



Having fun at the beach just got better with the “dive propulsion vehicle,” a battery-powered scooter. You can make backward loops underwater.

JIMI KILBRIDE

Beach Toy Joy

Enough already with lying on the sand. Time to get wet and get busy.

I used to love going to the beach, spreading my towel over the sand, then just chillin’ for several hours—reading, dozing, lolling in the water and gazing upon the luscious bikiniscape.

Then, somewhere about my 500th sunburn, I began noticing that my sand sessions had become numbingly boring. After half an hour, I’d get antsy and want to be doing something—snorkeling, body-surfing, discussing the French Symbolist poets with that rosy-cheeked babe rolling in the shorebreak—anything other than just lying in the sun like a slab of sizzling bacon.

That’s why a recent interlude at the Kona Village Resort on the Big Island was way fun. Imagine yourself in a really nice sandbox full of really nice toys—surfboards, windsurf boards, kayaks, outrigger racing canoes, little sailboats, body boards with windows through which to watch the fish watching you watching them, scuba gear—oh, boy.

As a guest of this, the most unique resort in Hawai‘i (rustic-luxe seclusion with thatched-roof cabañas sans telephones, radios and TVs), most of these toys are there for you at no extra charge, though lessons require plunking down plastic.

You’d think that all conceivable forms of ocean fun would’ve been invented long ago. Not so. The latest art is stand-up paddleboarding, where you (duh) stand up on a big surfboard with a long paddle, and catch waves. Kind of like cross-country skiing only you don’t lose any toes from frostbite afterwards.

Stand-up paddleboarding is a hip-swinging ballet when the experts do it. It was something else when I tried. I looked like I had jellyfish in my surf trunks.

The first time I fell, I did as my instructor (the cute and talented Stacy Spilman) instructed—I threw my paddle in the opposite direction, this seeming preferable to a conk on the head.

I rethought this strategy after expending considerable

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energy swimming for the paddle, then the board.

The second time I exited the board, I hung onto the paddle, then used it as a life raft while I flailed away getting back to the board. I perfected this maneuver during subsequent disembarkations.

OK, that was fun. What's next?

Back on sand, Stacy gave me a lesson in how not to tip the sleek, two-person outrigger racing canoe. This thing looks like a seagoing rocket and, in the right hands, can go just as fast.

In my hands, there was a somewhat different result. First, I went out with Stacy and she showed me how to right the canoe if it tipped, which apparently is something that happens now and again with inexperienced guests (no extra charge).

We *hulied* (tipped over) on purpose, flopping over headfirst. That was the second-most fun thing I did all day. Made me wonder how many people have drowned from laughing underwater. Stacy showed me how to turn the canoe back over.

I couldn't wait until I got out on my own. Alas, Stacy had taught me so well I didn't huli the canoe once. After awhile, paddling was practically more boring than lying on the beach, and considerably more work.

The opposite of boring was the last beach toy I played with that day.

I don't mean to be cruel, but if you are, or ever will be,

a scuba diver and you die without doing hydrobatics on a battery-powered scooter, you'll be sorry that your life was wasted.

Remember 007 whizzing along on a futuristic powered hydrosled through the sky-blue Caribbean in *Thunderball*? This was even better. I went out with Jimi Kilbride, a man whose deep bronze smile lines show that he fully realizes what a fun job he has.

Underwater, I tucked my "dive propulsion vehicle" between my legs the way Jimi had shown me, punched the throttle and, to quote Peter Pan, "I'm flying." Jimi demonstrated a backward loop.

It was enough to make you shed a salty tear for all the world's poor gravity-bound dancers. I tried a little loopy-loo and ... well ... wow ... flying weightlessly, effortlessly in any direction.

You twist your body and go into a spiral. You arch your back and turn as tight as you can, pulling Gs, making your air hose shudder in the current. You laugh, letting water into your mask.

Then, inevitably, you're back on the beach. Sprawled exhausted on a chaise lounge, the palm tree fronds clacking like chopsticks in the breeze, your skin warm with the aroma of sea-salt brine, you can hardly keep your eyes open. At this point, lying on the beach is just the thing.

Bill Harby



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