

THE NAKED ISSUE

Hot Springs Through a Cultural Lens

“I want to get into a hot tub filled with warm water,” Satoshi Furukawa, Japanese surgeon and astronaut, said in an interview right after his return from the International Space Station in 2011.

I can agree with him now. I moved to Oregon from Japan about five years ago, and one of the things I miss from Japan, besides people I love and delicious food, is hot springs. I love every moment of it — the initial shock of the heat to the gradual relaxation in the warm water — it can't be expressed in words, but so so good.

Most homes in Japan have a hot tub by the shower, so you can take a hot bath daily if you like. But the special ones are when you go on a trip. Hotels usually have public baths with large hot tubs for the guests to rest up from the day of traveling or start the morning with a nice hot bath.

Yes, it is public, and no, people do not wear clothes. You go to a changing room and take your clothes off.

I've never questioned this because this is what I grew up with until coming to the U.S., and my friends told me about their experience at hot springs as “unique,” or sometimes “weird.” Is it weird to go into hot springs unclothed?

I've talked with Yuki Kameoka, the managing director of the All Japan Ryokan and Onsen Association. He says foreign tourists tend to face two main barriers to getting into public hot springs or baths. First is “feeling shy or resistant” to being unclothed with strangers because they have



The way to relax fully with your clothes fully off, or not

BY SEIRA KITAGAWA

TERWILLIGER HOT SPRINGS.

Photo by Breanne Schnell, U.S. Forest Service

never experienced that before. However, Kameoka says that once a foreigner experiences hot springs, the resistance often goes away. “You just gotta experience it,” he says.

The second barrier is having tattoos. Traditionally, tattoos are prohibited in hot springs and even many swimming pools in Japan. Kameoka says tattoos are traditionally not well-accepted by the public in Japan. You are asked to hide the tattoos, or you can not enter, which means, in hot springs, you are most likely unable to get in.

Kameoka says, although older generations are still strongly against tattoos in public places, there are some hot springs where people can wear *yuami*, a towel-like

cloth to wear in hot springs to cover the body. He says the culture of hot springs is getting more inclusive.

Recently, I visited the Terwilliger Hot Springs near Cougar Reservoir. We got there around 11 am on Saturday, parked at a spot, and walked over to the U.S. Forest Rangers stand to pay \$12 for entering the hot springs. The ranger warned us about the “clothing optional” policy, and his warning weirdly made me a little uncomfortable.

We walked on a trail for about 10 or 15 minutes until we heard people's voices. I nervously looked around, and felt glad that everyone there at the time had a swimsuit on. After the visit, a ranger informed me

that there tend to be people unclothed in the evenings when it gets darker.

Three pools with hot water and one lukewarm pool lined up in the middle of the forest. The view was amazing — the bright green trees and clear blue sky. Although a sunny day in summer might not have been the wisest choice for dipping yourself in warm water.

Still, about 15 people were enjoying the hot springs with family, friends, or some came by themselves. I had conversations with a couple of people there at the hot springs, which felt natural and calm. I've experienced these things in Japan as well.

“Without any clothes and the way you were born, it's an experience and a relationship deepens,” Kameoka says. He loves the hot springs culture in Japan. He is also the director of Onsen Culture to be a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Many countryside and towns in Japan rely on tourism, and places with hot springs are deeply impacted by the pandemic. He says the number of onsen motels declined over the years.

By being recognized by UNESCO, he wants to bring hope to the people in tourist spots with onsen. “I want them to know that it is something they should be proud of,” he says.

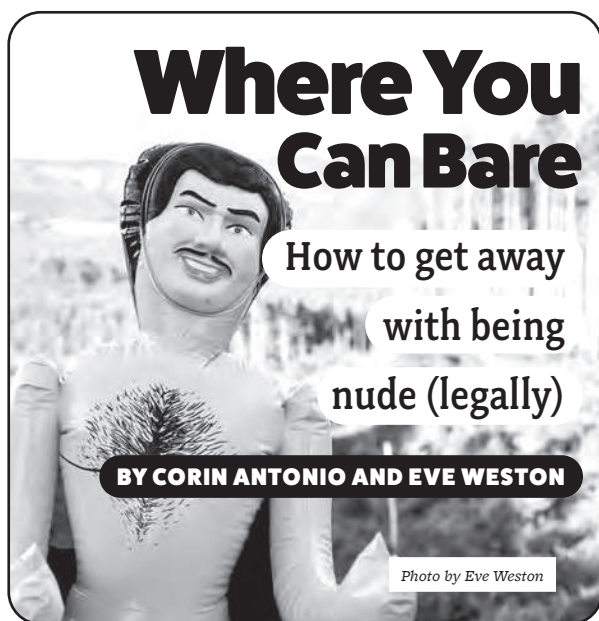
Terwilliger Hot Springs is open from sunrise to sundown and closed Thursdays from 8 am to noon for cleaning. Visit Willamette National Forest Terwilliger (Cougar) Hot Springs for more information. Learn more about Japanese Onsen culture at Japan Onsen (Hot Spring) Association.

