

TENNIS ANYONE? 4 PLACES TO TAKE YOUR GAME INDOORS

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Ocean Connection

**FIND YOUR BALANCE
AT SURF CAMP**



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Surfer Women's Guide to Being

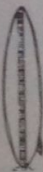


WOMEN'S SURF CAMPS are more than just lessons. They are a way to
CONNECT with other SURFERS, the OCEAN, and ultimately, with YOURSELF.

I LIKE A lot of things about surfing. When I am in Hawaii or Mexico, I enjoy watching fit surfers slither up and down waves over the rim of my daiquiri. I'm a sucker for hair products with names like "beach hair" and I'm also a fan of board shorts—so roomy! But the idea of me, actually surfing, off the rugged coast of Oregon? Not so much. It's cold and dark and full of wild things out there. This is an ocean that is infamously rough. This is where the surf casually tosses chunks of driftwood at beachcombers, and this is

where the U.S. Coast Guard Helicopter Rescue Swimmers earn their chops because the waves off the Oregon Coast are known to be MEAN. I love the ocean, but when I get in it around the Oregon Coast, I tend to do it with professionals nearby. I'll happily ride 50 miles out to sea, swaddled in fleece and Gore-Tex, with a seasoned skipper to clobber tuna, hook halibut, or get blasted by a whale blow. There's a big part of me that aches to interact with Oregon's ocean, but that water is cold.

And yet, surfers who have been at it for





LEXIE HALLAHAN



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OPPOSITE: Surf camps create a tribe of Women "Surfistas" on Oregon's beaches.

ABOVE: Helmets, smiles and wetsuits are required gear for surfing students.

On shore, Lexie Hallahan teaches a few moves.

a while remind me of Buddhist monks. It's those perma-grins, the calm they exude, and those present eyes. This is what they have in common: They show up for a daily dose of humble pie (by riding through challenging waves—physical or emotional). And, for that work, they access a kind of peace with their tiny, beautiful place in life on this messy, glorious planet. I want that.

The surfers at Short Sands and Indian Beach on Oregon's North Coast do look mighty blissed out coming in from the waves, but they also look like DNA and lifestyle choices have arranged their physiques in a way that makes them seem a different subspecies from me. Where they tend to be long and lean and muscular, I'm cushioned. They glide, I grunt.

Could grunting, padded me paddle out into the ocean in Oregon, achieve real beach hair, and not die? I decided to try, with the assistance of a seasoned professional.

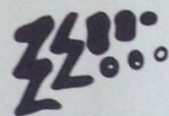
I was not a surf lesson virgin when I signed on for Lexie Hallahan's NW Women's Surf Camp weekend. Many years ago, a Mexican mermaid surfista in a Saladita suit helped me get upright onto a tabletop-sized surfboard. I also spent a glorious day, a few years ago, at Cannon Beach in a 5/4-millimeter wetsuit with surf instructor Julie Adams and, with her guidance, began to get the hang of hopping up on a moving wave. But that was years ago when I was doing more boot camp and eating less ice cream. These days, I've got floppy triceps



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and a belly to work around and I say 'oof' every time I get up from the couch.

WOMEN ONLY

I liked the idea of a two-day women's surf camp. No men with natural upper body strength to envy, and I think women are especially awesome in women-only retreat settings. Also, I liked the idea of attempting to surf for two days. I'd have one day to get the hang of it, and a second to finesse my newfound skills.

I checked into the just-opened Ashore Hotel, a hip, affordable addition to Seaside's housing scene. I figured their warm saline pool, oyster shell-lined fire pit, bedside fireplace, and good wine on tap would be important after clambering off and on a surfboard in the frigid Pacific all day.

On Saturday morning at 8 a.m. Lexie Hallahan, along with her co-instructor Dennis Braun, came gliding across the parking lot of Cleanline Surf Shop. We were an uneasy clump of novices brought together by our common goal of becoming surfers. Lexie, sun-bleached and bronzed, seemed straight out of Waikiki, rather than a 28-year veteran of Oregon Coast waves.

Lexie and Dennis welcomed us into their temple as missionaries for the waves. They are so sincerely pleased that we are there and have been doing this for so long that I begin to believe all of us will become surfers that weekend. Lexie's heartening talk is enough to get me through the hardest



"We reached the gorgeous overlook and the 12 of us sat down around Lexie and Dennis for a pre-surf surf lesson: the recipe for A PERFECT WAVE."



part so far—encasing myself in rental neoprene from tip to toe.

We paired up in the parking lot, and schlepped our boards down the trail to the beach in tandem. I felt like a true rugged Northwesterner, padding through the ancient cedar forest, passing families headed to set up camp on shore. Since none of those strangers knew I couldn't surf, I must admit, I strutted slightly in

my half-pulled-on wetsuit, trying not to remember that my helmet and 10-foot board gave me away as a novice. Yesterday, I was one of them. Today, I am a surfer. They'd be panting on land and I'd be the out there with the dolphins and seals with driftwood bouncing off my helmet as I carved another wave.

