

I remember my first holiday with a boyfriend. We went to Paris and pushed our little single beds together, but he kicked up such a fuss when I admitted fooling around on my own in Berlin the month prior, that I dumped him up the Eiffel Tower.

So might I - I thus wondered - fare any better on holiday with gay "mates" instead? Just a bunch of single gay male friends on a bog standard group package to Gran Can or 'biza: what simpler? No smooching off into cliquy pairs, no jealous bickering and no hand-in-hand promenading gingerly down streets too straight for queer romance. Just one long tanked-up doss.

Of course, it's more vodka and coke than beers all round with us gay boys, and we're drunk as skunks before we reach the airport - louder and brasher than a jock strap in deep heat and scaling new heights of obnoxious. Narrowly missing a rightful mauling from a student rugby team in Departures, we

board, only for one of us to mentally lacerate the poor male trolley dolly mincing down the aisles.

So, we arrive where even the sands seem pink! Ah, the camaraderie and the bitchy banter: those four single beds in a large shared room, a spit-and-a-spunk from the beach. Like some old school outing: queers reunited! The dorm-like set-up prohibits even the most covert of drunken fumbling. And each morning brings anew the ritual rush for the bathroom mirror and the preening of God's gay gifts.

It's weird how gay mates can get so embarrassed about seeing each other naked. Maybe "nude male flesh" means sex for gays, and gay mates aren't supposed to have sex with each other - that's the whole point. Also, perhaps, the naked truth might remove the very mystery that fuels our chummy, yet flirtatious, repartee.

As with any group spending long periods of time together, "flexibility" and "compromise" are the watchwords. Not

everybody will have the money or the perverted mental stamina to shop until they drop. Not everyone will have the body, skin-type or sky-high boredom threshold to strip off on a beach 24/7.

The biggest perk of travelling with single gay pals is the simple thrill of going out and having a ball, with everyone - at least secretly - on the pull. Anyone looks ten times more attractive when animated with their friends. Mates provide a great context for meeting other guys, all relaxed and fancy free.

However, on the downside, you won't look so instantly "available" as when out on your own. And it's not much fun if the guy you drool for saunters over and starts chatting up your mate instead; or if you both end up fighting over the local Juan and you're the loser - not even offered a scrap from the table.

And even if you do click with your dream Don and make your escape, where to head - apart from the loo? Dare you risk dragging the guy back to yours for a quickie before others return? Or make straight for the dunes? Or for your horny young man's lair? A little hard if he's holed up with a family of ten.

Worst of all, what if you're the only one who doesn't pull - the last one left on the shelf? Looking increasingly dejected and unattractive for all to see, you make that sad, lonely walk back to a deserted base, save perhaps for an insensi-



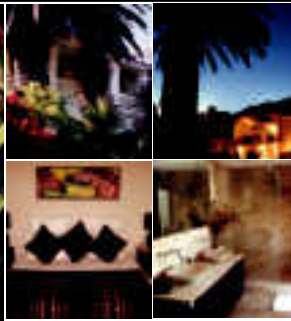
PACKAGE PALS

**Hang onto your towels!
The UK's best-travelled
queer, QX's ADRIAN
GILLAN, relates the perks
and pitfalls of heading
abroad this summer with
your gaggle of gay mates!**



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tive or daring mate who's shagging away; or you go cruising and have the consolation of bumping into a pal who didn't get his end away in the end either. Whatever, a close-knit gay male travelling group has a habit of fragmenting and dispersing when out hunting as a pack; then regrouping the next day to compare notes and repeat. Moreover, gay clusters have a habit of imploding under their own homo-inertia, completely unaided by external factors. If it's not two queens falling out before they've even stepped-off the plane, you can find mates become shags and then scarce speak, or - far worse - become lovers and just drift off in a misty bliss. Yet, perhaps more dangerous still is the unfortunate discovery some may make that what is amusing for a couple of nights each week down the local club back home is simply too dreadful all day and all night for a whole week, and you're actually desperate for a real break - from all your gay mates! Fuck it - just book it!

SEVEN WONDERS...

Seven sure-fire locations to large it with the lads abroad this summer...

GRAN CANARIA - All year round sun-drenched Gran Canaria emerges from the Atlantic's warm currents just west of southern Morocco and a mere four hour flight from Blighty. This Spanish island's two most popular gay resorts are Playa del Ingles, with its famous Yumbo Centre - a multi-story gay bar-club-shop multiplex like no other; and Maspalomas, with its infamous nude and cruisy Sahara-style dunes and beaches - where sand gets everywhere. Both offer hot weather, even hotter guys and a shopping bonanza. Plus: Don't miss out on the culture in capital, Las Palmas; the lovely little villages scattered throughout the island; or the interior's rugged, volcanic landscape.

Ibiza - Home to Romans, Arabs, Catalans and pirates, Ibiza - third largest Balearic island - is a colourful gem set in the Med; and Spain's undisputed party capital! Gay life is centred in Ibiza Old Town, especially around the aptly-named Calle de la Virgen and along the beaches in the south - not least the nudist Es Cavallet stretch. Hire a car to explore secluded coves up north.

Mykonos - Like a separate island state 'though Greek, cosmopolitan and white-washed-walled Mykonos lures in queers to the gay beaches of Elia and Super Paradise on the south coast plus bustling, labyrinthine Mykonos Town itself - a boutique brand-brimming shopping Mecca by day and stop-out's paradise by night, not least around the Little Venice waterfront.

Sitges - A half hour south of Barcelona, fishing village turned classy resort Sitges attracts homo hoards, especially June-September. The gayest beach in town is Playa de la Ribera - and then there's Playas del Muerto to the west of the centre where queers love to strip and dip. Sitges is crammed with bars, clubs and exquisite eateries

but if you miss your urban fix, Barcelona is less than 25 miles north for a fun day trip. Alternatively, the Catalan countryside surrounds.

Benidorm - Tucked into Spain's Costa Blanca's foothills, Benidorm has come a long way since its "Costa del Package" past - increasingly wooing the more... erm... discerning gay traveller. Dubbed the "Florida of Europe" for its year-round sun and vast, spotless beaches - many of them gay or starkers or both - the sizable queer quarter has evolved in the cute Old Town. Where else?

Palma - The capital of the largest Balearic, Mallorca - not to mention of all of the Balearics - colourful and cosmopolitan Palma pre-dates the Romans. However, the gay scene's bars, restaurants, clubs and saunas are located in El Terreno, a wee way west. Don't miss the nearby cruisy beach at Illetes either. And hire a car to explore the rest of this gorgeous island!

Tenerife - Avoid the straight-swamped southern resorts on this colourful Canary and head due north to Puerto de la Cruz with its long-established yet intimate gay scene - mainly on or around the Avenida de Generalissimo. There are a couple of saunas, a few gay run cafés and several bars with darkrooms and vids. Bask, swim and cruise at the famous Lago Martinez lido complex. Or for something more intimate, lay your towel at any of a handful of tiny nudist beaches dotted along the coast - notably Playa Bollullo, just outside Puerto; or at nearby Los Patos.



GROUP BOOK NOW!

Sensations - destinations include Benidorm, Gran Canaria, Ibiza, Mykonos, Palma and Sitges - for more info or to book: **020 8902 7177** and mention QX for latest offers.

Respect - destinations include Sitges, Ibiza, Gran Canaria, Mykonos and Tenerife - for more info or to book: **0870 770 0169**. Quote QX mag for latest offers.

Images supplied courtesy of Sensations Holidays and Respect Holidays.



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