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Escape from L.A.

by Stephan Horbelt

Sometimes we all need to escape. Whether you're escaping your job, the drama associated with family and friends or just the day-to-day grind of your hometown, it feels good to get away. For the most part, gays love to travel. Here are some of our favorite picks for where to get going when the going gets rough. Some of these destinations are merely a hop, skip and jump from Los Angeles; others are half a world away.

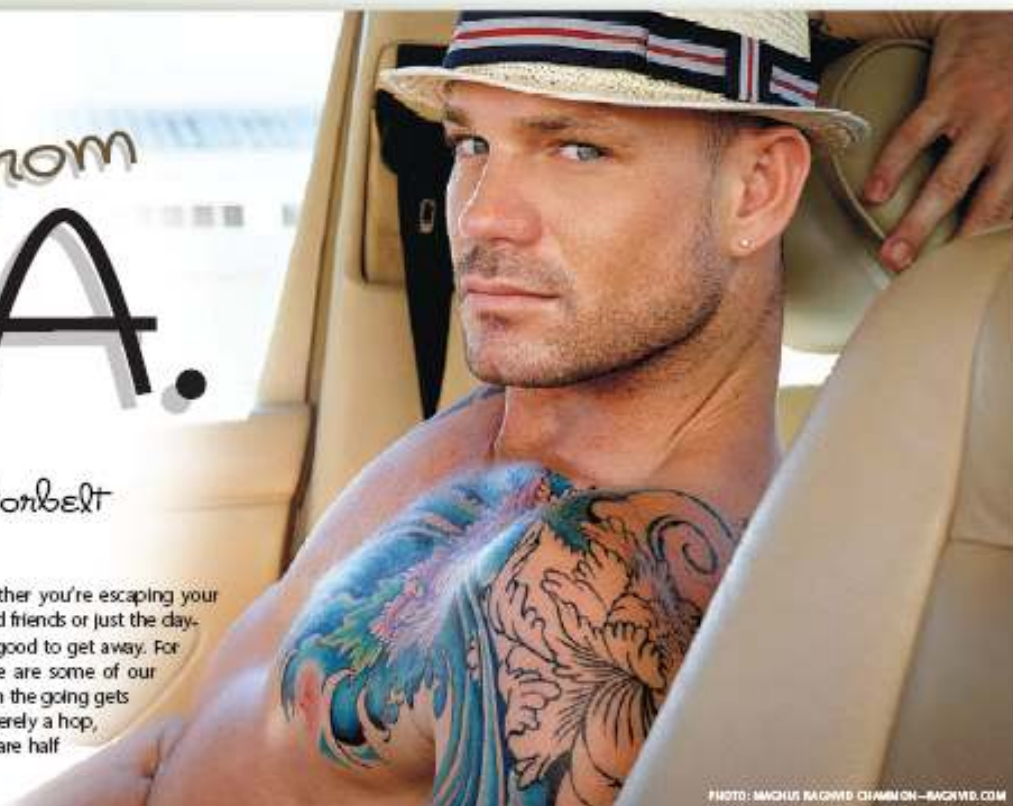


PHOTO: MICHAEL RACHOWSKI CHAMBERLAIN-BACKWIRE.COM



Provincetown, Mass.—known as P-Town to those who are frequent visitors—sits at the spiraling tip of Cape Cod. Here, at the end of the world, sits a village where gay life is everywhere. Young and old, male and female, P-Town's residents and visitors have nothing but open arms for all walks of life.

Let a sense of relaxation overtake you as soon as you step off the ferry, and make plans to make no plans at all. Lay in the sun poolside or on beaches; bike or hike the many nature trails; shop at quirky boutiques; catch one of the many plays and live shows; dance your ass off at the many bars and T-Dances. And plan on making new friends.

Here are four of P-Town's biggest events, each of which brings people in from across the country.



PROVINCETOWN

INDEPENDENCE 2010

July 2-8

A week of July 4 parties at the Crown & Anchor, featuring huge DJs, including Tony Moran, Joe Gauthreaux, Eddie Baez and more.
onlyatthecrown.com/independence

BEAR WEEK

July 10-18

For its 10-year anniversary, Bear Week features daily pool parties, a "Meet and Greet," "Woof on the Wharf" at the Boat Slip, an "Underbear" party and shows by Kate Clinton and Vania Jean Meriman.
ptownbears.org

CARNIVAL

August 15-21

The mother of all P-Town party weeks, this year the theme is "Jungle Fantasy." Expect to see body paint, wigs and lots of exposed bananas. The parade is not to be missed.
ptown.org

SPOOKY BEAR WEEKEND

October 29-31

Celebrate Halloween with the hottest, hairiest, most handsome bears in New England. And don't leave home without a sexy costume or two.
ne-ursamen.org



SAN FRANCISCO

Escape
from
L.A.

