

HOLIDAY SPOTS: **HOT** & **NOT!**

Where to go and what to miss: ADRIAN GILLAN weighs up pairs of contrasting, though well-nigh neighbouring, places for queers to hit or skip. What a difference just a few miles can make!

PACIFIC

HOT: NEW ZEALAND

ABOUT as far as you can travel from London and more advanced on many gay issues! Although, like us, they don't have gay "marriage" (to use that emotive, currently theologically-loaded word), unlike us, their civil partnerships do also recognise unions between straight couples who do



not want to (sharp intake) "marry". New Zealand's Parliament also has a higher proportion of out MPs than us: the 122-member body has five openly gay members following recent elections - including transsexual Labour MP Georgina Beyer. Most of the gay scene is located in the two main cities Auckland and Wellington, on the North Island. Increasing numbers of gay expats and retirees are settling in NZ - though often away from those big city hubs, preferring instead the natural and volcanic wonders that abound.

NOT: FIJI

MEANWHILE, a mere spit-and-a-spunk over the Tropic of Capricorn in Fiji - scarce a thousand miles away - an Australian male tourist was recently jailed for two years for having consensual sex with a local man whilst on hols. The sentencing magistrate said both men's behaviour made him want to vomit. Despite homosexual acts being essentially deemed illegal on the islands, there are - it so haps - other laws in place which offer queers protection from discrimination and which thankfully helped the Ozy bod and his Fijian friend get freed a few weeks later. Gay men and prostitutes in this otherwise seeming island idyll are still bearing the brunt of a homophobic spate which many are linking to these arrests. The Oz government has formally protested and the UK Foreign Office has warned any LGBT Brits who visit to beware. Basically, practicing queers should steer well clear!



AFRICA

HOT: SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH Africa's post-apartheid constitution was the first in the world to enshrine full protection for people regardless of sexuality. Recently, South Africa's Supreme Court of Appeal ruled in favour of a lesbian couple who wanted the definition of marriage changed to include



same-sex unions, saying the current Marriage Act was indeed unconstitutional. And great men like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu have long been vocal in their pro-LGBT support. At the tip of a mighty continent where two oceans collide, Cape Town has long been seen as the country's gay capital with a compact scene in the Green Point district attracting a largely white, touristy crowd - not least during Nov-Feb, for that mid-winter sun. Despite the "Mother City" still having its fair share of race, crime and HIV issues like the rest of the country, it is still one of the world's great wonders. And, despite the twelve hour non-stop flight, with no time difference, you won't feel lagged on landing!

NOT: ZIMBABWE

OVER the boarder, and it's just not cricket Mr Mugabe! You sanction the murder and torture of thousands of your own citizens, compare queers to dogs, ban the BBC, accuse the UK PM of being in the grip of gay mafia (C of E mafia more like) and allow your mindless thugs to beat up our very own Peter Tatchell when he is only trying to arrest you for being the hateful homophobic monster you are. Whilst your nation starves and is made homeless, and election rigging accusations fly, you still manage to jet around the globe with impunity despite something laughingly called international law. Probably see you down my local Ritz!



CARIBBEAN

HOT: SABA

ONE of the five member isles of the Dutch Caribbean, tiny Saba is arguably the most pro-homo destination in the Windies. Unlike former British colonies like the Bahamas, Belize and Jamaica, which have all refused entry to gay cruise ships, Saba has a long-standing reputation for welcoming everyone. Via the Netherlands, it is even part of the EU! Natives and



visitors alike enjoy the full protection of European Law. Holding hands and kissing hardly merits a glance. More Amsterdam 'dan "Burn di Battyman"! Moreover, just off the coast of Venezuela, it's outside the hurricane belt and boasts sun-kissed nude beaches for baring all. In fact, the entire Dutch Caribbean acts as a homo harbour haven in an otherwise predominantly choppy queer-queasy sea.

NOT: JAMAICA

SCARCE five hundred miles away, the plight of lesbians and gays in Jamaica has been grabbing headlines over the past two to three years - in no small part due to the successful Stop Murder Music! campaigns waged against Jamaican Dancehall singers like Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Elephant Man and Buju Banton. Last June, courageous Brian Williamson - founding member of the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals & Gays (J-FLAG) and the only Jamaican activist prepared to use his real name and show his face via media - was found dead at his home with multiple stab wounds. The police ruled that the motive was robbery because some of his possessions were missing, refusing to treat it as a hate-crime.



Crowds gathered outside the scene of the murder to laugh, jeer and celebrate his killing. The Jamaican government and police share full responsibility for such endemic, culturally-sanctioned and barbaric homophobic attitudes and violence.

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TRAVELLER BEWARE

Naturally, worldwide attitudes and laws concerning LGBTs vary enormously. In some countries, like Egypt and Iran, same-sex relationships are illegal and punishable by imprisonment - or even death. However, the better prepared you are, the fewer problems you are likely to encounter.

