

The Newsletter

Go barefoot all over!

The Ups and Downs of a Mexican Nude Beach Proposal



Playa Zipolite, Mexico

Northern North Americans too often overlook Mexico in discussing clothing-optional beaches. Although public nudity is against the law in Mexico, many in the country point with some pride to the locally sanctioned nude beach of Playa Zipolite at the southern point of Oaxaca. Mexican newspaper and travel magazine articles routinely note the existence of other naturist-friendly beaches at resorts and of quietly tolerated nude use of public beaches in states such as Baja California Sur, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Quintana Roo. Recognizing the enormous draw such sites have for international tourists when the location can offer a degree of security and basic amenities, local politicians and developers in Mexico are beginning to prod state governments to allow portions of secluded beaches to be used clothes-free.

The latest widely debated project began and may have sadly ended in 2009. In February of that year, Spanish-language Mexican newspapers began reporting on a new proposal south of Guerrero's Acapulco Bay called *Chirulandia*. Acapulco's heyday was in the '50s and '60s, but with overcrowding, water pollution, non-stop development of once pristine coastline, and general decay, foreign tourists found other places to enjoy. Acapulco and the *Costa Chica* coastal region to the northwest and southeast have improved enough in recent years to begin attracting large numbers of happy visitors once again, but some politicians along the coastline understand that naturist opportunities can garner additional revenue.

In the town of Marquelia (pop. approx. 14,600) with its downtown markets a few kilometers from the shore, Mayor

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MEXICAN NUDE BEACH PROPOSAL, *cont.*

Jesus Rico Santana proposed that a portion of the town's 12-kilometer-long, palm-lined coastline be open to nude use. Wanting to expand beyond Marquelia's current 12 hotels and 100,000-per-year visitors, Rico Santana is hoping that an eco-tourism angle for the municipal beaches would draw visitors from Europe, the U.S., and Canada. The development at and near the beaches would pass environmental scrutiny, he argued, and feature solar energy, eco-huts, drinking water, a treatment plant, and locations specifically catering to gay and lesbian visitors. Advocates selected the name *Chirulandia* for the project from the regional term *chirundo*, which refers to walking naked.

Newspapers reported that some local "social" and religious groups denounced the idea, worrying that a clothing-optional beach would cause a series of problems. One avowed concern frets that tolerating any public nudity—even if only on a specified stretch of beach—would encourage lewd behavior. This vacuous concern is standard throughout North America, but when nude beaches are open and patrolled like any other public site, laws specifically banning blatant sexual activity in public are enforceable and usually sufficient to forestall any such problem.

A second concern was that nudity in public would cause an increase in drug-related problems. Although Playa Zipolite (often in the Mexican mind when nude beaches are brought up) *did* have a serious drug problem in decades past, once officials

patrolled the beach and took clear action against drug dealers and users, the problem at Zipolite was reduced to no more than found at most any other public beach.

A third concern arose from local homophobia over the proposed openness to gay and lesbian visitors. Vocal segments of opposition got it into their heads that gays and lesbians—especially *naked* gays and lesbians—would be spreading sexually transmitted disease across the region. It's frustrating that naturists and textile advocates of clothing-optional beaches must still respond to this nonsense.

Fourthly, critics said that *nudismo* "contravenes the uses, customs, and values of all the people who have a faith, a religion. The one thing that we want to maintain is the use and preservation of the moral values and ethical principles that govern human life and respect for all religions." Since Mexico's revolution of the 1910s, the political and legal authority of the Church has been dramatically curtailed, yet the tradition of Mexico's Catholicism remains a strong social presence in people's decisions regarding social policy. This concern—weak as it is, given the consistency of Christian faith with family-friendly naturist principles—will need to be addressed for the foreseeable future.

A final shot against Chirulandia tried to turn eco-values back against project supporters, arguing that new access to the beach would adversely affect natural areas near various mangrove swamps.

In March, newspaper reports said that Mayor Rico Santana had heard the criticisms against the Chirulandia project, deemed them the voice of "selfish" people not wanting the beaches visited by others, and noted that Marquelia had the state government's authority and financial support to go forward with the project. He continued to argue that Chirulandia would be environmentally-friendly (perhaps learning from Acapulco's excessive development to the northwest decades ago), and routinely reminded people of the many jobs and financial benefit that would come to Marquelia. Many of the town's small businesses supported the idea for this reason.

What is encouraging for North American naturists is Rico Santana's argument that many tourists are looking for clothing-optional beaches, and that Marquelia's "virgin coastline"—if opened to nude use—would attract the kind of visitors and income the town could use. Marquelia might not be able to compete with more famous vacation sites like Cancun and Mazatlan on their own textile terms, but there is enough international demand for nude beaches that a significant number of travelers would fly to Acapulco and drive the 100 or so kilometers to Marquelia to take advantage of a naturist opportunity there.

Rico Santana was quoted as saying that the project is aimed primarily at people with a European mindset, a people who can bring a new culture to Marquelia, a people who do not associate nudism with disease or insanity, but who understand,



Mark Storey

Playa Zipolite

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MEXICAN NUDE BEACH PROPOSAL, cont.

perhaps better than Marquelia does presently, that nudity is “civilized” and, perhaps, civilizing.

