

Surf's Up!: You can always count on sun and sand



Page Hedde; Photo credit: Lisa Haase/ESA

There is little doubt in anyone's mind that the beach is the place to be this summer in RI. Despite the severe restrictions placed on beach parking and admission passes, we are fighting the traffic and dodging the numerous highway construction projects as we search for our place in the sand on one of our beaches.

In order to continue to keep the coronavirus in check, both the local beach towns and the state have made unprecedented moves to cut down on the crowds, both in and out of the water. South Kingstown, for example, sold out 800 resident beach parking passes for the town beach within a week. No non-residents can buy day parking passes for the 2020 summer. Other towns with private beaches followed suit.

Narragansett, in their effort to cut down the beach crowding, is not offering any non-resident parking, and non-residents can only buy single day passes for \$10.

The big parking lot across from Scarborough State Beach is closed for the summer. Once the main lot is full, cars are turned away. This, in an effort to prevent overcrowding and make social distancing easier. That is the reality of summer 2020.

Meanwhile, surfing conditions during the high point of the pandemic were the biggest, best quality and most consistent that I have ridden since spring 1970. There were multiple swells every week during March and April, with very light, virus-fearing crowds. There were several memorable sessions at perfect point breaks with no one out. And that is a rarity these days.

We are fortunate in Rhode Island that we're allowed ocean access. In some coastal states, surfers and paddle boarders were arrested if they entered the water. In southern California, one beach town issued \$1,000 fines for surfing. While we experienced parking bans near the surf spots, all it took was a little walking to get there.

Thus far, the summer has offered up probably the most perfect beach weather in several years, with sunny skies and warm air and water temperatures on a daily basis. Unfortunately for surfers, this does not translate into good waves. Most reefs and points have been quiet, with only longboard surf at the beach breaks.

Thanks to Governor Raimondo's coronavirus mandates, our annual summer surfing, skimboard and skateboard camps are operating as usual in South County. With many other summer camps cancelled, there has been an upsurge in sign-ups as the weather gets hotter. South Kingstown is offering surfing, skimboarding and skateboarding camps this summer. The surfing camp is held at one of the best reef breaks on the East Coast: Matunuck Point. The skimboarding camp is held at one of the best skimboarding beaches anywhere, South Kingstown Town Beach. And the skateboard camp takes place at one of New England's premier skate parks, Old Mountain Field. In Narragansett, Narragansett Surf Shop offers the longest running surf camp in New England, at the Narragansett Town Beach.

Surfing competition is one of the few sports that can take place with social distancing this summer. With only four contestants spread out in the water at a time, this falls safely in the guidelines of pandemic sports activities. The Eastern Surfing Association is planning to run its summer circuit, and several skateboard competitions are also scheduled. This is another sport where riders compete in solo runs, and social distanced.

Along with surfing and skateboarding, paddleboarding has made a huge comeback as people look for safe outdoor activities. Area dealers report record sales of not only paddleboards, but of kayaks as well. Many manufacturers have already run out of stock for the summer. Likewise with bicycles and running shoes.

It is going to be a strange summer for sure, but never a bad one, if you are at the beach.