

Here is an interesting article about Sandspur Island – also called Beer Can Island – at Haulover. For the colorful images in this article go to the following site and see my book presentations and signings at the end of the article.

http://biscaynetimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1543%3Aits-a-shoal-thing&catid=50%3Acommunity-news&Itemid=223

It's a Shoal Thing

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FOR DECADES BOATERS HAVE GATHERED AT THE HAULOVER SANDBAR FOR FUN AND RELAXATION -- PLUS A LITTLE ROWDINESS

Fun and sun on the Haulover Sandbar, with Collins Avenue and Bal Harbour in the background. Courtesy of Coast Guard Auxiliary Summer in Miami. Crowded beaches, crowded malls, and crowded... shoals.

Look west over the Collins Avenue bridge that spans the Haulover Inlet, or glance north while traversing Broad Causeway, and you can't miss the sea of boats that gather in Biscayne Bay. South Florida has a bevy of hangouts at islands and shoals. Think Nixon Beach or Stiltsville Flats near Key Biscayne, or Nest Key in Key Largo.

The Haulover Sandbar, sandwiched between the ocean inlet and Sandspur Island (also called Beer Can Island), draws weekend crowds in the hundreds. At low tide the exposed sand can stretch out long enough to toss a Frisbee. It's knee and waist deep for a huge swath, which makes it perfect for lounging the day away.

David Templer: "There's no need to blast home amplifiers and have triple train-horn contests. It's obnoxious." Courtesy of David Templer

When nature builds shoals, boaters come out to play. But sometimes they'll have different agendas.

Staci Lurie, a Miami Beach native and Bay Harbor Islands resident who heads out on the water any chance she gets, has been frequenting the Haulover Sandbar for years, when she's not diving and spearfishing. "It's always been a place to relax and enjoy time with friends. But I can't say it's the same place as it's always been."

Today the current has shifted, bringing more than just sand from Bal Harbour's beach to form the sandbar. Crowds have increased. Decibels have escalated. As a result, a mutiny is in progress.

"It's turned into a zoo," complains David Templer, a North Miami Beach resident and Aventura attorney, who says "friendly boater etiquette has all but disappeared at the Haulover Sandbar." He echoes the sentiment of several old-timers who want the culture of the sandbar to return to the days of respect-thy-neighbor. "There's no need to blast home amplifiers and have triple train-horn contests," says Templer. "It's obnoxious."

What about those boaters who may want to mount loudspeakers on their transoms or dance topless on their bows? Don't they have rights too? Are the folks who complain about noise just a bunch of curmudgeons?

A few years back, Templer, a former North Miami Beach city councilman, thought about starting a coalition to bring civility back to the sandbar. His kids, he says, weren't enjoying themselves there any longer. So he spoke to friends, created a Facebook page, and contacted law enforcement.

With so many boats so close together, an inexperienced or impaired skipper can cause trouble.

Multiple public agencies have jurisdiction in Biscayne Bay. Templer says his concerns, and those of a few others, sometimes "fell on deaf ears," but some agencies were receptive, such as the Miami-Dade County Marine Patrol. But when the economy tanked, Templer said he was told budget cuts meant less manpower -- and they are the ones with the jet skis to get into the shallow depths.

Miami-Dade Marine Patrol Lt. John Ramos also talks about relativity and priorities. These days, out at Virginia Key, there's a sea of blaring noise complaints from boaters blasting DJ equipment using home generators. At the same time, Ramos says they take every complaint they get seriously and have two marine officers dedicated to the Haulover area on the weekend. Jet skis are now back, assigned to the Intracoastal district, he says, and they patrol the area randomly.

Perhaps there isn't anything too unusual going on. Jorge Pino, a Florida Fish and Wildlife marine officer, says it doesn't appear there is anything out of the ordinary at the sandbar. "We always have boaters that go out to enjoy themselves and abide by rules, and we have a select few that will be intoxicated," Pino explains. "It is no different than any other location with hundreds of people gathering where there is alcohol."

Aerial view of Haulover Inlet in 1947, with massive sandbar clearly evident. Courtesy of Martha Saconchik-Pytel and Miami-Dade County

Pino adds that, although FWC has jurisdiction in the Haulover area, they concern themselves with conservation, safety, and watercraft issues -- and not noise. Ramos says patrols at Haulover have also increased with the addition of the Joint Marine Protection Act, which "provides municipal law enforcement agencies on the water jurisdiction to enforce the laws in that area," he explains.

Maybe it's really a matter of boaters learning how to share the bay.

At TheHullTruth.com, rants about general sandbar etiquette are posted. On the Haulover thread, you'll find references to "idiots" who don't know how to boat. "Just keep an eye on Fu%%ing stupid boaters that ran over your anchor line. Those kind of idiots have put my boat adrift on 2 or 3 different occasions," opines JoseG.

RedSlayer069's advice for a good time at Haulover? "Go during the week if possible, it's usually a little more tolerable. On teacher work days the place is almost deserted, that's when I bring my kids and their friends."

So must you love it or leave it?

Jenna Williams is a huge fan. In the running for Queen of the Sandbar, Williams heads out early -- with her crew of regulars and floating lounge chairs -- to claim her coveted spot on the sand, as she's been doing for the past 13 years. "The scenery is breathtaking, the water is beautiful," she says. "Living in Florida, there's no other place I want to be on the weekends except there." To Williams, the scene is actually "more under control today than in the past." The music, she agrees, can be obnoxious, but she focuses on having a good time: "We try not to let other people influence what our day is going to be like."

The inlet today, with sandbar, Intracoastal boat channel, and Sandspur Island. Courtesy of Google Earth

Check Facebook and Yelp for Haulover Sandbar devotees of all persuasions. "Kayaked our way over from Oleta, tied up to a friend's

