

VENTURING OUT

Proud all over

'Tis the season when communities worldwide hold parades, parties, dances, sporting events—all in fabulous queer style

by Sasha Alyson



San Francisco Pride will expand to two days this year

PHOTO BY SHERYL SCHINDLER

Have you ever watched a group of drag queens in full regalia play baseball against a lesbian softball team? You'll have that chance if you attend the annual Lesbian and Gay Pride celebration in Lexington, Ky., in June. This hilarious sports competition is called (what else?)—"Bat 'n' Rouge."

If you're in Houston, you can watch or participate in the United States' first nighttime pride parade, complete with lighted floats and more than 125 groups marching.

Since the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village in 1969, gay pride events have grown from protest marches and demonstrations to huge parades, festivals and parties celebrating the lesbian and gay experience. Once primarily political rallies, they've become the major social event of the year in many cities—attended by thousands of residents and out-of-town visitors.

Tom Ervin, of the International Association of Lesbian/Gay Pride Coordinators Inc., says that while many cities once held pride activities on the anniversary of Stonewall, this is no longer true.

Los Angeles and San Francisco hold their pride events on different weekends to allow Californians the chance to attend both celebrations. San Diego wisely has its pride celebration in late July, giving attendees a full month to recover from the double whammy of the L.A. and San Francisco events.

The IAL/GPC, a nonprofit organization founded 15 years ago to assist in the planning and production of pride events, now consists of representatives from dozens of cities producing gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered pride events all over the world. Among other responsibilities, the organization chooses the international gay pride theme each year. "Equality Through Visibility" is the theme for 1997.

The IAL/GPC estimates that pride events in 1996 publicly mobilized 6 million to 8 million people in North America and 2 million in Europe, and the numbers are growing exponentially.

Pride activities are as different as the cities hosting them. In England, London Pride attracts tens of thousands of attendees and usually features world-famous entertainers. Toronto boasts the largest pride event in the world. San Francisco Pride has become so popular that it's expanding to two full days this year.

Santa Barbara holds its festival right on the beach, with swimming, sea kayaking and wave riders enjoying the water. This year a "duathlon" (biking and swimming) is also scheduled. Although it has enormous success with its circuit

parties, Miami hasn't had much luck with pride events, but Ft. Lauderdale usually compensates by doing a wonderful job with theirs.

Along with funding and securing city permits, one of the biggest problems faced by many pride committees is getting news coverage for their events that is fair and balanced, but according to Tania Jo Ingrahm of Hawaii's *Island Lifestyles Magazine*, this is slowly changing in her state.

"Overall, the coverage we get is more balanced and more positive," explains Ingrahm. "The TV stations have always covered the parade, but they used to just focus on the queens and the more outrageous contingents, or on the right-wing protest groups. This year the protesters were absent, so the stations couldn't put them on the air like they have in the past, and we ended up with better coverage."

Boston's 1996 Pride was one of the most controversial in recent memory, due to a man on stilts in a kilt who exposed the Scottish "crown jewels" frequently along the parade route, and some topless Lesbian Avengers who frolicked rather passionately in a wheeled bed. The resulting uproar was the subject of heated debate throughout the city for several weeks afterwards, in both the mainstream and queer media.

The IAL/GPC has provided the following dates for some of the pride events scheduled for this year.

Northwest pride events: Eugene, June 29; Olympia, June 21; Portland, June 20-22; Salem, June 7; Seattle, June 29.

U.S. pride events: Atlanta, June 27-29; Boise, June 14; Boston, June 1-8; Chicago, June 29; Denver, June 29; Fort Lauderdale, June 15; Honolulu, June 28; Las Vegas, May 10; Los Angeles, June 21-22; New York City, June 22 and 28-29; San Diego, July 25-27; San Francisco, June 28-29; Santa Barbara, June 7; St. Louis, June 28-29; Vancouver, B.C., July 26-Aug. 3; Washington, D.C., June 8.

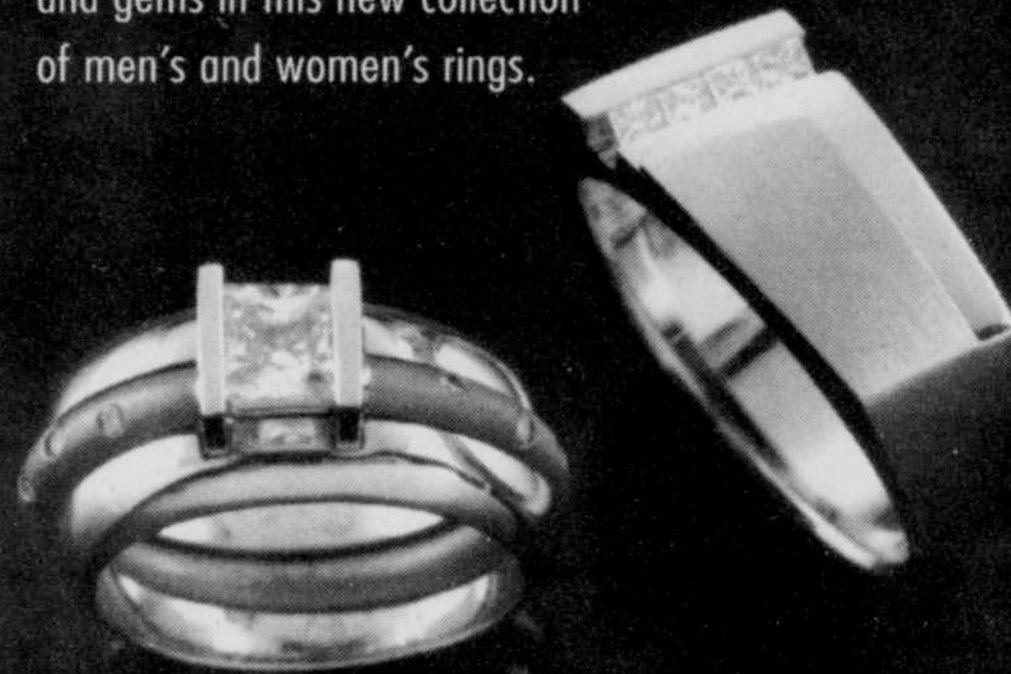
World pride dates: Amsterdam, Aug. 1-10; Buenos Aires, Nov. 1; London, July 5; Mexico City, June 28; Paris, June 19-29; Europride 1997, June 19-29 (in Paris).

Those looking for more information about Pride 1997 can visit IAL/GPC's Web site at <http://www.interpride.org>, where you can also find its electronic magazine, "Anomaly." Contact IAL/GPC by e-mail at info@interpride.org.

Send questions or comments about gay travel to Sasha Alyson, Alyson Adventures, PO Box 180179, Boston, MA 02118, or via e-mail at AlyVenture@aol.com.

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