



Recession Hinderin... Travel?

by Scott Stiffler
EDGE Contributor
Monday May 19, 2008

Gas at four dollars plus per gallon; skyrocketing airline prices; plummeting exchange rates: it's enough to make you think twice before jetting off to an exotic destination. But for travel-minded LGBTs, it's going to take more than recession jitters to cancel, postpone or compromise our travel plans. While thrifty soccer moms fret over the cost of loading up their dreary nuclear family and shelling out big bucks to take that gas-guzzling SUV to an overpriced land called Disney, the summertime rituals of savvy, robust, horny, sun-soaked gay men will remain relatively unchanged -- as they timeshare, carpool, group rate and daytrip their way to vacation bliss.



Europe Out, Canada In

But just because we have more disposable income than our breeder brethren is no reason to spend it unnecessarily. Edge recently spoke to some queer travel pundits to make sense of the current economic climate and assess the best travel strategies and destinations -- so once you get to where you're going, you'll still have enough (money) in your pocket to ply that handsome

townie with alcohol and take him back to your reasonably priced hotel room.

"There is clearly an increase in the amount of money gay and lesbians are spending when it comes to travel. Will the recession impact them? No doubt, but they won't be as affected as much. Because gay men have more disposable income and time, the recession won't really slow them down much. It may change their behaviors, but it won't stop them from traveling." says Ed Salvato, Editor in Chief of The Out Traveler. The annual amount spent on the gay travel market is estimated to be over sixty-five billion dollars -- a significant increase from just a few years ago, and one Salvato traces to events in 2001 in which the resiliency of gay travelers caught the attention of an industry in search, and need, of a new niche market.

Salvato: "After 9/11, studies were done that showed a lot of people stopped traveling; but gays and lesbians kept traveling. A lot of marketers of destinations and hotels took notice of the gay travel segment."

It's no wonder, then, that the mainstream travel industry looked at our rainbow flag and zeroed in on its distinctive green hue. For proof, check out the statistics gleaned from a recent poll of 1,500 gays and lesbians travel consumers (conducted by Community Marketing, Inc.; a consulting and marketing company based in San Francisco that specializes in the gay and lesbian tourism industry). The poll, which Senior Projects Director David Paisley explains was

TRAVEL CHANNEL SPONSOR



...across town, or across the world!

ZIP TO YOUR FAVORITE GAY-FRIENDLY DESTINATION IN STYLE... ZIPTOGAYTRAVEL.COM

FROM:

- Select a Departure City -

TO:

- Select a Destination City -

CHECK IN: 06/03/2008
CHECK OUT: 06/10/2008
(mm/dd/yyyy) (mm/dd/yyyy)

CLASS: ADD FLIGHT
 Coach
 First/Business

ROOMS: 1

Room 1: Adults: 1 Child: 0



done to benefit clients who wanted to get a better understanding of how the recession will play out this summer, asked respondents how the economy affects their travel plans. Paisley found that, although "eighty percent felt the country was in a recession," they'd still be traveling -- but "their choices are different. Going to Europe is an expensive proposition this year. They are well traveled and have been to Europe before, so they'll sit out Europe this summer. Instead, they'll be spending time in the U.S. and Canada doing shorter local trips, and looking for bargains."

As a result, "Gay travel in North America is huge this year, with Americans staying closer to home." According to IGLTA Global Ambassador Tom Nibbio, "Out bound travel from the U.S. will be impacted due to exchange rates. In bound international travel into the U.S. should continue to rise. Gay & Lesbian international travel will probably stay very consistent with mainstream travel, although during difficult times, Gay & Lesbian travelers are more dedicated and loyal to continue their travel planning."

(Image: a graphic that American Airlines is using to attract LGBT travelers in a new line of ads.)



Staying Close to Home

"Gays and lesbians are looking at more local travel options instead of going to London -- because the exchange rate is more expensive. This year, they're doing more regional traveling." says Salvato -- who points out that, for

Midwesterners, Minneapolis is a nice place to go for theater -- as opposed to New York City." For East Coasters blessed with the gift of gab, bargains can be had by old-fashioned negotiation: "Provincetown resorts can be very expensive. That's when guesthouse owners make their money. They require five-day minimums; my gut would tell me you can bargain. They want to fill their hotel rooms, so there may be a little more flexibility. Call up and say instead of five nights I can only stay three; what's the best price you can offer me? There may be more resiliency on the part of Ptown guesthouse owners.

If you're interested in Ptown, yet find these minimum stays too restrictive, why not Ogunquit, Maine? "It's really charming," says Salvato, "and surprisingly international with a lot of French Canadians. It has a huge white sand gay beach; the water is cold, but it is gorgeous. You can have your fix of gay nightlife and enjoy Maine and some decent shopping and a lobster lunch at The Lobster Pound."

