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EXCLUSIVE My life as a nudist - and the benefits of stripping off: Naturist reveals how getting naked can bring 'exhilaration', a sense of 'total well-being' - and that the practice is going mainstream

- **Andrew Welch, 59, reveals how his life-long devotion to stripping off began**
- **An Ipsos survey found that 6.75m Brits would identify as a 'naturist' or 'nudist'**
- **READ MORE:** Officials back beach on Italian island as venue for nude weddings

By ANDREW WELCH FROM BRITISH NATURISM FOR MAILONLINE
PUBLISHED: 08:42, 8 June 2024 | **UPDATED:** 08:47, 8 June 2024

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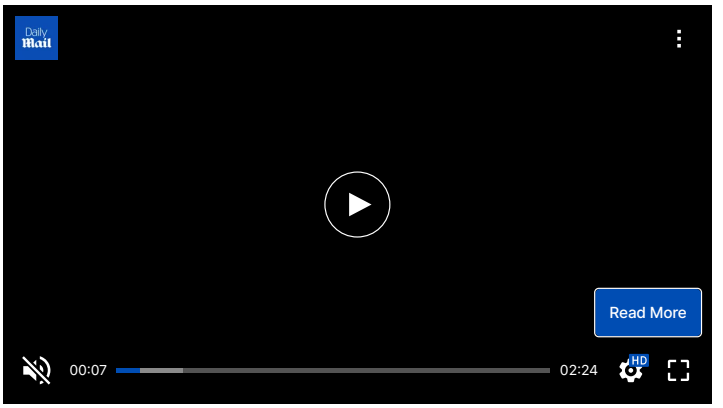
It's 1979. I'm 14. Loose-limbed and gangly, though not especially tall.

My hair falls below my ears and probably only gets a wash when I swim. I'm in **France** on holiday, abroad as a family for the first time, finally escaping the usual fortnight of rain-dodging in the UK.

The beach is a short drive away. Flat and wide with fine sand, backed by grass-flecked dunes, wild Atlantic rollers crashing onto the beach beyond. Aside from the mews of seagulls and other birds, it's peaceful, relaxing and idyllic.



Well, probably.

I don't really know. Only one thing interests me. Not far away are other beach users, lazing about on their towels absorbing the sunshine or hugging their knees under umbrellas in the shade and most of them have no clothes on.

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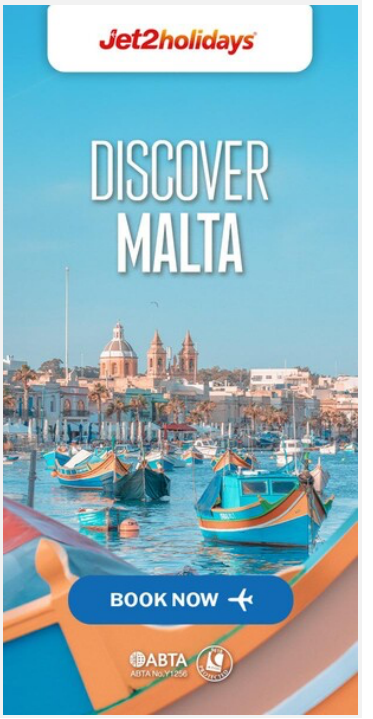

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Andrew Welch (above), a spokesman for British Naturism, reveals how getting naked can bring a sense of 'total well-being'

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I confess - I ran along the top of the dunes to make sure. A group of six are tucking into a picnic (or pique-nique, who knows?). I guess it's a family, in three generations, including grey-haired, leather-skinned elders and a girl of around my age.

I had never even considered that my grandmother had a naked body, let alone imagined I would see it. Especially over lunch.

My overwhelming feeling was that I wanted to be part of it. I wasn't going to do it in front of my siblings, but I did manage a few swims in the sea, pulling my speedos off under the water and balling them in a fist. What a feeling!

Later, in the early nineties, I took a package holiday to a Greek island and eagerly consumed the information from the rep at the welcome meeting, recommending bars, restaurants, markets, sights, trips and excursions - and beaches.

The best one, she said, was a pine-and-thyme-scented, 10-minute stroll around the headland from the village. It had a terrific view across the Aegean, was never crowded and boasted a taverna, right on the sand. It was also a beach, she added, used by nude sunbathers.

Andrew (above) writes: 'Naturism is so much more than just taking your clothes off. If you asked 100 naturists what they get from it you'd probably get 100 different answers, but common themes include the feeling of sheer relaxation, escaping from the daily grind, a sense of total well-being, and the company of a happy, non-judgemental bunch of like-minded people'

The experience completely met those long-held expectations that originated on those Atlantic beaches. The most curious thing is that it took me a few hours to decide to strip off. I don't know why. I do remember feeling a bit of an interloper until I did.