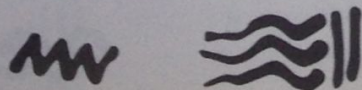
We reached the gorgeous overlook and the 12 of us sat down around Lexie and Dennis for a pre-surf surf lesson: the recipe for a perfect wave.

I never knew that this was what I had always wanted to know. You know in those surf movies when the surfers are driving along and they look out to sea and suddenly notice that the conditions are perfect, pull over and go running down to the beach to tear it up? How do they know? Well, after Lexie's perfect wave recipe lesson, I'm one of those dudes. Kind of.

The recipe starts with tides, and goes on to wind direction, wind speed, and swell height and how they are all connected to each other. In surf camp that day, I learned that good surfers are also obsessive amateur meteorologists.

The thing about a weekend surf camp is you have time. Time to talk. Time to recover. You have time to be in the moment, to notice, to watch and wait for conditions to change. NW Women's Surf Camp goes where the waves are best, rather than operating out of a set location each weekend. Luckily they are located near some of Oregon's finest gems of locations—Short Sands and Oswald West State Park.

We were a diverse group, ranging from former military members to beginning swimmers. With a ratio of three





Surf camp lessons begin on shore, where students learn their moves.



to four surfers per instructor, we would all get plenty of attention, and if we whacked ourselves in the head with our surfboards or something, someone would be there to see us go down and rescue us. Seasoned professionals!

We practiced our moves on land for a long time before venturing into the water. The military contingent hoo-ahed up like a pair of professional acrobats. I oof'ed my way up much more slowly, but my board was big and float-y. It would do.

GETTING UP

Once we had all demonstrated an ability to get up and, more importantly, to fall correctly and to protect our faces from flying boards, it was time to give our new skills a try. We paddled out.

One of the best things about surf camp is having an instructor standing behind you in the surf, holding onto

your board. When it's time to paddle, you just do what they say and it usually works out. The wave came, the swell lifted my feet, I paddled like a shark was chasing me, and oof'ed my way up onto my knees and promptly rolled off the board. I felt like a four-month old baby pushing up for the first time. It was hard and exhilarating and I wanted to try again!

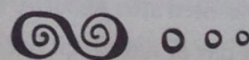
Take two. Paddle, paddle, paddle, oof. This time, I planted a foot before keeling over the side of the board.

Lexie's two thumbs up and bright smile as white as the waves encouraged me to try again.

Next try, I lumbered up onto two feet for a moment like a 200-pound two-year-old and then, like a two-year-old, I immediately turned around to see if my instructor was watching me doing this amazing standing up thing, and I tipped into the water.

I looked around to see how my peers were doing. The beginning swimmers were flopping around in a foot of white water wearing life jackets as a solicitous surf instructor made sure they did not stay face down. The former military women looked like O'Neill and Quicksilver would soon be having a bidding war over who would be their sponsors. But we all had one thing in common: all of us were grinning like a bunch of dizzy moon-drunk monks.

Because that's the thing about surfing. You must heave yourself into a wetsuit and lug a heavy board down to the beach. You will struggle and fall and get salt water up your nose as you fall and fall and fall again. The waves will not stop coming and they will tire you out. And for some reason, it doesn't really matter if you stood up or how good





KATHERINA AUDLEY

Would-be surfers move away from the shore, hoping to catch the perfect wave.

you were out there; your cheeks will ache for days from grinning.

Lexie knows this. She is a very good teacher, as are all of the instructors at NW Women's Surf Camp. But really, she doesn't care if you stand up. She just wants you to come and hang out in her temple and she wants you to love surfing. She wants to give you the tools to understand how it works and share her zen-like calm enthusiasm, then it's up to you.

Lexie's mission is to create a tribe of women surfers in the Northwest. When she started surfing in Oregon there weren't many other women out there. Head to Hawaii or California and you'll see plenty of women riders these days. But get in the water in Oregon, and it's a dude's sport. Through her surf camps, Lexie has been creating a growing tribe of women who ride. Her surf camps fill up almost every time. Some people come and give it a try, have a great time, make new friends and go back to land. Some get hooked. They start exchanging phone numbers and following the weather on websites. They conspire to play hooky when the surf conditions align.

I was tired after about 10 rides on my first day at surf camp. But that's the

luxury of a weekend-long surf camp. You have time to take breaks. And in your shot-through-with-adrenaline state, you absorb this bright beautiful place with wide-open senses. Warm sun, glistening water, waves full of women smiling. The new surfers emerge one by one and flop down. Everyone is moving more like athletes now. And in this moment, I get Lexie's vision. I, too, want to live in a world full of surfistas. I want Lexie to keep filling the waves with women who want to ride.

My senses stay open for days after surf camp. Food tastes amazing. The warm saline pool, the wine and the fire pit at the Ashore hotel are exquisite.