Where You Can Bare

How to get away with being nude (legally)

BY CORIN ANTONIO AND EVE WESTON

Photo by Eve Weston



Are you someone that walks around their home naked? Ever wondered: Can I legally walk around outside naked? If you haven't, that's OK, not everyone ponders that question.

But here in Oregon, there's surprisingly a lot of places where you can do just that. From mountain passes to even some beaches, there are spots where you can get your nude on.

Before getting into where you can go, you have to look at what being nude actually means.

Oregon Revised Statute 167.060 defines being nude as the following body parts being uncovered or “less than opaquely” covered: post-pubertal human genitals, pubic areas, post-pubertal human female breast below a point immediately above the top of the areola, covered human genitals in a discernibly turgid state (or as the rest of us call it, an erection).

Oregon law does not prohibit nudity if the exposed genitals and body parts are not being used in a sexual manner. However, municipalities can and have implemented stricter laws banning the exposure of genitalia.

While state law does mention breasts as included in nudity, Oregon has strict freedom of expression laws that have historically protected the right of its citizens to be topless in public. In Eugene and Springfield, public indecency laws prohibiting the exposure of genitalia exclude breasts from the prohibition.

That means if you really wanted to, you could walk around downtown Eugene topless — as long as you're not doing it in a sexual or lewd manner — although this is certainly not common, and you might get some looks or complaints. This also means almost every beach in Lane County is a topless beach, but very few are accepting of nudity. In fact, there is no officially designated “nude beach” in Lane County.

Lane Code § 6.200.100 prohibits the exposure of genitalia in public places. This ordinance may be enforced county wide — although enforcement may be less common in remote areas. In places where there are no local laws prohibiting nudity, it is permissible to be in the nude as long as it does not constitute a “public disturbance.” That means if you're on public land in a jurisdiction that does not explicitly prohibit the exposure of genitalia you can legally hike, camp or bathe in the nude. It's always best in practice to be mindful of your surroundings and respectful of others who may not wish to see a nude person while hiking with their family — so take precautions. Don't be fully nude on a busy hiking trail. That might cause a disturbance, even if it's technically legal.

“Oregon is the perfect place for me. We have some of the nicest and most welcoming places to recreate nude,” says Shirley Gauthier, who has been a nudist for 53 years. “I have the pleasure of being here at this beautiful [nude friendly] place,” she says, “being in the mountains and

the hot springs at dispersed spots through the Willamette National Forest.”

So, why be nude? “Why wear clothes?” Gauthier answers. She has been a member of the Willamettans nudist club outside of Springfield since 1972. “When I first joined, I was 5' 7” and I weighed 128 pounds and I had no breasts and I was super skinny and super self-conscious, and this was one of the few places where I came and I was totally comfortable.”

While there are no officially sanctioned public “clothing optional” areas in Lane County, there are places that have been designated as “clothing optional” by the community.

Glass Bar Island is accessible only by the Willamette River. The Oregon State Parks and Recreation says while the location is not sanctioned by the state as clothing optional, it is known for its clothing optional space by the community. The area is maintained for environmental purposes rather than public use. Travel and enjoy at your own risk.

Terwilliger (Cougar) Hot Springs, located on the McKenzie River District in the Willamette National Forest offers a 1/4 mile hike along the Rider Creek Trail to four soaking pools with varying temperatures. The Forest Service says temperatures range from 85 degrees Fahrenheit in the lower pool to 112 degrees Fahrenheit in the upper pool. The pools are 3 to 12 feet across and an average of 2 to 3 feet deep. The pool floors are mostly bedrock, but some gravel, sand and debris remain at the bottom of the pool.

McCredie Hot Springs, located in the Willamette National Forest eight miles east of Oakridge on Hwy 58 near mile post 46, offers man-made pools bordering Salt Creek.

Nudie Rock on the McKenzie is located on McKenzie View Drive near Armitage Park about one mile east from Coburg Road.

Be sure to check local laws and regulations before venturing out in the nude.