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Top Topless Beaches 2005

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The French are credited with many great inventions, such as the bicycle, pasteurization, the barometer and, more recently, the 36-hour work week, but one cultural contribution that rarely makes it into the history books is sunbathing au naturel.

Of course, the French were not the first people to frolic on the beach in a state of semi-undress--the Polynesians after all have been doing it for millennia. But what the French did was popularize it, to make it, as they make so many things, chic.

This laissez-faire attitude towards topless tanning is largely due to French actress Brigitte Bardot, who came to embody (pun intended) the sexy, laid-back spirit of Saint-Tropez on France's Cote d'Azur. In 1952, a two-

piece bathing suit that would be considered modest by today's standards was then seen as being controversial, but Bardot and other young starlets such as Ursula Andress would pose for photographers at Cannes wearing the tiniest bikinis imaginable.

By the 1960s, it was common to see starlets tanning topless on the beaches and yachts in and around the Riviera. Today, even though many people still prefer to keep their suits in place, practically every beach along Europe's long Mediterranean coastline is clothing-optional.

With a few exceptions, one place where bikini tops remains firmly in place is the U.S. Avant garde fashion designer Rudi Gernreich made waves in 1964 when he created the topless bathing suit, which was modeled by his wife Peggy Moffett. Although many magazines picked up the story and ran an image, according to the Web site BikiniScience.com, Life magazine refused to publish the full photograph with the explanation that, "This is a family magazine, and naked breasts are only allowed if the woman is an aborigine."

Fast forward about 40 years, and some American beaches, such as Miami's South Beach, as well as Black's Beach in San Diego, have adopted a more casual approach to toplessness. There are also dozens of naturist resorts in the U.S.--"naturists" are full nudists--but in many places public nudity is still prohibited by law and carries a major fine. Throughout most of Europe, South America and parts of the Caribbean, it's a very different story--at least on the beach.

Unsurprisingly, taking it off is taking off with the travel industry. The Kissimmee, Fla.-based American Association for Nude Recreation estimates that nude travel is a \$400 million global industry--up from \$300 million in 2001.



The 20-year-old Bardot posing in 1956 with uncharacteristic modesty.

Below is a list of some of the best beaches to perfect the no-tan-line tan, whether you prefer to take it off, or take it in. Remember to bring plenty of SPF and watch out for people lurking with telephoto lenses.



1. Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro.

Rio de Janeiro is home to Carnival, Copacabana and some of the tiniest bikinis on the planet. On a warm day, it seems that half the population of Rio is enjoying a dip in the ocean or a game of volleyball. Although Ipanema beach is infamous thanks to the song, spread your towel on Copacabana Beach, preferably in the shadow of the Copacabana Palace Hotel, where rates start at \$360.

For more information, call 55 21 2548 7070 or visit www.copacabanapalace.com.br.



2. Black's Beach, San Diego, USA

Black's Beach is one of the best areas for parasailing in San Diego--thanks to the high cliffs as well as its status as a semi-nude beach. Black's Beach is also one of the most popular surfing beaches in San Diego, and it's perfect for taking long walks and sunbathing on the rocks. If you're planning on leaving part of your bathing suit on the rocks--be careful. Since Black's is a state beach, in some areas nudity is prohibited.



3. Kuta Beach, Bali

Bali's Kuta beach is one of the most popular places on the island to gather and watch the sunset. It's also the heart of Bali's nightlife. But during the day, it's ideal for people watching. Beyond the huge swath of white sand, there's a huge selection of restaurants and nightclubs. Book a stay at the new Uma Ubud from Como Hotels, the group behind the Caribbean's Parrot Cay resort. Rates start at \$185. For more information, call 62 361 972 448 or www.uma.como.bz.



4. South Beach, Florida, USA

South Beach is arguably the best topless beach in the U.S., thanks to the party atmosphere that attracts the young, beautiful and buff. Just about anywhere you go on South Beach is ideal for beach spotting, but one of the best areas is upper Collins Avenue, near the Delano and Raleigh hotels. But if you need a break from the chaos, check into the serene new Ritz-Carlton South Beach, where rates start at \$499. For more information, call (786) 276-4000 or visit www.ritzcarlton.com.