But once I had... it just felt completely right. Of course, I had no inkling of how it was going to affect the rest of my life, nor become my career, nor that one day that simple act of taking off my trunks on a Greek beach would be significant enough to be written about in MailOnline.

Naturism is so much more than just taking your clothes off.

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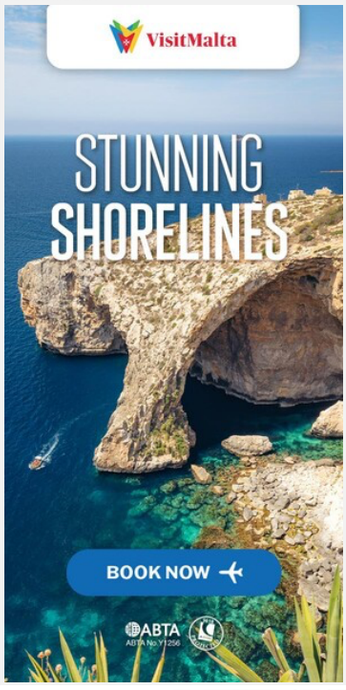

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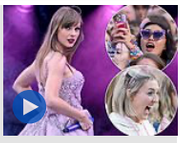

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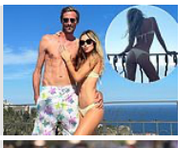

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Andrew (above) says there's 'a peace and tranquility' about naturist resorts that 'isn't always found elsewhere'

If you asked 100 naturists what they get from it you'd probably get 100 different answers, but common themes include the feeling of sheer relaxation, escaping from the daily grind, a sense of total well-being, and the company of a happy, easy-going, welcoming, non-judgemental bunch of like-minded people who have found something that truly enhances their lives.

Anyone who has been skinny-dipping will know the exhilarating feeling of the water sliding over all of your skin - and to sit back on the beach without that wet costume clinging to you is something else.

It's also good for you - the human body was not designed to be completely wrapped up in clothes and subjected to artificial heat and light sources and air conditioning 24/7.

Recent scientific research has proved that instead of feeling ashamed, embarrassed or vulnerable, improvements in self-esteem, confidence and body image result from spending time naked with other naked people.

Given decades of social conditioning, you might be surprised to learn that many people say a naturist resort or event is the place they feel at their safest.

Since those early toe-in-the-water experiences, I've taken many naturists holidays and recaptured those wonderful feelings. There may be a small number of naturist resorts compared to those who insist you keep your cozzie on, but - boy! - there's a huge range, and across the world.

There's a peace and tranquility about them that isn't always found elsewhere with something to cater for all tastes and pockets.

From wild camping with minimal facilities, getting right back to nature, right up to all-inclusive, luxury beach hotels.

There are nude cruises, hotels large and small, apartment and villa complexes, campsites with modern chalets for holiday rental - with restaurants, bars and shops that would put a small village to shame - and sports, activity and entertainment programmes throughout the season, and a whole lot more.

The uninitiated might perceive that nudity is obligatory, with a changing room beside reception and an instruction to strip before you go any further, but it's not.

An Ipsos survey published in 2022 found that 6.75million Brits would identify as a 'naturist' or 'nudist'

People are free to do as they choose - the weather sometimes being the deciding factor. Most people take a naturist holiday because they want to be nude, but if you like to dress for dinner, want to slip on a cardie if the breeze gets up, or cover yesterday's sunburn against today's rays, then you can.

Nudity is mandatory in swimming pools, and putting something like a towel between a seat and a bare bum is essential.

You might also feel that being naked amongst many other naked holidaymakers will be weird but it soon becomes unremarkable. There's also a lovely understanding amongst naturists that taking unsolicited photos of people is bad behaviour.