> Before you go, heed advice to queer travellers on the Foreign Office website: www.fco.gov.uk

> Get a good guidebook, which includes local queer-related laws and customs. Search the web.

> If in any doubt about your personal safety as a gay person, consider whether you should go at all, especially if travelling alone.

> Hotels in many countries don't accept same-sex, same-room bookings. Best check before you go.

> Be aware that STDs may be especially rife in some parts of the world and STD clinics non-existent.

> Those living with HIV should check to see if any entry restrictions apply; and what the availability of emergency drugs or treatment might be at their destination.

> Outside any distinct queer quarter, open expressions of sexuality might be frowned upon - or worse.

> Note that in some cultures, straight same-sex friends show affection by holding hands; however, obvious foreigners so doing could be viewed quite differently.

> The police in many areas of the world still try to entrap gays.

> Beware new-found "friends" or a prostitute who could turn into an exploitative thief or blackmailer.

> Take details of British Consular Offices in all countries you plan to visit, in case of any difficulties.

> **A number of gay travel operators visit some of the more gay-friendly places mentioned in this feature, including:**

Man Around -
www.manaround.com
Amro Holidays -
www.amroholidays.com

> **Other websites of relevance:**
www.avert.org/aofconsent.htm
(indicates Age of Consent in countries worldwide)
www.ilga.org (reports on human rights issues in countries worldwide)

EUROPE

HOT: SPAIN

EARLIER this year, Spain joined the Netherlands, Belgium, Massachusetts



(US) and Canada in extending full marriage rights to same-sex couples. Hundreds of thousands celebrated at Madrid's recent Pride Parade and many have since tied the knot in a nation where the age of consent is just 13 for all. Polls suggest nearly 80% of Spain's population identify as Catholic, but half of them ignore the Church's teachings.

Spain's pro-gay stance is fully backed by left-wing PM José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero who has said: "Spanish society grants [LGBTs] the respect they deserve, recognises their rights, restores their dignity, affirms their identity and restores their liberty." Blair: eat your heart out!

There are great scenes, not only in capital Madrid and Barcelona – you know, that place near Sitges – but also in Valencia, Bilbao and Seville, not to mention Ibiza and the Ibearics and Gran Can and the Canaries.

NOT: GREECE

ACROSS the Med, Ancient Greek heroes must be spinning in their graves at the homophobia in their homeland. As the Olympics showcased this once-great nation and cradle of democracy to the world last summer, away from the camera, Greek police officers and Orthodox priests, journos and politicians, were continuing their frenzied assault on the sexual freedom of Greek citizens.

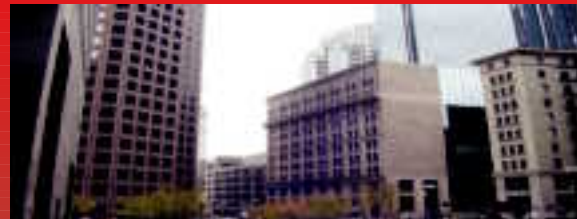
A member of the EU since 1981, Greece has resisted calls to adapt its legislation to comply with the standards set in the Amsterdam Treaty, still barring the right to legal same-sex union or the adoption of children; visitation rights for LGBT parents in separations; inheritance rights and pensions; or workplace protections. HIV prevention campaigns and equality work in schools are almost non-existent.

Greek Law refers to homosexual acts of seduction as "lewdness against nature", so characterising LGBTs as unnatural. Media and Church will still use the term "cinaedismos", an antiquated Greek term for homosexuality meaning "shameful behaviour". Athens and Mykonos apart: beware!

AMERICA

HOT: MASSACHUSETTS

IN February last year, Massachusetts became the first US state to allow same-sex couples to marry, failing to identify



any "constitutionally adequate reason" to deny them the right. Several other US states allow varying degrees of civil union – like Republican California where Governor Schwarzenegger recently vetoed his own Legislature's green light for similar gay marriage rights. Democrat-dominated Massachusetts' flagship city is civilised and mellow Boston - a short hop across the pond from Blighty – with its sizable scene and gorgeous leafy hues come Fall.

NOT: TEXAS

TWO thousand miles cross-continent, it is somewhat ironic that oil-and-Bush-bible-belt heartland Texas became the scene for "The Lawrence Case", a momentous pro-queer decision back in 2003. A Texan ban on consensual homosexual sex in private was overturned by the US Supreme Court on the grounds that such a law was a straightforward violation of the human right to privacy.

However, whilst this naturally and happily had a knock-on effect in other US anti-sodomy states - Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri – activists are anxious a new right-wing judge in the Supreme Court could lead to an overturn.

Meantime, like many other states, Texas explicitly bans recognition of same-sex unions; has no explicit LGBT non-discrimination law; and supports no pro-gay work in schools. That said, large scenes do exist in the likes of Dallas, Austin and Houston.



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