

Annual 'OUT&ABOUT Travel Awards' Reveal the Best and Worst in Gay and Lesbian Travel for 2005

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Spain Named Destination of the Year; Sandals Resorts and Ohio Hit Rock Bottom

Editors of PlanetOut Inc.'s (Nasdaq: LGBT) OUT&ABOUT Travel announced the winners (and losers) of the 12th annual OUT&ABOUT Travel Awards, led by Spain, which won the coveted title of "Destination of the Year" for 2005.

PlanetOut's OUT&ABOUT Travel Awards recognize achievements in lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) travel during the past year, as well as bring attention to an industry increasingly opening doors to LGBT travelers. Commentary, travel resources and the complete list of honorees can be viewed on Gay.com/travel and PlanetOut.com/travel.

"No place opened its hearts and minds and put out the welcome mat to the LGBT community quite like Spain has this year," said Ed Salvato, PlanetOut Inc. travel editor. "With its sun-drenched beaches, history-filled cities and picturesque countryside, as well as its recent legalization of gay marriage, it's no surprise that Spain is the destination of the year."

What's really amazing is how Spain has transformed in just 30 years, from the oppressive era of Franco to today's progressive, more inclusive atmosphere," he added. "It brings hope that destinations we warn you to avoid could one day open their arms to everyone regardless of sexual orientation."

According to Salvato, while Spain and some of this year's other winners consistently make the list, several new and unusual places have begun to woo LGBT travelers and deserve praise. Among the best:

œ Bloomington, Ind. received an award in "Tourism Development" for breaking into the gay and lesbian travel market by showcasing itself as a progressive college town with cultural opportunities surprising for its size and location.

œ Parks and Resorts at Yosemite National Park received a "Special Mention" for their on-going efforts in courting LGBT travelers amidst a challenging political climate.

Salvato noted that not every place deserved cheers. Fourteen destinations, companies and organizations whose homophobia was evident in 2005 received "Rock Bottom" dishonors, highlighting egregiously anti-gay behavior worthy of a gay travel advisory. Among the worst:

œ For the 12th straight year, Sandals Resorts' continued discrimination landed them on the "Rock Bottom" list, which comprises an infamous -- yet ever-shrinking -- group of places. Although the resort stated publicly that they changed their "heterosexual couples only" policy, OUT&ABOUT Travel received an internal memo Sandals sent to their sales agents last year that stated, 'we will continue to market exclusively to conventional male/female couples in love. There will be no departure from this original market niche.'

œ For its harshly-worded constitutional marriage ban, Ohio made the list. On the bright side, some of the state's travel industry marketers are taking steps to reach out to LGBT travelers. Also, places such as The Cincinnati Hotel are providing a friendly oasis in a state with an otherwise un-accepting political climate.

"The travel industry has really opened its eyes to the potential of the LGBT market, which collectively spends \$54 billion a year on travel," said Mark Elderkin, president of PlanetOut Inc. "For gay travelers and those targeting them, the marketplace has increasingly moved online. Gay.com and PlanetOut.com offer extensive branded content, such as reviews from OUT&ABOUT Travel and TravelGuides, sponsored by advertisers who are smitten with this Internet-savvy, travel-happy demographic. Online travel services such as Travelocity, as well as airlines, hotels, cruise ships and destinations, are reaching out to the LGBT audience, which goes online to do everything from booking flights to finding accommodations to shopping for travel gear."

When the OUT&ABOUT Travel Awards first came out in 1992, only a handful of destinations actively marketed to LGBT travelers. Today, at least 60 destinations worldwide are vigorously courting this lucrative market, including such unexpected locales as Philadelphia and Madison, Wisc., as well as countries with obvious appeal, such as Canada, England and France.

An indication of the changing times came at the recent 91st Annual Conference of the Destination Marketing Association International (formerly the IACVB), in San Diego, Aug. 3-6, where Salvato became one of the first gay travel experts to be asked to speak at the conference. His panel was filled to capacity and drew surprising attention from locales such as Fargo, N.D.; Dayton, Ohio and Grand Junction, Colo.

