

The Experience of a Lifetime

I have learned in my nearly 19 years in Oregon that the best way to combat my growing frustration with our long *fallwinterspring* season is to go somewhere warm, preferably between March and the Pride of June, to recharge my batteries and help combat my serious Vitamin D deficiency and nasty disposition. This year my wife Cher and I, along with our best friends Jena and Bethie, made a long journey to the Caribbean for an Olivia Travel resort vacation in the Dominican Republic. This was the fourth time Cher and I have traveled with Olivia, and each trip has outdone the last.

Many of our friends have been suspect of our trips, wondering why on earth we would want to spend the extra money to be with a group of lesbians for a week. They roll their eyes, make comments about how they always feel comfortable on regular vacations and question the big deal about Olivia anyway. Our friend Bethie was skeptical as well—going along with the plans set forth by her girlfriend, co-conspired by me to make this trip for the four of us happen. We booked it 14 months in advance—plenty of time to plan, dream about and pay for it. Each month we counted down, another 30 days closer.

On May 6, we set off for the airport and 12 hours of travel. When we arrived at the Club Med in Punta Cana, it was as if everything



living out loud

BY KATHRYN MARTINI

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about our regular lives melted away. Not only were we in paradise, sitting by the beautiful blue water of the sea, we were with our people, completely comfortable and free.

Those of us who live in the Portland metropolitan area don't realize just how lucky we are to reside in a progressive city where we can be ourselves. My wife and I hold hands wherever we go—I will kiss her in public, there are places we can go dancing together, and neither of us is afraid to be out at work. This is absolutely not the experience of many of the ladies whom we met on our trip. It's always fascinating, albeit heartbreaking, to hear about their regular lives at home.

We met two ladies from Virginia—both closeted except in the company of close friends and family. They have a child together, but one of the women has no legal rights due to Virginia's strict laws that keep her from adopting *her own child* and, as the second mother, she is hesitant to participate in school events or in any other capacity that would out them. As a couple, they can't even insure each other or have automatic property rights. They had never, until this trip, expressed any form of affection toward each other in public.

Another couple from Alabama have been in a committed relationship with each other for three years, but don't share a home due to their fear of having an out and open relationship. One of them is a small business owner who doesn't want to risk losing clientele, and her livelihood, if people know she's a lesbian. For these ladies and others like them, going on an Olivia trip is life changing, a utopist respite from the homophobic world they endure each day.

We met ladies from all over the world— young ladies in their early twenties, older ladies in their eighties, couples, solos, groups of

old friends and new friends, femmes and butches and everyone in between. Some were comfortable in their basketball shorts and sports bras as beachwear, some were comfortable topless, one lady was wearing a flannel shirt in the pool during a volleyball game— yes, a flannel shirt. Some ladies dressed up in the evening, some did not, and eventually Jena, a professional hair stylist, resisted the urge to offer makeover advice to the ladies still sporting mullets. We weren't the only Portlanders who made the long trip for sunshine—our newest besties are a couple from NE whom we happened to meet three weeks earlier in the bathroom at The Alibi.

We swam in the sea, drank piña coladas, socialized, napped, ate lobster, watched amazing shows by The Wau Wau Sisters, Dana Goldberg, Poppy Champlain and Vicky Shaw, danced until the wee hours of the morning and skinny-dipped under the moon. And never once did we look around and wonder if anyone was looking at us funnily. Never once did I drop my wife's hand or feel that bit of heaviness that sometimes sits in my chest, and never did I feel even the tiniest bit of shame or judgment.

Toward the end of the week, Bethie looked at Jena with tears in her eyes and said, "This is the greatest experience of my life." Some things are worth making happen. The greatest experience of one's life is definitely one of them. **JO**

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