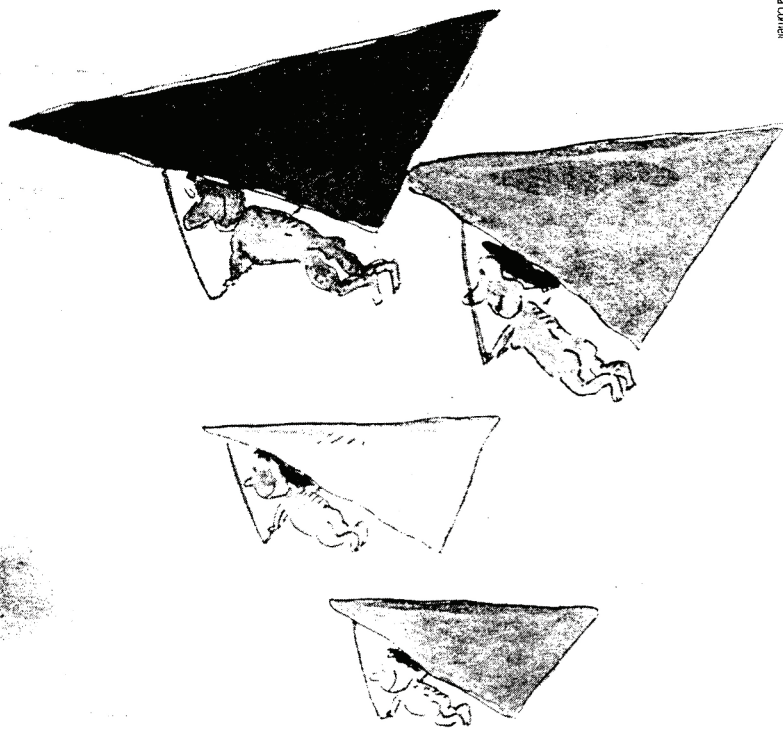


Offering cruises, videos and fancy resorts, marketers are taking nudism beyond volleyball in the buff.

Naked appeal

By Lisa Coleman and Matt Rees



FREDERICK BISCHOFF was ordained a fundamentalist minister in the 1960s, but after a visit to a nudist colony in 1979 he decided to make his paradise here on earth. In 1981 Bischoff founded Club Paradise at Paradise Lake, a nudist condominium resort in Land O' Lakes, Fla. Two years ago a condominium at the resort went for about \$73,000. Now it goes for \$100,000. Club Paradise is sold out, and Bischoff is building a \$33 million nudist development with 143 planned condo units in the Dominican Republic. He says nearly half the units have already been sold.

Nudism—or “naturism,” as serious nudists call it—has always had a steady, if small, cult of devotees. You’ve seen the pictures—usually a bunch of paunchy middle-aged folks playing volleyball in the buff.

Recently, marketing people have been trying to expand the range of goods and services they sell to the naturists, and they’ve been doing a pretty good job of it. Including cruises, resorts and sundry merchandise—videos, coffee mugs and the occasional T shirt for those nippy days—nudism is bringing in revenues of about \$120 million a year. And the number of participants is growing some 20% annually, according to a recent study for the Trade Association for Nude Recreation by Glyn Stout, a Stanford M.B.A. who has run a nudist resort in Los Gatos, Calif. since 1977.

One encouraging sign: An estimated 20% of U.S. adults have swum naked. That’s up from 15% in the early 1980s. And TANR claims its membership is up to 70 companies from 40 two years ago.

One of those new TANR members is Bare Necessities Tour & Travel, Inc., set up two years ago by Thomas Tiemann, a corporate lawyer from Austin, Tex. The company charters cruise ships, rents resorts and sells berths and rooms to the clothes-free crowd. Tiemann has already filled up a 900-naturists Caribbean cruise that doesn’t sail for another four months, bringing him \$1.2 million in revenues for the one-week charter.

“What attracted me to this business was the economics,” says Tiemann. Guests pay \$1,800 to \$5,200 for the week, depending on cabin location. Berths on a comparable clothes-required cruise go for \$1,200 to \$2,400 during the peak winter season. Tiemann sells one large charter and two smaller charters a year, and says his profit margin is near 40%. Next year Tiemann says he plans to reserve an entire Jamaican resort for two weeks for exclusive use by nudists. He uses a network of nudist clubs to market his cruises, cutting club owners in for a slice of his profits if they push his vacations to their members.

There are even signs that the big cruise marketers are taking notice. Industry leader Carnival Cruise Lines, Inc. set up topless decks on some of its ships in the late 1980s.

In keeping with the way most naturists see themselves, the ads for nudist products avoid sexual innuendo and remain wholesome. Ads in mainstream publications like *USA Today*, *The Atlantic* and *Caribbean Travel & Life* push nudism as a family activity that lets executives and other busy people strip away the stress of corporate life along with its uniform.

Ed Lange, a former magazine photographer, now runs the Elysium Institute, a nudist retreat in Topanga Canyon, Calif., and a publishing company and mail order house, with combined revenues of \$1.5 million. Lange’s advertising pitch: “There’s nothing lewd about nude.”

Still, Glyn Stout, the M.B.A. turned nudist resort developer, comes close to crossing the line when he gushes: “The appeal [of naturism] is something that comes from mutual vulnerability. It makes for smoother communications across gender lines. It’s like being in the Garden of Eden.” Is that pre- or post-apple? ■