

Nifty sites for planning your ideal vacation

by Diane Walsh

PONDERING WHERE TO GO to take time off this summer?

The Internet is a pristine gateway for getting a glimpse of the perfect destination, so we're told. On your e-path to discovering the ideal place to escape you're sure to encounter a multiplicity of choices. For some people the Web presents too many pathways. Information overload is a common complaint that can have the same dissatisfying effect as not having any information at all. Add overabundance – the notion of an inanimate all seeing PC search engine all too many times considered the single best travel specialist — and it's no surprise there may be those suffering from symptoms "oooverGOOGLEing."

In an age where people are expected to just give in to the overriding merits of e-planning as if it were the next best thing to eggs on toast – some not-so-computer-savvy people may find they're going in a labyrinth of virtual walls and frustrating dead ends. Moreover, it's hard to know which sites can be trusted.

Here are some tips to help you ease your angst about scheduling your vacation plans online, while distinguishing the junk from the gems in gay travel resources:

1. It's important to have network of resources among friends.
2. Travel companies are in the business of bringing tourists to particular destinations. Their flashy, seemingly hot sites aren't necessarily trustworthy – no matter how gay or gay friendly a business seems.
3. A Web site may cater to "the gay traveler," but that does not mean it can be trusted. Marketing industrialists are spending millions of dollars targeting the pockets of would-be pink travelers. You might want to take the Web-plunge with www.navigaytion.com or www.gaytravelonline.com.
4. Start chatting and posting your inquiries in a blog or in a membership-resource site. Blog sites and e-groups are the best place to start your search. Why? People who offer travel experience tips or destination stories generally don't have a marketing agenda. Bloggers usually are in-

spired to write about their experience because "they liked or didn't like" their vacation spot.

That said, you might want to visit:

QID (www.queerid.com)

PlanetOut (www.planetout.com)

Worldwide Gay Travel (www.worldwidegaytravel.com)

Gaylink Content (www.gaylinkcontent.com)

Rick Steves' Europe Through the Back Door (www.ricksteves.com)

Queercents (www.queercents.com)

Or even the more mainstream, Travel Pod (www.travelpod.com)

If you're looking, specifically, for a site "catering" as it were to "lifestyle trips for gays" then try Rainbow Tourism (www.rainbowtourismdowunder.blogspot.com).

If you're looking for the best resource in the UK, try TimeOut (www.timeout.com) and you won't be disappointed.

Of course, you always have the option of looking in www.pinkclassifieds.co.uk and going from there.

Be sure and check out Turkey Gay & Lesbian Travel (www.turkey-gay-travel.com). Turkey is the scoop as the hottest destination right now.

Sites that provide hotel room auctions and other cool discounts are a must see. Priceline (www.priceline.com) holds top points. Keep in mind though that some hotels listed on this site are participating in what some critics are calling "gotcha capitalism," whereby you find out later about a hidden trick that as a guest it is obligatory you put out "resort fees" amounting to extra costs (up to \$50 in some cases) whether or not choose to use their pool or spa! So, be sure and read the small print. Call the hotel. Be wary of sites that seem to be catering to one specialty and claim to be "voluntarily" proliferating the latest discount opportunities.

For airline and accommodation bookings, Kayak (www.kayak.com) is reliable; so is Sidestep (www.sidestep.com).

Holiday accommodation exchange is a trendy way to go these days because it's economical to trade your place with someone else. If you're hoping to house or apartment barter, check out Gay & Lesbian Home Trade Network (www.gayhometrade.com).

If you're thinking Asia as a destination, get useful tips on traveling smart on Asian Gay & Lesbian Resources (www.utopia-asia.com).

An absolute gem for lesbians planning to holiday is All Things Lesbian (www.allthingslesbian.com).

If you're keen on a Northern escapade but want a homey feel, try Yukon Pride Adventure Tours (www.yukonpride.com).

If you're the conference delegate type, then European Gay & Lesbian Travel Alliance (www.egta.com) might pique your curiosity.

If you want down-home advice and like anything Canadian, try Purple Roofs Gay & Lesbian Travel Directory (www.purpleroots.com) or Gay Vancouver (www.gayvan.com).

Now if you want something mildly raunchier and are looking to connect while, at the same time, learn about the hot spots to visit, then surf Cruise You (www.cruiseyou.com), or even better yet, check out The Pacific Canadian Association of Nudists (www.p-can.org) – what looks to be a well-connected nudist group in Vancouver, BC.

It may be that edgy or edgier-harder-to-locate sites are simply handy to have in your notebook because: sometimes the underground spots are the most interesting, for example, Bristol Gardens (www.bghs.co.uk) and Rio's (www.rios.co.uk), both health spas; or heck, even Torture Garden (www.torturegarden.com), a curious yet notorious fetish club!

Have a ball wherever you chose to go. Bon Voyage! **CLOUT**

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