



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Sea & Suds

I've always been a beach girl, an avid fan of flip-flops, tank tops, shorts and shades. When my feet hit the sand, I become a different person—a person I'd like to bottle up and bring home.

What is it about the beach that transforms me, draws me in like gravity? I sat down recently to ponder my love for the world's best vacation hole. Here are some reasons that came to mind.

The colors: I find it great fun to drive down the road and see rows of houses painted like Easter eggs. Happy hues are everywhere, from funky art in gift stores to hot pink Adirondack chairs outside every gas station. Living in suburbia, I'm used to monochromatic palettes, and it's a refreshing break to see people getting gutsy with color.

The consistency: The beach looks the same now as it did when I was young. Unlike most things, it doesn't age. There's comfort in that because it makes it feel like home.

An easygoing attitude: Technology is out, Jimmy Buffet is in. Anyone working a BlackBerry or planning a conference call is likely to endure ridicule. Cocktails are in vogue any time of day, justified by the saying, "It's five o'clock somewhere."

Unconditional acceptance: The beach welcomes everyone, regardless of circumstance or appearance. Whether I shave my legs, paint my toenails or pack on a few pounds is irrelevant. I can go with a party or alone, comfortable either way in the hospitable environment.

Unlimited resources: An endless supply of water, shells and sand can entertain my kids for hours. Buckets and shovels—combined with imagination—create a pleasant batch of memories. Watching my kids look for sand dollars, build forts under the pier and bury each other in the sand is like reliving my childhood, only this time I'm wise enough to cherish it.

The space: There are no walls at the beach, and that makes it impossible to keep a guard up. The mix of fresh air, sunshine and ocean breeze tears down defenses, creating a confessional of sorts. Sometimes the conversation is internal, an inner monologue held on a long walk down the seashore. Other times the conversation includes loved ones, people who care about the particulars of my life. However my thoughts unleash, the result is always therapeutic.

The restoration: The beach recharges my battery by unplugging me from the world. Disconnecting from reality calms my nerves, clears my head and zaps my worries all at once. Free of responsibility and distractions, I can enjoy my family, focus on simple blessings. One of my favorite writing holes is under a beach umbrella, listening to the waves crash and scribbling on a notepad I keep in my beach bag.

What about you? Is there anything you'd add to this list? Perhaps your happy place isn't as much the beach as it is the lake, the mountains or another nook of nature. Whatever the case, the reasons are probably similar. We all have an escape of choice, a place we go to relieve stress and catch a much-needed breath.

Wherever you vacation this summer, I hope you embrace the social code. I hope you walk around barefoot, catnap on a hammock, eat lunch at two o'clock and dinner at eight. Most of all, I hope you let the change of scenery work its magic on you. Summer's the perfect excuse to break rules, and whatever peace you find away from home, try and bring some back.

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