

By Carolyn Gerin

BEYOND THE BACHELORETTE PARTY:

girls in

The sun is out, the top's down, the wind's in your hair. You're headed down Highway 1 with the iPod cranked, belting Blondie tunes into invisible microphones with your best gal pals. You feel healthy, alive and ready for anything. Sometimes you just need to hit the road with the girls and be ridiculous together. Isn't that what bachelorette parties are all about? Yes, and no, we say, because although it's certainly fun to strap on those Manolos, false eyelashes and up-dos, every other girl in town is doing the same thing for her "hen party." We offer an alternate plan that is no less fun, particularly exhilarating, a little easier on the pocketbook, and healthier than your standard wine country or Vegas soiree.





Now, we're not knocking swanky venues – if a bodacious, dress-up glamazon weekend is what your heart desires, then have a Cosmo on us, we love luxe experiences. But if you're looking for true female bonding – offering thrills, chills, a few spills, hilarity, fresh air, exercise, healthy competition (not rooted in dress size or designer duds), and is just a little off the beaten track of bachelorette activities – look no further than Surf Camp.

“Surf Camp???” you bellow, “But I don't SURF!” “Bollocks!” say I, because, although I do surf, (however still a beginner edging into intermediate status), I witnessed first time surfers of every body type and fitness level amaze themselves by standing, riding, and ruling. Reference the face of a 5-year old balancing a 2-wheeler for the first time: incredulity and unbridled joy. “But don't I need to have the fitness level of pro surfers like Lisa Anderson?” you query.

“Bollocks, again!” say I, having witnessed a well-upholstered Midwesterner in her mid-30's rage at Richard Schmidt's Camp, soundly and expertly kick my butt, and everyone else's in the class.

“So what's the catch?” you ask, tentatively.

“A good attitude, an ability to laugh at yourself (and potentially make an ass of yourself) in the company of your best friends, and on the very next wave, ride to shore while all your girlfriends are ‘Woo-woong!’ you,” I state.

So what's the deal with women taking to the water like Carrie Bradshaw to a Dolce & Gabbana sample sale?

It's the essence of stoke – the surfers term for that transcendent “spinning chakra” feeling you get when gravity releases the body, the soul lifts, the board takes off, and you are riding (whatever wave, whatever size, it does not matter).



Dorothy Becker vintage images
provided by Club Ed Surf School



But just like in a vampire movie: once you're bitten, you become one of the tribe and keep coming back for more.

Balance Sheet: It's win-win no matter how you slice it. Convinced? Here are three camps that deliver the goods, all 1/2 - 2 hours from San Francisco, so if it's a destination trip you seek, this one might hit all the right notes.

Ready to wriggle into that black rubber wetsuit (which by the way lends an uber flattering "cat woman-esque" sleek and sexy silhouette), sucking in any extraneous junk-in-the-trunk? Trust me: you'll look Bond-girl fierce.

Richard Schmidt Surf School, Santa Cruz, California has been getting girls in the curl since 1978. A former Triple-Crown competitor and California's 'top big wave rider,' he is easygoing, humble and patient, despite his legendary status. He is the producer of the Learn to Surf & Ocean Safety DVD which was voted by Surfer Magazine as "the best how to video ever released" (and one of the reasons I can stand up at all). The "Schmidt Guarantee" promises that you will "stand up and ride down the face of the wave in the first lesson." It's true, our class was filled with first timers on a pretty crowded Saturday and every single person achieved this. The demographic was mid to late 30s, and of varying fitness levels, but everyone planned on surfing again. Day classes or surf camps in Santa Cruz and overseas available.
www.richardschmidt.com

Adventure Out Surf School, Pacifica, Half Moon Bay or Santa Cruz California, is sponsored by Billabong and run by Cliff Hodges - owner, founder and CEO. His love of the outdoors led to a business and mission: "developing a connection with the outdoors and nature is one of the most important things we can achieve as people, as well as creating more responsible and respectful surfers." Although I attended a first timer class, his teaching style was clear, concise, and humorous. He offered easy to understand metaphors to successfully translate the complex body machinations that is surfing: the pop up, the drop, the stance, effective paddling, the arrangement of limbs. Everyone was excited to get in the water, and although there was a bit of "baby board crawl" and a few wipeouts (to be expected), post session, every gal wanted to repeat process. One even asked my advice on the best place to buy a wet suit. Arrangements for day classes, overnight, custom or international camps.
www.adventureout.com



FEMALE BONDING OF ALL AGES
AT CLUB ED SURF SCHOOL.

Photograph by Bart Keagy,
ghosttreephoto.com



ED'S GRANDMOTHER WAS THE FIRST WOMAN EVER TO PERFORM A HEADSTAND ON A SURFBOARD!



“Balance” says Zen master Ed Guzman of **Club Ed Surf School**, Santa Cruz, “is the key to relationships, to life, and to surfing: the ocean will tell you the truth.” Heavy! And as affable and caring as Ed is, when it’s time to paddle out, he’s all business: Point your toes! Paddle like you mean it! Get through the white water! You can rest later! This one’s yours!! Stand UP!! STAND UP!! Go, Go, GOOOOOO!!!!

Holy cannoli, and paddle I did, for 3 hours, until my arms were lifeless appendages by my sides. But I dropped, and rode, and then did it again, and again. By the end of the week, I’ll be doing cutbacks like Slater.

Ed has a remarkable teaching style: part tough love, part comedian, part drill sergeant and part Olympic coach. He explains complex concepts in such a way that you can make your own mind up about a specific movement: “If you pop up with your arms by your lower ribs, it’s less effort.”

Less effort, that’s all I needed to hear. He gives you 100% of his expert former pro-surfing knowledge and Mavericks-ridin’ waterman moxie. His team of equally fun-loving experts are mostly former

students who ride with pride. You can’t swing a board leash in Santa Cruz without hitting either a friend of Ed’s or a former student. His award winning company offers weeklong camps during the summer at the glorious Manresa State Park, day classes, and custom trips locally, or internationally. Pre-wed, see Club Ed. www.club-ed.com

The verdict is in: surfing is addictive and with the right teacher, the world can be your tube. And, your arms will look, like, totally buff in your strapless gown...

So the Monday after Surf Camp, when you’re hanging around the water cooler with your colleagues recounting weekend antics, how cool are you when asked, “So how was your bachelorette party?” You answer (with your thumbs hitched to your belt loops, leaning nonchalantly against the wall), “DUDE – It was rad! We surfed for two days, and snaked each other’s waves, but ended up high-fiving each other in the parking lot and then had dinner and drank wine on the beach. We’re going again in two weeks. Wanna come?”

i do!

