

PACK UP AND GET OUT!

Ripples from America's jihad on terror changed more than fried potatoes into "freedom fries." War with Iraq seemingly has altered longtime friends into foes: Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, France. Luckily, touring "old" Europe with this new world order is still fun as hell.

"People here understand in general the American people aren't responsible for the war. They see it as Bush's war," says Jonathan Schroeder, a former Portlander living in Hanover, Germany. "I can't imagine anyone encountering negative attitudes for simply being American."

Trés gay

Political hot spots spice up European travel

BY TIM JOYCE

Despite politics and Yankee music blaring in every bar, the European scene is very different. Experiencing sexuality isn't taboo, and homosexuality is less of an identity. But expect to pay for toilets sometimes, and remember that no last call can throw you more than jet lag.

Across the Atlantic, bar and bathhouse blur into darkened backrooms where nearly anything goes. No guilt or stigma is felt, and nearly every venue has a dark room or corner. Protection messages are everywhere in many languages.

"Many countries in Europe have strong recognition of domestic partnerships, and several allow gay marriages," says Schroeder. "Open attitudes about sexuality run deeper in European society. It would be a shame for Americans not to experience living a more relaxed and care-free gay life."

Which destination is the only difficult question.

"Paris is my favorite," says antique dealer Frank Moorman, who I met at the bar of Le Carré, a hip, ultramodern gay spot in the City of Lights. Fast-paced Paris has much to offer. While "La Queen" is Paris' most famous gay venue, it is overproduced and on the touristy Champs-Élysées. Flooded with heterosexuals, it's far from the city's gay district, Le Marais. North of Hotel de Ville (City Hall), the large area is difficult to navigate, even for Francophones.

"I love the Depot," adds

Moorman. "Less attitude than most Paris spots." Le Depot is on Le Marais' northern fringe, and hidden through the twisting hallways of the downstairs darkroom is a better bar and dance floor.

"Paris is pretension times two," counters Michael Castelblanco, who lived in Europe for several years. "Lots of twinks, lot of flammers. Lesbians are runway models."

Now in Portland finishing his degree, Castelblanco much prefers Berlin. The city's renaissance has construction cranes all over the skyline. Running above and below ground, the metro system can confuse but remains the best bet in getting around. Highly popular among young tourists, Berlin boasts several gay enclaves and is known for its leather scene, which is more bark than bite.



PHOTOS BY TIM JOYCE

Homo Erectus, a gay bar near Brussels City Hall, has friendly employees and patrons eager to chat



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