I drove home thinking about putting a roof rack on my car and buying a wet suit. The way I look at the world has changed. I see air and water differently now. I have a weathervane on the top of my studio. Every day, I look at it and every day, I think about the waves. And now that I know how to see them, it is only a matter of time before I'll be driving down the coast and notice that the conditions are lining up just right and I will make a beeline for the nearest surf shop and get out there. And when I do, I know my smile muscles will be aching for days. ■



WHEN YOU GO

Some camps fill quickly so call NW surf Camp to reserve early. (503-440-5782; www.nwwomensurfcamps.com)

2016 CAMP OFFERINGS:

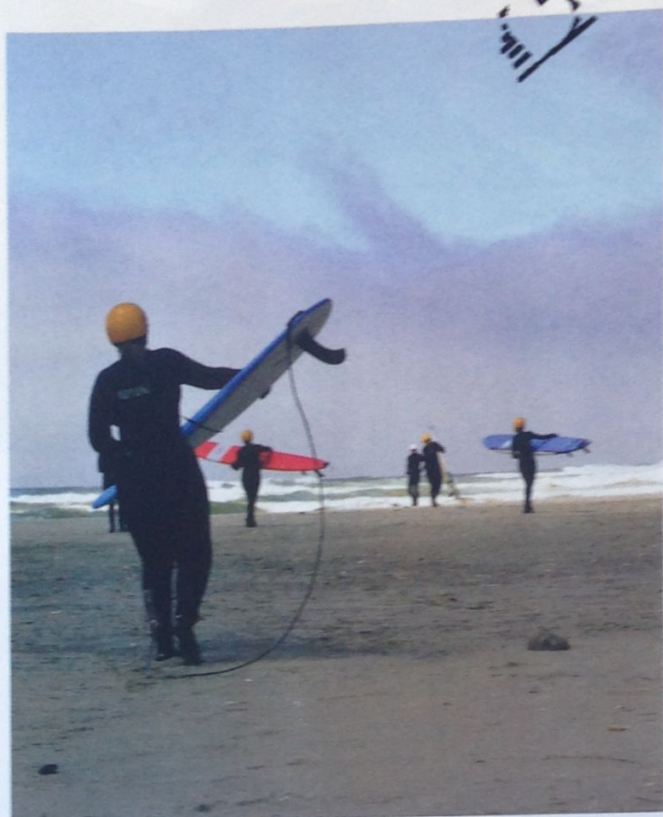
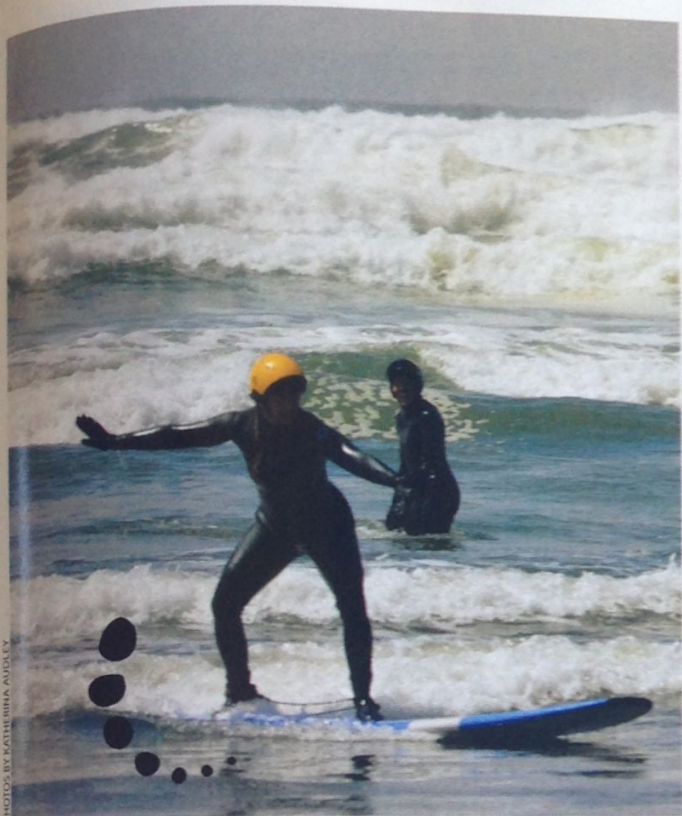
WOMEN'S DAY SURF CAMPS are JULY 23 and SEPT 3. Great sampler to get your feet wet in surfing!

WOMEN'S SURF WEEKENDERS are JULY 23-24, AUGUST 20-21, SEPT 3-4 and SEPT 17-18. All events are based on the best, optimal tides for teaching and being successful in learning to surf.

GROUP COED SURF LESSONS, for women and men (ages 13 to 70 years) are MAY 21 & 28, JUNE 18 and 25, JULY 9 and 16, AUGUST 6 and 13, and SEPT 10.

STAND UP PADDLE COED GROUP 1/2 Day Camp is on JUNE 26, JULY 17, and AUGUST 14.





"I drove home thinking about putting a roof rack on my car and buying a wet suit."

THE WAY I LOOK AT THE WORLD HAS CHANGED."



ABOVE: Women practice their moves in the water then congratulate each other on the beach after a great day of surfing.