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#114

the travel issue

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FROM THE EDITOR

Pack Your Bags!



Sometime in the '90s I was part of the rent-a-crowd at a well-catered event hosted by a friend of a friend. I didn't know many people at the party but that didn't stop me blah-blahing on to anyone

who'd listen. The topic must have been food because during a break in conversation a rather well-turned-out older lady (big hair, too much jewellery, Chanel suit) asked me, "What are the gays eating these days?"

Disinhibited by expensive champagne, I replied, "Apart from each other?"

This got a laugh, which was lucky, because it distracted everyone from the awkwardness of the question. What are the gays eating? What are the gays wearing? Where are the gays living? The generation from which this lady came often referred to "the gays" as a way of objectifying us – the gays are over there, away from "us", the regular people.

On this occasion, I'm sure the lady didn't mean to offend. She was simply asking me, one of the gays, if there was a gastronomic trend on the horizon she should know about. The gays are often ahead of the trends, you know.

Since then a new generation of gays have reclaimed "the gays". Young writers at this magazine started using the phrase a few years ago in a comic, self-referential way, especially after the so-hot-back-then-but-so-dead-right-now "queer" went out of fashion.

If I were at that same party today and was asked, "Where are the gays going on holidays?" I'd have a pretty good idea and it would surprise me. Back in December, the extent of the economic downturn was becoming apparent and experts were predicting that the next 12 months, at least, were going to be all about staying home to watch cable television, eating in and renovating the spare room.

The average DNA reader travels overseas twice a year but under the circumstances I expected the gays to explore cheaper domestic travel options. However, while putting together this month's travel features, I discovered that that's not been the case. The gays I quizzed were not caravanning through Queensland, weekending in Tasmania, shopping in Melbourne or camping in the Outback. No, they were off to Spain (for Madrid Pride), Japan (for a friend's wedding), the USA (to see Cher in Las Vegas), Argentina (for the cultural experience), South Africa (for the vineyards), Russia (for Eurovision,

not the Pride riot) and Denmark (for the Out Games). Either the gays are not being affected by the downturn or Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* has prompted us to leave the country in record numbers.

This month we look at the trend (yes, we the gays are ahead of it) towards boutique gay travel and escorted travel groups. One Sydney company, Hautes Vacances, will get you costumed and up the red carpet into Vienna's Life Ball. Another, Points Of Difference, is arranging all-gay long weekend ski trips to Thredbo in the Australian alps. Chicago's Zoom Vacations can have you hang-gliding into a chic beach party in Rio or organise Bel Ami porn stars to deliver your birthday cake!

Travel writer Cameron Watt explores Buenos Aires and finds a vibrant subterranean gay culture in a city that's still thriving, with echoes of old New York and continental Europe. Scott Riley and Mark McFarlane file a superb photo story from the rough-and-tumble arena of Las Vegas' gay rodeo – where



Come fly with us! Pam Ann at Life Ball with Victor Hoeld (second from left) and Hautes Vacances guests.

Brokeback cowboys wrestle cattle and goats wear underpants! Our intrepid photo-duo also captured some of the raw leatherman heat of San Francisco's raunchy Folsom Street Fair.

If you need to be talked out of taking an overseas holiday, our *Expect The Unexpected* feature is for you. Our writers reveal nightmare travel experiences (rat infested accommodation, revolutionaries armed with machetes, gang wars in New York).

If your fear of *Australia* is greater than your fear of swine flu, we hope you enjoy this issue. Don't forget to take the DNA Readers' Survey on our website and be in the running to win a \$10,000 African safari. Or join DNA's Vietnam by train adventure (see page TBC). We leave in October for a joint trip with the girls from *Lesbians On The Loose*.

Wherever your destination, safe travels.

Andrew Creagh,
Founding Editor



Hautes Vacances escorted group in Vienna for Life Ball.



Zoom Vacations escorted tour to Sydney for Mardi Gras.



Points Of Difference ski trip to Thredbo.



