

THE HEALTH & EFFICIENCY GUIDE TO
NATURIST LIVING

HE & E naturist

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America Special



Stéphane and family in the pool

Park is a case in point. The owner, Stéphane Deschênes, is the president of the Federation of Canadian Naturists, a father of two young boys, and a husband to Linda. And he wants to grow this 50-acre "half campground and half country club" (in his words) into the premiere naturist resort in Canada, geared to family nudism. No clothing-optional status here.

"I need to have complete control over Bare Oaks in order to see it grow," said Mr Deschênes when I visited Bare Oaks, about an hour-and-a-half's drive north of downtown Toronto, Canada's largest city. "You can't grow a business in a co-op sensibility or with a board where the committee rules... but you can set up a co-

Fun for all the

family!

Nestled in central Canada's green belt, Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park is a warm environment, as Bruce Bishop discovers

op once the park or property is completely in place."

Bare Oaks has been in existence in various incarnations – textile and naturist – since 1972. Like many similar naturist venues, different owners have had different ideas as to how the park should be managed and what kind of improvements need to be made.

Bare Oaks is coming along just fine and seems to have found its perfect niche. During my visit in mid-summer 2007, a prominent children's playground was being constructed near the main clubhouse, and land was being bulldozed for three tennis courts and extra campsites. (A boules court is already on site,

It's all about branding. When an experienced naturist holidaymaker hears news from places such as Paradise Lakes in the USA or Hidden Beach in Mexico, he or she knows that families with children are either unheard of, or need not bother visiting. Those resorts are geared to couples, singles and people wanting to unwind and party. Not that parents can't relax and let loose, but a naturist resort or park can't be all things to all people: inevitably one group may feel out of place.

Bare Oaks Family Naturist

The new tennis courts under construction



Local couple Liz and Noel





The man-made lake



as is mini-golf on occasion.) Two families of Canada geese seemed right at home on site, as did muskrats in the ponds. Nature surrounds you here.

The park has been lucky to retain the services of a local movie caterer, Kathryn Munro, whose daily meals are well-priced and prepared. A standard licence to sell alcohol is pending, although one can bring one's own beverage of choice to any of the common areas. (A large grocery and off-licence is about a 10-minute drive away.)

Six motel rooms are available in the clubhouse for non-campers; one room has a private bath. The clubhouse is a hub of activity with two saunas, an indoor whirlpool, a heated saltwater outdoor pool, an exercise room, spa services and a lounge with satellite TV. If you bring along a laptop or notebook computer, a wireless connection is available throughout the common areas and in some of the motel rooms.

Stéphane Deschênes was educated at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario (Canada) – a political science and psychology double major who now designs online continuing education programmes for the

architectural industry. Owning a naturist park is a labour of love, as “the place is not a money-maker”, he says.

His start in naturism came while at university when he and his girlfriend and another couple skinny dipped and “skinny fished” – and the lack of sexual tension delivered a watershed moment in his discovery of non-sexual social nudity. Years later, as president of the FCN, he has visited many other naturist clubs and parks in Canada and has his favourites which appeal to his own sense of respect for the environment. “Within Canada, I admire the environmental principles of Ontario places like the Sunward Naturist Park near Ottawa, and Jewel Lake near North Bay – as well as Sol Santé in British Columbia,” he says.

When asked about the many pundits who insist that organised naturism is not attracting people in their 20s, Mr Deschênes says: “People in their 20s are focused on their careers; not to mention that the 25-year-old single person is different from the 25-year old married person. Both do need affordable vacations, though. “The clothing optional idea was perhaps a good one, but it has failed. Bare Oaks is naturist, not clothing-optional. If that’s not for you,



Local couple Liz and Noel in the outdoor shower

then you don't have to come here. I can sympathise with people whose spouses do not embrace naturism, but I can't solve that problem in my park."

Everyone who arrives at Bare Oaks is given a full tour of the facilities and is asked to read the member and visitor agreement, which is quite detailed. While the "instructions" may be explicit, they do offer good advice, such as: "For new people who stay clothed during their adjustment period: please be respectful of others. Be discreet and avoid public spaces."

If you'd like some textile time outside the park, the sleepy village of Mount Albert is about a 10-minute drive from Bare Oaks. The Prince Albert Pub is a popular restaurant, but there is limited shopping. Another nearby village is Sharon, home of the Sharon Temple – a national historic site.

Before Canada became a country in 1867, Ontario was known as Upper Canada. A

small community of people known as the Children of Peace crafted a dramatic architectural testament in the 1820s to its vision of a society founded on the values of peace, equality and social justice. These former Quakers led the country's first farmers' co-operative, built its first shelter for homeless people, and played a key role in the development of democracy in the formative years before Canadian confederation. As the museum's website states: "The Temple of the Children of Peace in the village of Sharon – with its Ark of the Covenant, inspirational Banners, Pipe and Barrel Organs and Jacob's Ladder – was completed in 1832. It lives on as the centrepiece of the Sharon Temple National Historic Site, which encompasses nine historic buildings in a park setting."

It seems only fitting that Bare Oaks is located so closely to a historical site that has its origins in the values of peace, equality and social justice – certainly trademarks of the International Naturist Federation.

Bare Oaks is a mere two-hour drive to Canada's largest city, Toronto, where a wealth of accommodation, shopping and entertainment is available. Toronto even has one of two legal nude beaches in Canada – the other being in British Columbia, on the Pacific Coast. Toronto's nude beach on Lake Ontario is called "Hanlan's Point", and is easily accessible by taking a Toronto Island ferry at the foot of Bay Street downtown, and following the signs once you are dropped off at Hanlan's.

The best time to visit Bare Oaks and/or Toronto is from mid-May to late September, when the temperatures suit naturist activities. Many charter airlines, including Zoom, fly from the UK to Toronto.

One of the residents, "Stony", practising his putting



The entrance to Bare Oaks park