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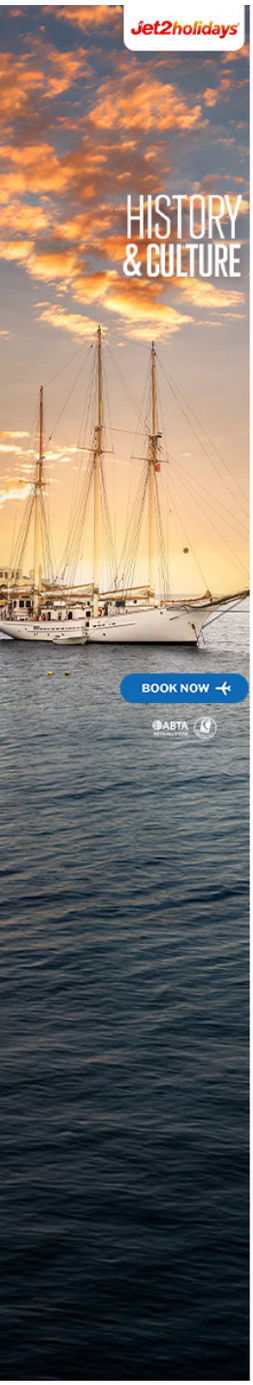
EXCLUSIVE I run a nudist resort and these are the do's and don'ts of getting naked at a holiday retreat (and how erections are dealt with) ›

And, I am pleased to say, it's going mainstream.

An Ipsos survey published in 2022 found that 6.75million Brits would identify as a 'naturist' or 'nudist' (interchangeable terms, really) with 39 per cent of those surveyed having skinny-dipped, sunbathed nude or visited a nude beach or resort.



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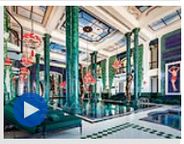

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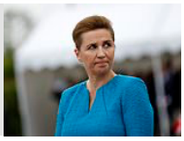

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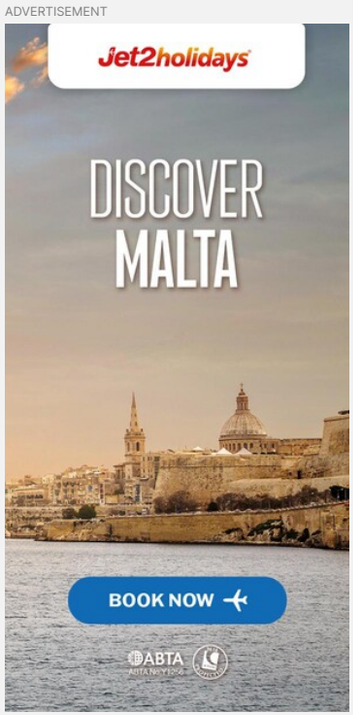

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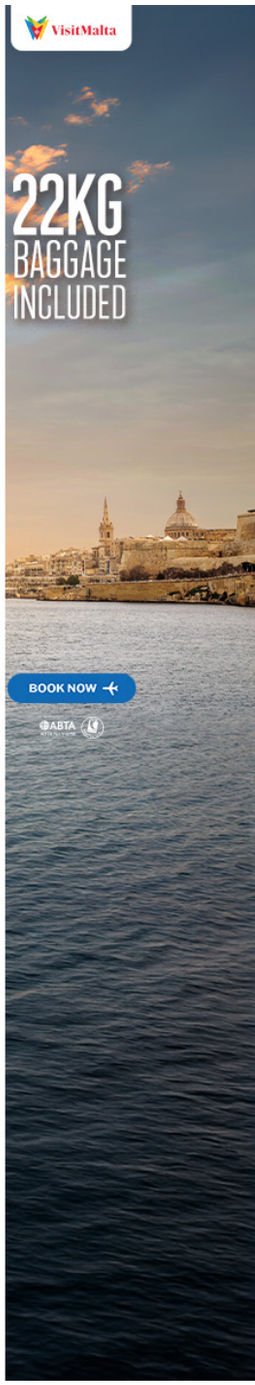

Naturism is often seen as something for older people, but the survey also revealed (pun intended) that almost half of 16 to 24-year-olds had participated in the previous 12 months.

My next trip is to a huge, sprawling resort in France with a long list of different types of accommodation, food and drink outlets, a long sandy beach and the most chilled vibe pervading the natural landscape as holidaymakers of all ages enjoy the perfect way to de-stress.

Join me?

*Andrew Welch is a spokesman for British Naturism. For more visit the British Naturism website - **www.bn.org.uk.***

France

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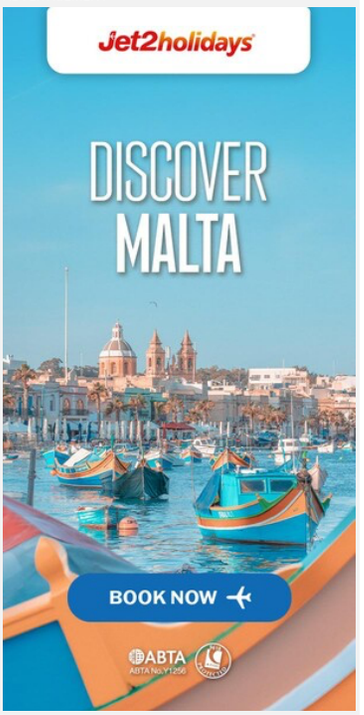