Salvato also champions Asbury Park as an alternative to Fire Island: "A lot of New Yorkers go there; it's being developed and there's a core of dedicated gay and lesbian people. It's sophisticated but friendly and local. Jones Beach is a great Sunday day trip, and there's a whole gay section there. If you're in Manhattan, Sandy Hook is only two ferry points away. It's in a state park and it's gorgeous." Salvato's other alternatives to Fire Island or Ptown include "the Caribbean, Key West, Miami or Palm Springs. They're unbelievably hot and muggy, but you can stay in pretty nice places for great deals. In St. Croix, you can go to Sand Castles; the summer is what they call their slower season, so you can find some good deals."



Gay Americans Abroad

For those determined to

Free Stuff



"Jersey Muscle, Arms in the gym with Nick and Jeff"

on DVD!
[Enter here»](#)

Buy A Home



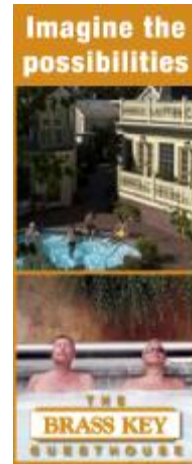
Colonial House for Sale [Rhinebeck, NY]

[Put your property here»](#)

In Philadelphia



The Liberty Stampede Awards :: May 11, 2008



leave the country, Salvato recommends "going to Seville and Spain as opposed to Barcelona; going to South America or Mexico for some place exotic as opposed to Bali or Hong Kong where the dollar is weak. Argentina is very gay friendly; Buenos Aires offers civil unions, so it's a welcoming place for gay and lesbian visitors and still very inexpensive." Nibbio emphasizes the international placebo effect of planning "unique trips to Hawaii or Alaska; that way, you won't have to worry about any foreign exchange rate, and will feel as though you're traveling internationally."

He also sees Mexico as "a good value choice for Americans. For gays & lesbians, I suggest Mexico City and Cancun. Also, South America is still a good value (Machu Picchu, Cusco & Lima, Peru; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Rio, Sao Paulo & the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina are all great choices for Gay & Lesbian travelers despite the cost of airline tickets due to fuel surcharges."

Paisley notes that "All the California cities are great values this summer. We're seeing the dollar is so cheap, European gays and lesbians are flooding to the US east and West Coast. It's helped the local economies keep up their numbers." He also points to relatively close traditional Canadian destinations such as "Van Couver, Montreal and Toronto." but notes that, once there, it's a short trip to lesser-known cities like "Victoria, Whistler and Halifax."

One way to cut down on the logistical hassle of finding your way through an unfamiliar city is to travel with a group -- which, although Nibbio notes is not for everyone, "a travel agent can provide you with the best options after asking you some simple questions about where and how you like to travel. If you like to travel in large groups, RSVP, ATLANTIS, OLIVIA, rFamily, TravelPride and quite a few other IGLTA member cruise tour operators are the way to go." For Nibbio, group travel offers "Better overall value, great entertainment, customized (gay-friendly) itineraries, and much more perks that cater to the gay market."



The Pride Circuit

Every year in June, cities all over the country pause momentarily to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality -- by lining Main Street and watching ten percent of the local population walk, dance, swish and float by. Yes, America loves a Pride parade -- and so does the bottom line. For the LGBT travel market, the Pride circuit has become a cash cow. If your Pride plans include traveling to events in another city, Cheapflights.com has a list of tips for "visiting festivals big and small across America."

Those tips include planning ahead or taking a chance on last minute airfare deals (citing Boston to San Francisco rates as low as \$270 or Atlanta to Los Angeles for \$285). Staying just past the weekend or exclusively during the week will also significantly impact airfare -- as will venturing outside of the box to explore events in lesser known Pride destinations such as "Salt Lake City, Utah (June 6-8), Austin, Texas (June 14), and Portland, Oregon (June 14-15)." For more information, visit the Cheapflights.com Gay and Lesbian Travel Tips page (cheapflights.com).

Courtesy of Paisley, also note that discount-minded Pride-goers can also score a ten to twenty percent discount "off the best available Internet rate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday rates in fifteen cities across America by calling 1-800-Kimpton or visiting www.kimptonhotels.com. Ask for the hotel's second annual Summer

of Pride rate.

For the personal touch, gay and lesbian owned and operated B&Bs provide an instant sense of community while in new surroundings. Michael Dolan, Spokesperson for BnBfinder.com, notes that there are bargains to be had if you're flexible as to when you stay: "One fantastic thing about B&Bs during the week, they have more vacancy. Most offer midweek deals with a nice discount. The innkeepers are very friendly, so often times you get to interact with them more. We're seeing people who might normally fly to Amsterdam taking trips closer to home -- or taking a 'staycation'; staying at home and renting out a room." To find gay and lesbian run B&Bs, go to BnBfinder.com, click the Extras feature and search for Gay Friendly.

Scott Stiffler is a New York City based writer and comedian who has performed stand-up, improv, and sketch comedy. His solo shows include Damaged by the 70s and An Evening With Insane Mark Twain & Dead Bette Davis. He must eat twice his weight in fish every day, or he becomes radioactive.



This article is part of our "Summer Vacation 2008" series. Want to read more? [Here's the full list»](#)

[Back to: Travel » Home](#)

Copyright © 2003-2008
EDGE Publications, Inc. / All Rights Reserved