ll find a concession offering food and beach chair and umbrella rentals. There are lifeguards and fresh water showers. The naturist organization B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation offers fresh fruit, ice cream, and naturist literature and souvenirs during the weekend, and periodic beach festivals during the year. The water’s a warm 30°C (86°F) in the summer, seldom dipping below 21°C (70°F) even in the coolest months. Haulover is a few miles north of Miami Beach’s South Beach, famous for its nightlife and laid–back tropical atmosphere. Cosmopolitan Miami Beach allows women to sunbathe top–free, but for total freedom Haulover Beach is the place to be.



America’s a strange place. You can steal millions from investors and wind up with a slap on the wrist, or (maybe) a brief vacation at a “country–club” prison, but take off your clothes to go swimming? Is this small beach in South Florida the only area of sanity and reason left in America?

Information on Haulover’s naturist beach is available on the web sites of South Florida Free Beaches at www.sffb.com and of Beach Education Advocates for Culture, Health, Environment and Safety (B.E.A.C.H.E.S.) Foundation Institute at www.beachesfoundation.org.

Photo: SFFB (David Baum, Grey Vanaman), TR archive

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