The travel buzzwords right now are “boutique” and “escorted tours”. What are they? Who’s doing them? And where will they get you? We spoke to Victor Hoeld of Hautes Vacances for the lowdown.

“Not just a holiday, a life experience.”

DNA: What are escorted tours?

Victor Hoeld: At Hautes Vacances, it means that every group is accompanied by one of our concierges who make sure that wherever you go you’re a VIP. In places like Cannes during the film festival we organise film premiere access and tickets to the VIP after-parties with the stars. This August we’re providing VIP all-access passes to the Ascension party on Fire Island, exclusive to Hautes Vacances guests.

What prompted you to start the business?

I’ve been a traveller since birth; growing up in Sao Paulo and Frankfurt and living in New York, London and now Sydney. It’s ingrained in my life. Last year I had the opportunity to create something I’ve always wanted – tailor-made travel for like-minded people... the gays!

What fabulous places are you escorting tours to in the next 12 months?

Wow, some extraordinary places. For the whole iconic gay experience we have Fire Island in August. We’ve got a cool summer trip to the Greek Isles, Ibiza for the best house music on the planet, Morocco for its

Arabic charm, Southern Africa for its wildlife, Oktoberfest for pure party, Punta del Este for a stylish New Year, Rio and Florianópolis for the world’s best carnival, and Australia’s top gay event Sydney Mardi Gras. The world’s most

“The itineraries are designed to be mind-blowing. That’s the real luxury about our trips – substance.”

glamorous gay party is Life Ball so, of course, we’ll be going there again next year. **You recently took groups to the Life Ball in Vienna and the Cannes Film Festival. Tell us about those trips.**

All our travellers had a blast, myself included. Life Ball is simply the most glamorous annual gay event in the world. Where else can you hear Bill Clinton talking about his AIDS

charity, which you are supporting with your attendance, then see Katy Perry perform Freddie Mercury’s *I Want To Break Free*, and just minutes later dance to Lady Gaga with the world’s hottest gay boys in one of Europe’s most impressive landmarks, the historic town hall of Vienna? After Life Ball, we jetted over to Cannes (via Milan), which attracts the highest number of international stars of any global film festival. Go out with the stars after you’ve enjoyed the Mediterranean sun in San Tropez only a couple of hours before. Check out my photos in the Hautes Vacances Travel Club on Facebook and you’ll see what we are talking about. Next year, Hautes Vacances will extend the Cote D’Azur experience to include the Formula 1 Grand Prix in Monaco. I’m already pumped!

Tell us about the Fire Island trip.

Since the ’70s and ’80s, Fire Island in summer has been the coolest scene for gay New Yorkers. On the island you can party hard, go to exclusive VIP parties, socialise with high-calibre actors, models and athletes, enjoy great food or just relax on the beach. It’s magical >>

>> and once you've been you'll keep returning every August for many years to come.

We're in the global financial crisis; has this affected gay men and their travel plans?

The GFC doesn't seem to have affected Hautes Vacances' client base much. The gays are very time conscious and do not want to muck around when it comes to their holidays. Everything with us is designed to be just perfect and represent excellent value. I've not seen anyone else who matches our unique itineraries or our price points, either. My clients wonder how I design such grand trips at such great value.

How do you?

Ha! That's my secret! But I should add that for those who find a big African safari a bit too decadent at a time when everybody else is cutting down, we will be offering exclusive weekend getaways starting in spring.

Will this include domestic trips?

We are planning exclusive domestic getaways mostly designed for long weekends.

Gay travel always seems to be about luxury. Are there any dirt-track wilderness type tours in the works?

Standardised luxury can be quite boring, and five-star star luxury in chain hotels can be impersonal. For me, boutique travel goes way beyond that. We include wilderness and pure nature experiences – our safaris, for example. The itineraries and places we stay are designed to be mind-blowing and not boring or common. That's the real luxury about our trips – substance.

Is substance one of the aims of the service?

