

Traveling 2009

Cruising Costa Rica – Au Naturale *by Corey Egel*

Can you imagine Julie McCoy's voice echoing across the Love Boat, "Naked Twister at three o'clock on the lido deck followed by the best butt contest"? Sounds like a typical cruise, right?

Unlike other vacations at sea, when you board the Windstar to Costa Rica and Panama, your vacation is transformed from the ordinary into something extraordinary.

Source Events, a gay travel company, in conjunction with Gay Naturists International, a non-profit group offering nude vacations, have put together a tantalizing eight-day, seven-night adventure.

"People are hungry for intimate adventures, and for the smaller ship cruises where you really get a connection with the sea, the guests and with yourself," said Craig Smith, founder of Source Events.

The two-and-a-half hour bus ride from Costa Rica's capital city, San Jose, to the port is an experience of its own that will leave you saying, "Oh my me!" According to local folklore, that's what God said (because, what would a higher power say, "Oh my God?") after realizing something was missing from Earth... Costa Rica: an oasis covered with various trees, rich wildlife and lush jungles.

Gazing upon the multi-colored homes tucked into the mountainside, the road trip possesses a surreal combination of being in an exciting new country and happy hour at your local gay bar. During the journey, fellow travelers can be heard joking about an array of sexually charged topics, and how the only thing worse than a bitter cup of coffee is a bitter queen ("Oh my me!").

While boarding the Windstar, you get the feeling you're on a private yacht. Small in size, the crew of the five-star luxury sailing ship is big on pampering. With a maximum of 148 passengers, the staff of 98 lavishes attention on guests. The rich wood interior provides an intimate setting that's complimented by the comfortable décor.

The spacious rooms are even more impressive with their views (no need to go on deck for a view of the ocean, just peek out your windows!), flatscreen televisions and iPod SoundDocks systems, granite countertops in the bathrooms – not to mention, plenty of closet space. I'm guessing this

particular amenity may have been underutilized: did I mention that this cruise happens to be clothing optional?

The seemingly preferred choice of "being free," or throwing on a stylish sarong (who says you can't look good with less?) goes beyond the shedding of clothing. The true freedom lies in the liberating realization that you can be in the company of men of all ages and body types without it being overtly sexual. Although not for everyone, there's no pressure to dress, or undress for that matter – so put aside those locker room fantasies.

As tempting as it may be to stay on board the Windstar, the cruise provides amazing opportunities to get a taste of these two exotic countries. Sailing 850 miles, there's a wide range of shore excursions and activities promoting ecotourism. I'm not referring to granola tree huggers, but rather, conserving nature instead of exploiting the resources.

You can explore a national wildlife refuge and see (and hear!) howler monkeys high in the trees, watch iguanas dart in front of you and gaze at the vibrantly colored butterflies fluttering in their natural habitat; hike through a rainforest on foot and view the breathtaking flora; enjoy a day of fun in the sun at a secluded beach that once served as a penitentiary (lock me up and throw away the key!) with a barbecue and snorkeling; and wander the streets of a former banana port by enjoying a village along the beach brimming with energy with its restaurants, bars and gift shops.

My personal favorite – taking an ATV tour through a rainforest. To give you a better perspective, a strong wind could knock me over, but what a rush to go careening up and down rugged paths splattering through mud all the while getting a view of nature that's completely different from the norm.

Going on a guided tour isn't for everyone, but you can still receive helpful tips from the ships' events

coordinator on how to go exploring on your own or with a friend and still remain safe.

When you return to the Windstar, you're pleasantly reminded about the comforts that await you: the simple gesture of placing cool hand towels with a hint of lavender by the ship's entrance is just another example of the casual elegance you can expect. As the sun sets, the temperature aboard the ship still remains sultry.

Cruises are typically known for their feeding frenzies, but on the Windstar the five-course dinner at The Restaurant is made to order by one of 11 top-notch chefs from around the world. The cuisine is spectacular with its unique and flavorful dishes – including top cuts of meat, succulent seafood and an affordable wine selection that will leave your taste buds begging for more.

What makes this a dining experience rather than just a meal is that with great food – is great company. There's no scheduled sitting time or pre-assigned seating providing an opportunity to socialize with people you have shared the day with or make new friends. Who knows, you could share a meal with the owner of a nightclub or the music director of your local church – talk about a Hail Mary!

Who says you can't look good with less?

Forget about going back to the room when dinner is done. It's time to head back on deck to dance the night away, or enjoy a

theme party that's sure

to unleash your inner animal. With mixers like "Bongo In The Jungle," "Full Moon Banana Carnival," and "Tarzan's Tropical Leather," it feels like Halloween with a naughty edge.

Soaking it all in can be just as entertaining, so share some drinks with newfound friends and be captivated by the majestic night sky blanketed by stars and the brightly shining moon.

Gay travelers rejoice! There's another vacation option besides a party boat full of twinks, where the friendships are lasting – and the memories – forever! As the people of Costa Rica say, Pura Vida!

For more information about Source Events and upcoming trips, go to www.SourceEvents.com or call 888-768-7238.



The Windstar majestically anchored off of Quepos, Costa Rico.



Everyone is trying to decide if Tito the Crocodile, who has claimed a part of the beach at Isla de Coiba, Panama, has had lunch yet, before heading for a swim.



Excursions into Quepos, Costa Rica were filled with quiet and beautiful scenery.