"Even just a few years ago it would have been shocking for these destinations to even display interest in this segment," said Salvato. "More destinations are recognizing that, compared to their straight counterparts, dual-income gay people travel more frequently and more spontaneously, spend more money and are more likely to own a passport and travel internationally.

"Moreover, this is a segment that has more disposable income and more time to use it, and that has proven resilient in the face of economic downturns, terrorist events and other calamities that have recently befallen the travel industry," he added.

The OUT&ABOUT Travel Awards are chosen on the basis of excellence, innovation and solid gay-family travel values. While there is no formal process for nominating and judging of the awards, the winners are places Salvato and the OUT&ABOUT Travel experts would recommend personally to friends.

For a full list of best and worst in gay travel, including accommodations and dining recommendations, please visit Gay.com/travel or PlanetOut.com/travel.

Destination of The Year

Spain

Top Five Gay Resort Towns

Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Key West, Fla.

Miami

Palm Springs, Calif.

Provincetown, Mass.

Top 10 Domestic Destinations

Atlanta

Boston

Chicago

Hawaii

Las Vegas

Los Angeles

New Orleans

New York City

San Francisco

Washington, D.C.

Top 10 International Destinations

Canada

Caribbean

Europe

Paris

Spain

Asia

Australia

New Zealand

South Africa

Central and South America

Heartland Awards

Tucson, Ariz.

Aspen, Colo.

Rehoboth Beach, Del.

Jacksonville, Fla.

Saint Petersburg, Fla.

Baltimore

Douglas, Mich.

Saugatuck, Mich.

Albuquerque, N.M.

Santa Fe, N.M.

Cincinnati

Oklahoma City

Portland, Ore.

Dallas

Houston

San Antonio

Salt Lake City

Madison, Wisc.

Tourism Development

Bloomington, Ind.

Boston

Canada

France

Japan

Mexico

San Diego

San Francisco

Vienna, Austria

Great Gay Marketing

Icelandair Holidays

Luxor Hotel, Las Vegas

Millennium Hotels

Orbitz.Com/Gaytravel

Travelocity.Com/Gaytravel

W Hotels Worldwide

Wyndham Hotels

Celebrity Cruises

Jet Blue

Song (Operated by Delta Air Lines)

Parks and Resorts at Yosemite National Park, Special Mention

Tour Operators

Arco Iris Tours

Doin' It Right Puerto Vallarta

Islanders Travel

Gay2 Afrika

Man Around

Zoom Vacations

European Bed & Breakfast

Absolu Living

Women's Awards: Inns and Restaurants

Casitas Laquita, Palm Springs, Calif.

Fairbanks Inn, Provincetown, Mass.

Gabriel's, Provincetown, Mass.

Highlands Inn, Bethlehem, N.H.

Hotel San Jose, Austin, Texas

Hotel Sappho, Lesbos, Greece

Lindsey's B&B, Montreal

Naari Guesthouse, Delhi, India

Pearl's Rainbow, Key West, Fla.

Brasa, Seattle

Citizen Cake, San Francisco

Jardinière, San Francisco

Malaprop's Bookstore & Café, Asheville, N.C.

Murakami, Los Angeles

Prune, New York City

She She, Chicago

Tenth Muse, Lesbos, Greece

Tomboy, Chicago

Watershed, Decatur, Georgia

Events/Organizers of The Year For Lesbians

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

Girlpowerevents.Com

Agua Girl

Dinah Shore Weekend

Events/Organizers Of The Year For Gay And Lesbians (And More) Burning Man

Montréal's Gay Pride

Feast

International Mr. Leather

Lake Tahoe Winter Fest

Paradise Ride

Park City Utah Queer Lounge

Rock Bottom Designees

Sandals Resorts

Cromsaig B&B in Scotland

Alabama

Ohio

Iran

Egypt

Fiji

Jamaica

Singapore

Saudi Arabia

Texas

Uganda

Virginia

Zanzibar

Zimbabwe

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