Yes, along with style and exclusivity and amazing company. These are the values of Hautes Vacances and something I won't compromise on. We're about offering life experiences, not just a good holiday. Everything we do has a stylish and distinctively magical touch to it, just like haute couture in fashion or haute cuisine in fine dining. That's what I set out to achieve with the company, and that's reflected in the name.

Your passport must be a good read – but do you have one very personal, favourite place of all time?

I really love down-to-earth places like Morocco or the cool Latin buzz of South America, but I can't exist without über chic parties like Life Ball, Cannes Film Festival, Ascension, Carnival in Rio, or New Year Eve parties in the world's top spots like Rio, Cape Town or Punta del Este. I'm always searching for the next boutique gay travel experience and my clients are always welcome to join me! But, honestly, I hope I never find "the one" place as there is just too much out there to see and experience.

To see the complete list of Hautes Vacances up-coming trips go to www.hautesvacances.com

Something Special

You are unique, so your holiday should be, too. And it can be...

OUT TRAVEL: For boutique Australian travel experiences, the g-and-l travel specialists at Out Travel suggested the following: **Wrotham Park Station** is a premium outback resort, offering guests the excitement of the daily workings of a major cattle station with the luxury of a five-star resort. Guests can immerse themselves in the vast, rugged beauty of the landscape and engage in activities that showcase the rich heritage of Australia's Outback life. For a coastal retreat, the much-hyped **Southern Ocean Lodge** on Kangaroo

Island is one of Australia's great scenic treasures, providing an unspoilt wilderness experience. **Sal Salis Ningaloo Reef** is an exclusive safari camp hidden in the white sand dunes of Western Australia's Cape Range National Park. Five spacious wilderness tents are pitched just metres from the water's edge of the world's greatest fringing coastal coral reef. **Seven Spirit Bay** on the

Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory is one of the most magnificent and least developed tropical areas in the world. The peninsula is part of Aboriginal Arnhem Land, where entry is by permit only and extremely limited. For more go to www.outandabouttravel.com.au

POINTS OF DIFFERENCE: This newly launched Sydney company creates boutique and escorted events for gay and lesbian groups. Theatre trips to shows such as *Chicago* and *Avenue Q* include exclusive after-show meet-the-cast opportunities. The POD Priscilla By Bus tour includes visits to historic gay locations connected to the movie. The company's gay and lesbian skiing

long weekends to Thredbo, called Frosty Fruits, kicks off this September 4th to 7th. Check the website for more details. www.pointsofdifference.com

ZOOM VACATIONS: Fancy hang-gliding into a chic beach party in Rio de Janeiro? How about an exclusive dinner in a Peruvian mansion? Perhaps arriving by elephant to a gourmet dinner at Victoria Falls is more your style, or having your 40th birthday cake delivered by near-naked Bel Ami stars in Prague. "Our tours are multi-sensory,

experiential journeys that blend adventure, luxury, culture and style," says Bryan Herb of Zoom's one-of-a-kind itineraries. Bryan and partner Joel Cabrera set up the Chicago-based company in 2000. Today, despite the downturn, business is booming. Why? "There's thoughtful detail in every Zoom trip to make sure our guests are looked after and pampered in physical and emotional ways," says Cabrera. For more go www.zoomvacations.com

VIETNAM BY TRAIN:

Pack your sunscreen, sensible walking shoes and sense of adventure, DNA and our friends at

Lesbians On The Loose are off to Vietnam for a fully escorted gay-and-lesbian tour of this remarkable country. In October we'll be setting off by train from Ho Chi Min City in the south and travelling all the way up to Ha Noi in the north. Expect 18 adventure-filled days with a group of gay and lesbian fellow travelers. There'll be two sleeper carriages, one for boys and one for girls, and plenty of four-star hotels along the way, not to mention sensational Vietnamese cuisine, scenery, shopping and culture. For more info and bookings call Natalie at Franko's Vietnam Tours on (+61 3) 5256 3038 or email frankosvietnam@yahoo.com.au and ask for the DNA trip to Vietnam.