In April, Mexico’s federal office for environmental protection (La Procuradria Federal de Protección al Ambiente) put the brakes on Chirulandia. One unnamed local anti-nudity critic went to PROFEPA arguing that a road and path at La Guadeloupe and El Medano Creek were harming a white mangrove forest and coastal environments. PROFEPA bowed to this minimal pressure, and forced all work on these two and other aspects of Chirulandia to stop until a full Environmental Impact Manifest was approved.

As the summer of 2009 wore on, Mexico’s economy (paralleling that of the U.S.) was faltering. Reports of swine flu and drug-related violence in other regions added to the already hurting Mexican tourist industry. By August, Mexican newspapers were reporting Marquelia’s general secretary Hildeberto Bustos Castillo as explaining that with recent 40 percent budget cuts, the town “cannot afford the capital outlay required for an environmental study,” and that the Chirulandia project must thus be “temporarily suspended.” PROFEPA had also levied fines against Marquelia for the environmental damage purportedly caused by the two beach access routes, and the town was reported as struggling to pay for what work on the road and path had already been completed.

Those promoting Chirulandia may have simply been waving a pro-environment flag to sway public opinion to further their personal business interests, or they may have had the economic well-being of the town in mind. It’s hard to say from so far away. And the project managers may have overstepped their authority in beginning development—perhaps with too little concern for maintenance of environmental health and authenticity—before gaining needed approval. It’s not clear from newspaper reports issued as late as December if Chirulandia is dead or sleeping.

Still, the attempt by non-naturists to bring politicians, townspeople, developers, bankers, and tourist interests together to sanction officially a nude beach on public lands can teach naturists much. We must take advantage of the readiness and tenacity that those outside our naked community might marshal amongst themselves if only they see domestic and international naturist visitors as valuable and welcome assets to their communities.

What can we do to convince municipalities to open new or additional doors to nude recreation on public lands? Aside from straightforward approaches often requiring some experience in grassroots activism, there are at least three simple, cost-free, effective actions any of us can take.

* If you go to a restaurant near a nude beach or naturist resort, tell the wait staff or manager, “We were over at the Free Beach today, and some folks there said this is a good place to eat!” You don’t have to talk about naturism or the beach, as the restaurateur will simply smile, nod, and be glad to hear that

someone is recommending the food. It will sink in moments afterwards that local naturism means a healthy business climate for the restauraunt.

* Do the same thing at any commercial lodging you use near a nude beach. Keep in mind that you can do this whether or not you’ve actually been to the beach that day. Hotel managers are not going to throw you out upon hearing that a naturist recommended their rooms to you.

* Take the time to go online and find tourist offices of a selection of seaside vacation areas. Just Google the name of your favorite city along with “tourism,” and you’ll quickly find the municipal agency’s website with a feature allowing you to ask for information. Simply email them and ask, “My wife/husband and I are thinking of vacationing in your town for a week this year, but we like to go to places that have European-style clothing-optional beaches. Do you have any near your hotels and restaurants?” Unless you’re really lucky, you’ll probably receive a brief reply advising you to look elsewhere. Even so, these are *the* key people we want to reach with word that money-spending naturists enjoy vacation travel. It wouldn’t take many of these emails for the agencies to hear the demand and pass word of it along to city officials for their consideration. 🐣



Hidden Beach Resort in Mexico.

N Trends

Utah in Hot Water

Diamond Fork (aka Fifth Water Canyon Hot Spring) has enjoyed clothing-optional use for decades. Southeast of Provo, Utah, the natural rock pools have in recent years been augmented by regular users with cement to form a hot spring setting that guidebook author Marjorie Gersh-Young calls the “jewel in Utah’s crown.” On October 10, 2009, however, Utah County Sheriff’s deputies snuck up on nine nude soakers (six of whom were Forest Service firefighters) and issued a citation to each for “lewdness.” The soakers had hiked to the springs at night and worked their way well beyond the clothed people at the lower pools to avoid offending anyone. They were justifiably mystified at the charges. Utah law does not recognize that nudity of the benign variety can exist. All nudity is charged as lewdness.

Three years ago, U.S. Forest Service staff posted a sign along the trail saying, “While nudity is not prohibited on Forest Service trails, the Fifth Water Trail is frequently used by families and Scout troops, so please use discretion.” The sign was in place on that October night. The Forest Service now says that it will have the sign removed, and the ranger who posted it appears to be “admitting” that he acted alone in placing it, while the Forest Supervisor is strangely silent on the matter. The ranger has now publicly apologized for his supposedly unauthorized action. It’s odd, though, that it has

taken the Forest Service three years to determine that the sign was not consistent with the moral (mis)leanings of specific administrators.

The Naturist Action Committee’s Don Zirbel and Bob Morton have been in contact with most of those receiving citations, and, as Morton says, “NAC hopes to assist them in their search for representation so that when they appear in court they can present a unified defense. They are scattered all over the place, so conferring with each has been challenging.”

Concerning the Utah County Sheriff’s Department, which has a deserved local reputation for being heavy-handed, Morton notes that “the agenda of the County Sheriff’s Department is unambiguous, even though their public statements have not been. A spokeswoman for the Department has suggested that deputies were responding to a complaint at the springs. However, NAC has information obtained under Utah’s Government Records Access and Management Act that specifically identifies the raid on the springs in the middle of the night as having been initiated by the deputies themselves.” Regardless of the County Sheriffs attitude, NAC is committed to defending naturist freedoms in Utah and elsewhere. 🐾



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