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## Nude Travel Reveals Profits

Christina Valhouli

Earlier this month, Castaways Travel, a Spring, Tex.-based travel agency specializing in nude trips, announced it was offering an all-nude charter flight from Miami to Cancun in May--the first of its kind. Passengers will be invited to disrobe once the plane hits cruising altitude, and the cabin crew will remain dressed. For safety reasons, no hot beverages will be served and, in case you were wondering, all passengers will be sitting on towels.

Castaways co-owner Donna Daniels says that so far she has sold about 70% of the plane's 172 seats. The flight costs \$499 (this is one flight where passengers won't have to worry about excess baggage charges) and participants will be staying at the El Dorado Resort and Spa, where room prices start at \$910 per week. Castaways selling tag line is, "Fly nude, dude!"

The nude travel business, while skimpy on clothes, is covering itself with profits. 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**. Carolyn Hawkins, a spokesperson for the AANR, says the organization has 50,000 members and about 260 affiliated nudist resorts. Most of the resorts are clothing-optional, which means that guests can choose their level of nudity.

The skies are not the only place where people are going au naturel. Looking for a gimmick to increase sales in an increasingly tight market, some cruise lines are also taking it off. For the second year in a row, Carnival (nyse: CCL - news - people ) is offering a clothing-optional cruise on its 2,000-passenger ship Ecstasy. Other cruise lines offering similar cruises include Cunard and Windstar (both owned by Carnival), as well as privately held Star Clippers.

Hollywood, Fla.-based International Lifestyles is the parent company of Super Clubs, which runs some of the best-known clothing-optional resorts in the Caribbean, such as Hedonism II and III, as well as the five-star Grand Lido, and the Breezes chain of resorts. Super Clubs' vice president of sales, David Hancock--who likes to point out that he is not a nudist himself--says that each resort has a nude

section as well as a "prude" section for people who would not rather disrobe entirely.

Hedonism II debuted in 1981. Hancock says the inspiration for the resort came from capitalizing on the "fun, free, laid-back feeling" of Jamaica. While Hancock will not disclose the company's revenue, he says that business has been so good that International Lifestyles opened three new resorts under the Breezes chain last year.

"The nude market is very strong, and we are definitely looking to expand into Mexico and other Caribbean areas," he says.

Hancock says that the two nudist resorts are the most profitable in the company. "The whole market is growing so much that a lot more hotels are considering having a nude week," he adds.

Some uninhibited people would argue that from an economic point of view, it makes more sense to have a clothing-optional beach rather than a traditional one.

Dr. George R. Harker, a former professor at Western Illinois University and nude enthusiast based in Hawaii, calculated the economic impact of transforming a nude beach. Kaloko-Honokohau, a former nude beach on the island of Hawaii, was converted back to a traditional beach in late 1998. Harker, citing the Hawaii Travel Authority statistics, says that in January 1999, the island of Hawaii had a 4% drop in visitors, while the rest of the state saw an increase.

"I can't think of any other reason for the drop in visitors than the closing of the nude beach," says Harker. "The island of Hawaii doesn't have a lot of great beaches, so people would come to Kaloko-Honokohau."

Harker says the 4% decline in visitors translates to 2,873 people, who on average spend \$1,700 apiece on hotels, food and (one hopes) plenty of 30 SPF sunblock. His estimation is that closing the nude beach costs the local economy \$4,941,904 per year.

Pure economics also motivated Donna Daniels to start offering nude travel services. Daniels, who has been a nudist for 22 years, started Castaways with her husband, Jim Bailey, as a traditional travel company nearly ten years ago. In 1995, when airline commissions were cut, they had to find a way to increase profits and thus started booking nude vacations. Now, the nude side of Castaways far exceeds the traditional bookings, accounting for 70% of the \$5 million in sales from 2002.