5. Anse du Gouverneur Beach, St Barthelmy, French West Indies

The French-owned island of St. Barthelemy, known as St. Barts, exudes a typical Gallic sang-froid towards beach nudity. Topless tanning is allowed on all beaches but especially on Anse de Grande Saline and Anse du Gouverneur, ("anse" is French for beach). Anse du Gouverneur is our top pick because it's the prettier beach, and on a clear day you can see the islands of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Kitts. The Hôtel St. Barth Isle de France is a small, family-run hotel that is directly on the beach. Rates start at €655 (\$857).

	<p>6. Saint Tropez Beach, French Riviera</p> <p>Film icon Brigitte Bardot is one of the best embodiments of Saint-Tropez style--sexy, barefoot and glamorous. Some would consider the French Riviera the birthplace of topless tanning, and although the beaches tend to be rocky, the glamour quotient more than makes up for it (renting a chaise lounge will take care of the rock problem). The best time to travel there is during July and August, where you'll see such Saint-Tropez regulars like Joan Collins, Naomi Campbell and Roman Abramovich. The recently renovated Carlton Inter-Continental has been a popular choice for celebrities and wanna-bes for generations. Rates start at €255 (\$333). For more information, call: 33 4 93 06 40 06 or visit www.cannes.intercontinental.com.</p>
	<p>7. Paradise Beach, Mylonos, Greece</p> <p>Although most beaches on Mykonos turn into one big party during July and August, Paradise Beach has most of the action. During the day, the beach is chock-a-block with tanned bodies. There are plenty of beach bars, tavernas and water sports, too, in case sitting on a towel makes you bored. At night, there's music, and the crowds dance in the sand until the sun comes up--and then do it all over again. Once a month the beach hosts a full-moon party. The stylish Hotel Belvedere is built like a typical white-washed Cycladic village, with a free-form pool in its center. Guests stay in a converted 18th-century mansion. Rates start at €105 (\$137). For more information, call 30 22890 25122 or visit www.slh.com.</p>
	<p>8. Camps Bay Beach, Cape Town, South Africa</p> <p>Anyone thinking of sun tanning topless in Cape Town should beware. A South African newspaper just revealed that for the past five years, photographers have been snapping photos of topless women sunbathing and selling them to pornography sites. If you spend a sunny afternoon on a Cape Town beach, make sure no one with a telephoto lens is in sight. Cape Town has plenty of beaches to choose from, like Clifton, Camps Bay and Llandudno. Our vote is for Camps Bay because of its proximity to a huge range of stylish bars, lounges and restaurants. The penthouse of The Place on the Bay offers panoramic views of Camps Bay and starts at \$975 per night. For more information, call 27 21 438 7060 or visit www.theplaceonthebay.co.za.</p>
	<p>9. Playa d'en Bossa, Ibiza, Spain</p> <p>The entire island of Ibiza is pretty hedonistic, but some beaches have more of a party vibe than others. Playa d'en Bossa is the longest beach on Ibiza. It is lined with bars and cafes, as well as beautiful bodies on display. Since there's very little in the way of natural shade, rent a beach umbrella and a chaise lounge. At night, the beach is one of the best places for partying in mega-clubs like Space and DC10. The Cas Gasi is a cozy little inn with terracotta colored walls and hand painted tiles. Rates start at €252 (\$329). For more information, call 00 34 971197700 or visit www.casgasi.com.</p>
	<p>10. Playa El Agua, Margarita Island, Venezuela</p> <p>Playa El Agua is arguably the most popular beach on Margarita Island, and with good reason. Apart from the beautiful people who flock there, the three-mile-long beach is lined with palm trees, bars and cafes. The visitors who come here tend to be European and South American, with hardly any Americans. The Hesperia Isla Margarita has the island's only 18-hole golf course, and the bedrooms have dark wood floors and rattan furniture. Rates start at \$60 per person. For more information, call 0295 400-7111 or visit www.hesperiaislamargarita.com.</p>