

Have you ever had any negative or uncomfortable experiences on the beach?

Yeah, certainly have. I think I'm not alone. I can say just the other week. It was only literally a couple of weeks ago. I went down before work, so it was quite early in the morning. I thought I'd have a little swim. The sea was really calm and there was nobody on the beach that I was on. No dog walkers, no kids, nothing. So I nipped in, had a little swim. And then just as I was having my swim, someone came down, bloke, he took his keks off. He was completely naked and he went in the sea.

And I was like, really? The beach is massive. If he decided to strip off, he could have gone just one beach along or, you know, even better still to the nudist beach. You know, that's a designated space. But no, anyway, I thought he'd been nipping in and out, but no, he's hanging around. So I just thought, well, I'll just get back out again.

And I think, unfortunately, that happens too often that women, you know, modify our behaviour. We've decided to change what we were doing. And, you know, I don't always feel very comfortable sitting on the beach with not very many clothes on. And I just think because, you know, you've got that male gaze, unfortunately. And I really hate it when they're looking at kids and that sort of thing.

It's not nice.

Well, I was thinking about that question and what I decided was that I'm immune from all that trouble now that I'm in my 60s. But until then, I was so accustomed to having hostile, predatory gazes and intimidation from men that I didn't even notice it.

And I just had to put up with it all the time. And it was awful, awful. So I hardly used to go on the beach and certainly I would have to pretend I didn't care because I'd be ogled at all the time.

And I'm finally free of that. And I can now see it for the tyranny it really was.

I've had one incident, most of the time not. I've been lucky enough to be with groups normally when I'm down here.

On one occasion, very early on when I first moved down here, about 20 years ago, I had a bit of homophobic abuse, just verbal abuse, which wasn't great.

Who did that come from?

A couple of blokes. I couldn't tell you more than that.

I chose to ignore them completely. I was quite surprised that it happened in Brighton & Hove, but I guess it just happens. I've had derogatory remarks about lesbians. But that was on one occasion a long time ago.

It did make me wonder whether I could approach the beach on my own, but I chose to continue. And luckily nothing more happened.

Once, when I was walking along the beach with my mum, we saw this weird naked dude just standing there in front of the sea.

It was really weird.

Actually, yes, I have.

As a child, I lived 10 years in Shoreham, and I used to go swimming a lot there.

And I can remember blokes coming down and exposing themselves to, you know, to kids of my age. You know, it was horrible. But we didn't know what to do about it. And we couldn't really tell anyone, actually, even. So that was horrible. We'd talk about it amongst ourselves and wish they wouldn't do it. So that was one thing.

But the only really bad, horrible experience since I moved down to Hove in 2017 has been when I was, I'd gone down to swim. And I suddenly realized somebody had got a drone hovering directly over me and sort of following my movements, so much so that I got out of the water and shouted at him.

Now, I was about 66 at that time. It was about four years ago. And I was just like such an invasion of my privacy. I'd been just enjoying the sea and then having, and it was this bloke that just, I mean, he kind of recoiled after being shouted at, and so he should.

And I said, just promise me, you will never do that ever again to anyone else going into the sea who has not asked you to film them. You know, sort of did it like that. And then afterwards, I felt guilty.

And I thought, no, why should I be guilty? He was a voyeur who was watching me swim for reasons of his own, but it was creepy.

And I don't think, you know, let's try and share these beaches in a way that is respectful of the enjoyment and the needs and the pleasures of the sea and of the beach for everybody looking after each other.

And I think that both in both those cases, I don't think the men who expose themselves to me as a child in Shoreham or that bloke doing his filming of me from his drone would have happened if I hadn't been a woman, even a 70 or nearing 70 woman.

It still happens now and it has to be stopped.

I've noticed men frequently using their phones and it makes me on edge because I'm never quite sure if they're taking pictures or recording.

I've seen guys recording women before in their swimwear and it makes me, it really stops me from being able to relax and enjoy the beach as I feel like I should be able to.

So one experience I had when I lived in Kempton, I just went swimming the nudist end of the beach. I wasn't actually swimming nude, but obviously that's fine if you want to do it.

But I noticed that when I had gone for a swim and came in that there was a man on the beach masturbating. So that was horrific. And that has like stopped me wanting to ever go back to that nudist beach.

Were there other people around?

There were other people around and I noticed when it was happening there were lots of women swimming. And so it just felt like he was focused on the women being in the sea and mid-dress.

So it just didn't feel very nice and it was intimidating and just gross, to be honest.

And then my friend's experience, she was swimming with a female only group and they'd all been for a really nice swim, had a good time, came in, were all mid-dress. As you do the kind of like shuffly dance when you're trying to get changed on the beach.

And a trans woman came over to them completely naked and started to speak to them about how great it was that as women they could all be together and it was all safe and it was all very nice.

And just my friend and her friends were all really uncomfortable because they were a female only group and the person approaching them wasn't a biological female.