

TRIPPING OUT

Ideas and inspiration
for summer travel

by Richard Bray



Soaking up some rays in Key West

Start your trip in cyberspace

Someone once said the Internet is like the world's largest library, only all the books are on the floor. When it comes to gay travel and research on the Internet, it sometimes can feel that way.

Searching under keywords "gay" and "travel," Microsoft Network gave me 114 search results. Yahoo netted 540 links.



Fun London-style

As often happens with Internet research, there is a lot of clicking and hitting the back button, but I generally found the results well worth the mouse time. There is simply so much to wander through, the mind boggles.

Gay.com is a huge site with links to just about everything. I clicked on travel, which led me to other links such as London's Best Queer Clubs, Lesbian London, Brighton (which is apparently England's hottest gay resort) and the more recreational link to pics of the Go-Go Boys of London.

Gay.com's featured location this week was obviously London, but it also had subject links for Gay Events, Gay Towns, Travel/Health and Today's Weather. (I always work under the assumption that our weather is better than theirs.) The destination links were useful and functional, including U.S. locations, Asia, Australia/Pacific,

friendly, including Destination Guides, Plan a Trip templates, Car and Airline Reservation functions and a rather interesting forum section with lots of opinion called Talk with Travelers.

PlanetOut.com, another huge gay umbrella site, has a particularly useful search engine by destination.



Kicking back on an Olivia cruise

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association is an excellent reference listing 1,200 professionals around the United States. A quick search for Portland at IGLTA.com produced five gay-friendly travel agents with links to their e-mail addresses or Internet sites and contact information.

One of my favorite surprises searching the Internet travel world was a site called GayHomeTrade.com. With lots of listings, most with photographs and plenty of useful information, this site is the perfect place to set up a house swap. Membership is \$80 a year.

GayCalendar.com is helpful for planning where to go and when. This site lists events, by date or location, throughout the world from AIDS conferences to circuit parties.

Finally, for all you people who can't leave home without your dogs, don't miss PetsWelcome.com, which has been poodle-tested for its reliability in Oregon at least.

Although the Internet sometimes can be too much of a good thing, it is still an invaluable tool for gathering information. I can't imagine planning any sort of trip without it—and the price is sure right.

The pros know best

Clint Schrader of World Accents Travel is upbeat about gay travel and says his clients travel just about everywhere. Although destinations like Palm Springs, Calif.; Provincetown, Mass.; and Key West, Fla., are still popular, he says, "There is a lot of independent travel happening right now to places like South Africa, and unstructured tours are gaining in popularity as travelers become more sophisticated."

Schrader says gay-oriented cruises are still very busy. RSVP, geared toward gay men, is always popular.

Atlantis Cruises are also a hit, including both land packages and conventional cruises. One-week cruises through the Caribbean run about \$1,000 to \$2,000 a person, double occupancy, depending on the type of cabin.

Atlantis also offers one-week stays at its resorts in Mexico for about \$1,200 a person. These are generally all-inclusive rates. The fun begins once you arrive, and you can settle in and relax.

Schrader says Pied Piper has been marketing to gay customers; however, its ships tend to be mixed, so his clients often will form their own groups.

Olivia, well-known for travel geared toward lesbians, offers cruises both in Europe and the Caribbean. Rates are roughly \$2,000 to \$4,000 depending on the type of cabin. Cruise rates also vary dramatically depending on the size and type of ship.

Schrader reports happy, satisfied clients. "Customers generally like them, feeling very relaxed, comfortable and open."

If you're in the mood for a "family" vacation, cruises are definitely one of the easiest and most popular ways to go. First-timers might find the experience easier using a travel agent. They often offer special rates and can give useful advice on where to go and the most appropriate cruise line.



A good book to have along

No doubt about it: For years, the bible of travel for gays and lesbians has been the Damron Guide. Published since 1964 and updated annually, it offers one-stop shopping for where to go, what to look for and where to look for them, all in one book.

The lesbian edition, a bit shorter than the men's edition, lists accommodations, restaurants, bars, information lines, entertainment and much more. *The Damron Women's Traveller* covers the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico and Europe. Included are one-page city overviews for major met-

Canada, Caribbean, Europe and Latin America.

GayTravel.com is also an excellent Internet site and very user-

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