

PACK UP AND GET OUT!



PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

A vacation that works

Dream of never going back to your job? Here's a holiday to help.

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

ager at the beautiful Oregon Garden in Silverton, about an hour south of Portland. This guy cracks the whip early. His team is already at work by the time I hop in the truck for an 8 a.m. cruise through the garden's 240 acres.

With New Yawk accent and East Coast salt, Al reminds me of comedian Dave Attell. It's the daytime version of *Insomniac* and we're about to hit every bar—er, planting bed—this side of Salem.

I slip him my business card, just to let him know of my ulterior motives as investigative reporter. He laughs—his lesbian daughter is gonna think it's a hoot to see her old man written up in the queer rag.

We get coffee and drive to the highest viewpoint. Al jumps out of the truck, giving me the lay of the land. Short in stature but long on words, he explains how the garden displays nursery specimens, processes Silverton's waste water and serves as a destination for both nature nuts and strolling blue-hair bonnies.

We stop by a trailer where I meet the guys—mostly women, actually. Nearly all have gone to college for this sort of thing, putting my high school biology class to shame. I might plant petunias, but I've got nothin' on these guys. It's like they're speaking Latin or something.

May is a busy time at the garden because

winter construction projects are still being completed even as new plantings arrive. Our chain gang weeds and waters, prunes and plants. They create a new path, replace a drain and use a backhoe to sculpt new terrain with rocks bigger than my car.

As much as he disses the politics, Al's job as master gardener is almost more brains than brawn. He's the go-to man for what needs to be done. Yet, Al immediately transforms into arboreal ambassador to lead a tour of municipal tree huggers. Eavesdropping, I hear tree terms that mean something totally different to me—tight crotches, bound balls, trimming the bush...I never knew horticulture had such sex appeal!

Now with better appreciation for a master gardener's mix of management and mud, I can immediately think of at least one thing I'd rather use my hands for than pulling weeds. But the intimate experience of seeing what's really involved, even for just a day, was a hell of a lot of fun and something I can't wait to try again.

I wonder if there's a VacationVacation for gay bathhouse attendant?

Figuring out what you really want to do in life doesn't have to be all work. Each VacationVacation package includes

comfy accommodations where you can kick back and take in nearby attractions. After spending the day tearing up the garden, for example, I slept soundly at downtown Silverton's Water Street Inn.

This old Victorian has seen its share of history, I'm sure, but it's been beautifully restored by friendly innkeeper Sheila Rosborough and family. Five guest rooms feature private baths and other amenities, and you can walk downtown to restaurants, art galleries, a movie theater and shopping. (Yes, this all-American small town is in vogue for countryside charm; the Asian import shop Stone Buddha, for example, is owned by a lesbian couple.)

A short drive away is the quiet and thoughtful Silver Falls State Park. This natural oasis features more than 25 miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. The lush Canyon Trail particularly draws you past cool earthen walls, along the creek and through the woods past 10 magnificent waterfalls, many of which you actually walk behind. In addition to day-use access, the park offers camping and RV space, cabin rentals and group accommodations. Guided horseback rides are available during the summer. Pets are welcome, but not on the Canyon Trail. ☐

For details about VocationVacations call 866-888-6329 or go to www.vocationvacations.com. Visitor information for the OREGON GARDEN is available at 503-874-8100 or www.oregongarden.org. The WATER STREET INN can be found at 503-873-3344 or www.thewaterstreetinn.com. Contact SILVER FALLS STATE PARK at 503-873-8681, ext. 31.

Horticulture manager Al Shay shows you what it's like to be a professional master gardener when you take a working vacation at the Oregon Garden in Silverton

You usually take a vacation to get away from your sucky stressful job, but a new kind of travel package actually puts you to work...exploring that career change you've been fantasizing about.

VocationVacations is a new concept developed by 36-year-old gay entrepreneur Brian Kurth. He'd been working a high-stress job that just didn't reward him deep down. You know, that gnawing feeling you get sitting in traffic three hours a day, wondering about life? Like you, Kurth knew there's gotta be more.

"It suddenly occurred to me to test the waters in one of my dream jobs while on vacation," he says. He traveled five months, ending up in Portland, where he now lives his own dream, working for a local vintner while launching this new biz.

VocationVacations lets people spend some time shadowing a professional in the career of their choice and get a better sense of whether they really want to give up their cushy 9-to-5 job. Each month Kurth introduces a new package, such as chef, zookeeper or Portland International Raceway worker. Available now are brewmaster, vintner and the one I experienced, master gardener.

I pictured a meditative process, delicately pruning bonsai in a romantic greenhouse while sipping iced tea, hardly soiling my snow-white gloves and certainly not breaking a sweat. What I got was a fun, raucous look behind the scenes of a hybrid botanical garden/amusement park.

My mentor was Al Shay, horticulture man-

Relax, it's natural

Strip away the stress and soak in the hot springs scenery

Whether you work hard or play hard, shuck it all at Breitenbush Hot Springs to commune with nature *au naturel*. Rustic, restful and gay-affirming, this peaceful retreat offers more than its holistic, earthy-crunchy reputation might lead you to believe. Especially if you want to do nothing at all.

Two hours southeast of Portland, Breitenbush sits on a remote site in the Willamette National Forest. Tall forests, crisp air and rugged wilderness inspire deep thought, while the river's rejuvenating sound softens the stillness.

Artesian hot springs supply three natural-rock pools that face a meadow. A "medicine wheel" offers four tubs of different temperatures, along with a cold plunge. A natural-

steam sauna offers yet another way to unwind.

Breitenbush plays host to many events, but individuals can visit for a personal retreat, which includes access to daily well-being programs, such as yoga. Other services include hydrotherapy, massage and reiki.

Hiking trails wander from the campsite, connecting to ancient forests.

A historic lodge now houses a library, function room and dining hall. Guests either pitch a tent or choose a geothermal-heated cabin, some with bathrooms and some sharing a common bathhouse.

Other benefits (or caveats): clothing-



Bart Church, Breitenbush's new gay director of marketing and events, says a visit to the hot springs relaxes the body and rejuvenates the spirit

optional bathing areas, vegetarian meals and no phones. ☐

BREITENBUSH HOT SPRINGS welcomes the boys-only Northwest Radical Faeries from Aug. 13 to 17 and the girls-only Women in the Woods from Aug. 21 to 24. For details call 503-854-3312 or visit www.breitenbush.com.

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