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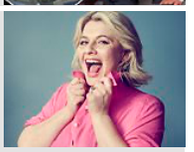
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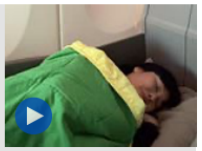

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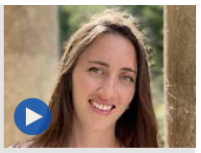

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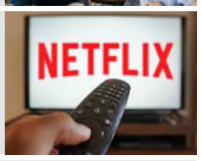

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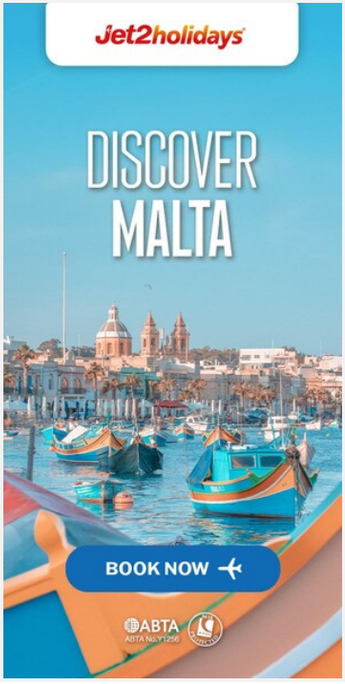

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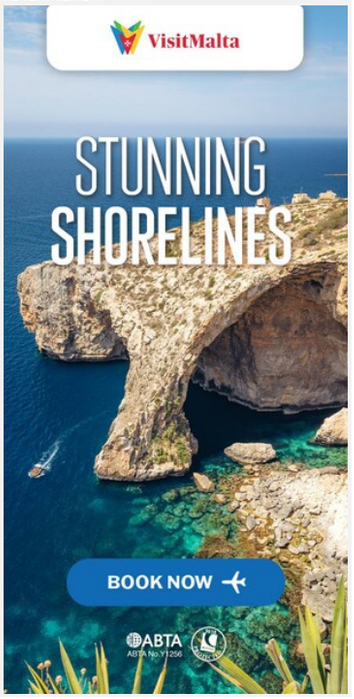

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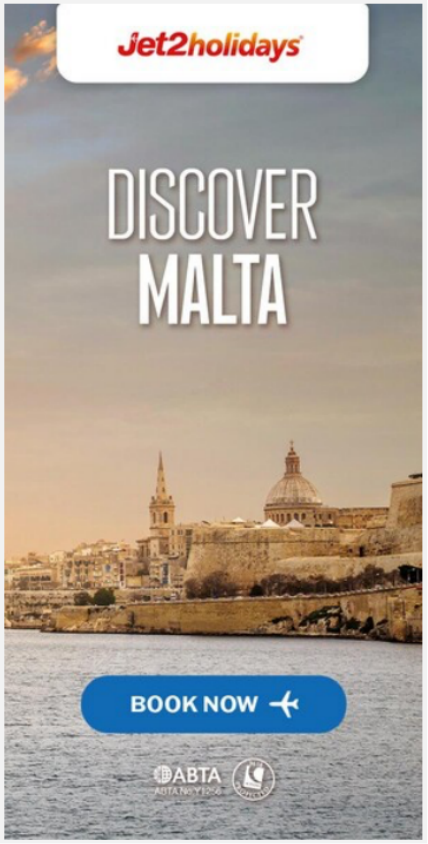

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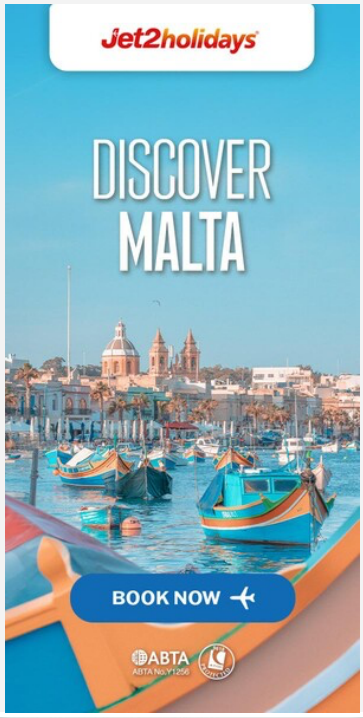

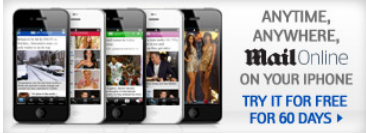

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