Having grown up in Alabama, and having never lived more than a five-hour car ride away from the Gulf Coast, the beach is not foreign to me. By the time I was ten, I knew the routine by heart: Leave at 7:00 am, drive through McDonald’s for an Egg McMuffin, a quick stop at Bates House of Turkey for a sandwich, and then we were home free. Once I saw that first palm tree, even if we were still an hour away, I felt as if we were already there. For the past several years, my family has been fortunate to have a second (soon to be primary) home near Grayton Beach, Florida. Believe it or not, the choice vacation destination of the South is a year-round home for lots of folks, and while many of them thrive on the seasonal business, they have a definite love-hate relationship with tourists. And they can spot one at twenty paces. Sometimes they know because you don’t stop to let people cross the street. Sometimes it’s because you are going the wrong way on Quincy Circle in Seaside. And sometimes it’s because you are walking around in your bathing suit in broad daylight on a city street.

I have noticed this phenomenon that I can’t quite explain. Perhaps the sound of crashing waves and the smell of salt air is hypnotizing folks, convincing them it is perfectly appropriate to parade around in swimwear in the most inappropriate places. It leaves me befuddled, to say the least. I don’t know about you, but I don’t normally see people in Nashville buying groceries in a tankini. I haven’t spotted anyone in Birmingham pumping gas in a one piece. I have not noticed anyone in Dallas standing in line for lunch while they wear a swimsuit. And I most assuredly have not seen anyone in Jackson, Mississippi, wearing a bikini while they ride a bike down the street.

For me, the most disturbing scenes are the gaggles of teenage girls prancing to and fro in what basically equates to a bra and panties. Sometimes even less. I have a teenage daughter myself, and she knows full well that if there’s no sand, pool deck, or boat deck directly beneath her feet, she better not appear publicly in a bathing suit without a cover up.

More than once I have had to stop myself from asking one of these young girls, “Where is your mother?” Unfortunately, the mothers are either nowhere to be found or are standing nearby—also in a swimsuit without a cover up. I simply don’t get it. Now, I do not have, nor have I ever had, a “bikini body.” But I do enjoy sitting on the beach or by the pool to catch a few rays. And while you might spot swimsuit straps peeking out of the neck of my cover up as I grab an adult beverage at The Red Bar, you will not find me standing in a swimsuit without one.

Years ago, I saw a vintage sign posted in the Hamptons advising visitors that sport coats and sundresses were suggested, and reminding them that swimwear and open toed shoes were not acceptable in town. The list went on and was a bit strict even for me, but I admired the initiative. If I see one more rear cheek tan line peeking out of a bikini bottom in line at the ice cream parlor, I may lose my mind. When you’re five, it is precious. When you are grown, it is obscene.

So if you are heading to the beach and you want to seem like you know what you’re doing, or even if you don’t give one flip flop about being the ultimate tourist, have a little self respect—and some respect for those around you. Go ahead and grab a wrap as you dash out the door. Your mother will thank you—I hope. I know I will.

A short but modest walk around town goes a long, long way.