

in order to use a room. Despite strong disapproval on the part of the management, some surreptitious drug dealing took place among patrons; consumption of mind-altering drugs, often taken just before arriving, was certainly common. As a rule, alcohol was not served, but could be brought in. Stereotypically, sexual encounters in the baths were completely anonymous; however, a few clients report having begun love affairs or friendships as a result of meetings there. A curious dynamic is that during off-hours, when few people were present, contacts could generally be made quickly, while when the building was crowded patrons could become quite choosy, in hopes that the continuing intake would produce more desirable individuals. Some patrons would have ten or more contacts, but the majority seem to have restricted themselves to two or three, or even one.

In the 1980s, with the unfolding of the AIDS crisis in the United States, the bathhouses came under attack because the promiscuous sexual encounters that took place there were held to promote the spread of the disease. Although this charge was denied, and many bathhouses began to distribute safe sex information and condoms as a positive contribution, it was clear that their days of glory were over. Many bathhouses in smaller localities were forced to close for lack of business. The owners of some establishments tried to change them into health clubs, but with mixed success. In San Francisco, as a result of pressure from public officials, the last bathhouse closed its doors in 1987. In Europe, however, bathhouses—usually termed saunas there—continue to flourish, and new ones even open from time to time.

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BEACH, SYLVIA (NANCY) (1887-1962)

American expatriate bookseller, publisher, and intellectual. The daughter of a Presbyterian minister in Princeton, NJ, Beach settled in France during World War I. In 1919 she established Shakespeare and Company, an English-language bookstore and lending library in Paris that was to become one of the chief gathering places of the international avant-garde. Beach's companion, Adrienne Monnier, whose own bookshop was located only a short distance away, played a similar role in French letters. A kind of arbiter and confidant of the whole "Lost Generation," Beach was associated with such figures as Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Bryher (Winifred Ellerman), Ernest Hemingway, Robert McAlmon, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. Her greatest accomplishment was her two decades as publisher for her close friend, the mercurial James Joyce.

A member of the influential lesbian colony in Paris in the years between the wars, Beach nonetheless led a discrete, almost closeted life, supported by her "marriage" with Monnier. Electing to stay on during the German occupation of Paris, where she saved her books from confiscation, she emerged triumphantly after the war as a senior figure in the world of letters.

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BEACHES

Most North American (and many European) cities located near water have a gay (male) beach. If geography permits, it is typically more remote or difficult to reach than the beach serving heterosexuals. Only those "in the know" will go the extra distance, or negotiate the natural barriers, to get there.

Where there are no natural barriers, one portion of a large public beach may become known among homosexuals as

gay territory. Original proximity to a tearoom (public toilet frequented for sexual purposes) may generate a tradition: that a section of beach is gay, and the tradition can survive long after the tearoom is gone. In any event, the sight of hundreds of men, and no women or children, across a stretch of beach, readily leads most heterosexuals, especially with families, to stay clear. Those who unwittingly or stubbornly invade may be offended or subjected to "grossing out." This behavior (one form of camp among gays) is a deliberate enactment of a stereotype attributed to homosexuals that embarrasses the heterosexuals into moving.

A gay beach may be more capable of defense against intruding or threatening heterosexuals than other territories such as a park or main cruising street. Teenagers intent on harassment at a crowded gay beach are likely to find themselves surrounded by a silent but menacing group of gay men. This added element of safety, even if only tacitly understood, often encourages gay men and lesbians to more outrageous behavior for their own entertainment on a gay beach than in other public spaces. This in turn helps establish the beach in heterosexual minds as a gay place.

Gay beaches are favorite places for cruising for several reasons: a large number of potential partners is concentrated in a small area, and they are likely to be above average in attractiveness, since the tanned and well-built are readier to show the body; there are readily manufactured excuses for introducing oneself to strangers (just let the frisbee fly too far); what you see is almost what you get, since modern beach costumes leave little for the imagination; and in many cases, the gay beach is isolated by bush or rock outcroppings which serve as cover for impersonal sex.

Holiday weekends are obviously prime time, but depending on the prevailing gay occupations in the city, certain weekdays (e.g., Mondays for waiters and

bartenders, Wednesday for hair stylists) may find the gay beach more occupied than other beaches. Cruising is not necessarily limited to the beach; if access is by public transport or ferry, this may also offer numerous opportunities. Offshore, gay men with sailboats or yachts may anchor, rowing to shore to offer attractive strangers a tour in their craft.

Social skills are as important as an attractive body in cruising a beach. Some men set up alone on a blanket, signalling their possible availability, while others prefer to gather in groups, hoping that mutual friends will facilitate introductions. In either case, it is common to periodically go for a stroll along the beach, winding one's way through the complex of towels and blankets, exchanging smiles or glances. The slimmest acquaintance or familiarity of faces may be used to strike up conversation (which may actually be directed not to the person conversed with, but to a total stranger on the next blanket).

Social visiting between blanket-based groups, whether by couples or singles, is easy and common. A picnic lunch increases socializing and lowers inhibitions against introducing oneself to strangers ("Are you hungry? There's lots here."). Ironically, the greater exposure of flesh in a public place often makes encounters more conversational, and less limited to an agenda of impersonal sex, than a dark park or gay baths.

Lesbians appear less likely to establish a beach and very few cities have a lesbian beach. The reasons undoubtedly include less cruising behavior in general among lesbians, less traditional social power (as women) to establish and hold territories, and lesbian preference for a proper social introduction and some prior acquaintanceship before intimate encounter. When a lesbian community develops beach-going social life, lesbians may establish some section of the existing gay male beach as their own. Covert gay men, or lesbians, may use a nearby heterosexual section of beach, but wander through the

gay beach on apparent errands (trips to the washroom, water fountain, and so on).

Police—mounted on horse, or more recently in all-terrain vehicles—often attempt to discourage or harass gay beachers, or to surprise or entrap those using “the bushes.” Heterosexual resentment of gay male impersonal sex opportunities may lead to political decisions to eliminate gay beaches (e.g., by constructing a promenade, or supervised swimming pool). But an experienced gay man who knows how to search is likely to discover some portion of beach frequented by gays, even in foreign lands.

See also Geography, Social; Resorts; Tourism.

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John Alan Lee

BEAT GENERATION

The origins of this trend in American culture can be traced to the friendship of three key figures in New York City at the beginning of the 1940s. Allen Ginsberg (1926–) and Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) met as students at Columbia University, where both were working at becoming writers. In 1944 Ginsberg encountered the somewhat older William Burroughs (1914–), who was not connected with the University, but whose acquaintance with avant-garde literature supplied an essential intellectual complement to college study. Both Ginsberg and Burroughs were homosexual; Kerouac bisexual. At first the ideas and accomplishments of the three were known only to a small circle. But toward the end of the 1950s, as their works began to be published and widely read, large numbers of young people, “beatniks” and “hippies,” took up elements of their lifestyle.

The beat writers and their friends were only sporadically resident in San Francisco, but the media played up this connection, especially during the “flower-

child” era in the mid-1960s. This reputation is not without relation to the Bay City’s emerging status as a gay capital. To be sure the beat writers placed little stress on developing a fixed abode—their pads were never photographed for *House Beautiful*. Seminomadic, they traveled extensively not only in the United States, but in Latin America, Europe, North Africa, and Asia. Significantly, one of the most widely read beat texts was Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* (1957).

The word beat was sometimes traced to “beatific,” and sometimes to “beat out” and similar expressions, suggesting a pleasant exhaustion that derives from intensity of experience. Its appeal also reflects the beat and improvisation of jazz music, one of the principal influences on the trend. Some beat poets tried to match their writings with jazz in barroom recitals, prefiguring the more effective melding of words and music in folk and rock. The ideal of spontaneity was one of the essential elements of the beat aesthetic. These writers sought to capture the immediacy of speech and lived experience, which were, if possible, to be transcribed directly as they occurred. This and related ideals reflect a new version of American folk pragmatism, preferring life to theory, immediacy to reflection, and feeling to reason. Contrary to what one might expect, however, the beat generation was not anti-intellectual, but chose to seek new sources of inspiration in neglected aspects of the European avant-garde and in Eastern thought and religion.

In the view of many, the archetypal figure of the group is William Burroughs. Born into a wealthy business family in St. Louis, Burroughs drifted from one situation to another during his twenties and thirties; only after meeting the younger writers did he find his own voice. First published in Paris in 1959, his novel *Naked Lunch* became available in the United States only after a series of landmark obscenity decisions. With its phantasmagoric and sometimes sexually explicit sub-