The processing locale for dishonorably discharged homosexuals during World War II, San Francisco has been a gay mecca ever since. Meandering through this city by the bay, you'll find gays and lesbians in nearly every part of town, not to mention in the city's political, financial and social structures. While it may not be exactly like Mrs. Madrigal's apartment building in *Tales of the City*, there's certainly plenty to keep the gays occupied. Here is our list of The Five Gayest Things to Do In San Francisco:

1 FOLSOM STREET FAIR

A true SF original, the Folsom Street Fair is the world's largest leather event. Every year on the last Sunday in September, the fairgrounds—covering 13 city blocks—is filled to the brim with people in their most outrageous leather/rubber/fetish attire. Yes, you will see naked people. And yes, you might see people going at it on the street. Bring a camera. folsomstreetfair.com

2 CRUISIN' THE CASTRO TOURS

While the Castro may have become more gentrified in recent years, it's still one of the gayest neighborhoods in the U.S. Learn the true history of SF's quest for freedom and equality with Cruisin' the Castro Tours, held throughout the week and led by owner and tour guide Kathy Amendola. cruisinthecastro.com

3 UNION SQUARE

This shopping area is the country's third-largest. Spend an hour or two to browse or all day to get some serious shopping done. The Macy's Union Square is the biggest department store west of New York City. unionsquareshop.com

4 BAKER BEACH

In addition to having one of the area's best views of the Golden Gate Bridge, feel free to drop your drawers and let it all hang out on the clothing-optional section of Baker Beach. You'll find a mix of men, women, gays and straights.

5 PENGUIN MELODRAMA

Who can forget Harry and Pepper, the two male penguins who joined up as adolescents, nested together as adults and raised a chick? Unfortunately, thanks to conniving Linda, the two are no longer together, and Harry and Linda have officially shackled up. It seems the drama never ends with gays—no matter the species. sfzoo.org



SAN DIEGO

Our neighbor to the south, San Diego is possibly the only U.S. locale with weather more agreeable than our own. Just a short drive down the 5 freeway, San Diego makes for a perfect escape.

For a trip out of town that's also a life-changing experience, check out Skydive San Diego, SoCal's premier skydiving facility. You'll find the newest, safest and largest jumpships in the industry—no other parachute center in the world has newer planes than Skydive San Diego. skydivesandiego.com

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions for those considering making the big plunge:

Can I jump with my friends?

Yes! Sharing the experience with your friends and family is fantastic. Groups of three or four are usually no problem. With advance notice, we have even put groups of nine tandems on one plane!

Do I have to make a reservation to go skydiving? How far in advance?

We take walk-ins on a space- and instructor-available basis. We can usually fit people into one of the tandem skydiving classes we offer each day. But if you have a special day in mind or you don't want to risk a possible wait or disappointment, we suggest making a reservation.

What will the skydive feel like?

The sensation of freefall is more like flying than falling, and the parachute flight is quiet and inspiring.

How will I feel when the parachute opens?

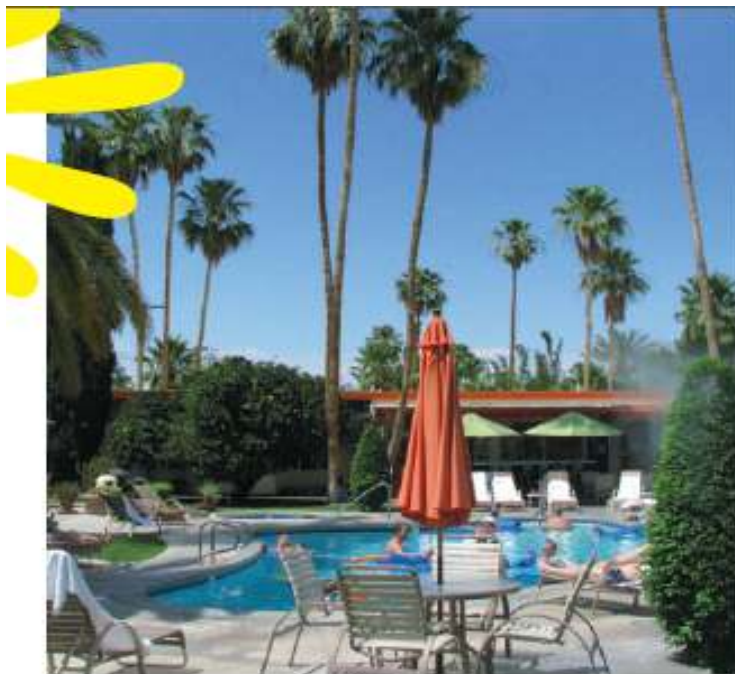
You will definitely know something is happening, but few people have complained about any discomfort.

How long does the skydive last?

Our turbine aircrafts take you to an exit altitude of 13,000 feet, which means your freefall will last approximately one minute and the parachute flight will last five to seven minutes.

What happens if the parachute doesn't open?

In the very unlikely event that the main parachute doesn't open properly, there is a reserve parachute which is inspected and packed by a licensed FAA parachute rigger.



PALM SPRINGS

Palm Springs has always been a favorite getaway locale for L.A. residents—approximately two hours outside our city limits, Angelinos aren't far from the desert, poolside lounge chairs and majestic mountains.

Two popular Downtown Palm Springs hotels have recently undergone multi-million dollar transformations. Hotel Zoso offers guests a serene and sensual setting with 163 oversized guest rooms, casual and fine dining, a fitness center and spa. While in town, check out the renovated lobby, lounge and pool area. At the Zoso you'll receive VIP treatment without breaking the bank. hotelzoso.com

The Hyatt Regency Suites transformed its guest rooms, public spaces, business and leisure facilities, dining venues and pool areas last December. Cabana Suite accommodations offer more than 600 square-feet of pool-side living space—a separate bedroom with a king-sized bed, two televisions, Home stereo and wireless Internet access. The hotel also has exquisite dining and cocktail options. palm Springs.hyatt.com

When you're not lounging by the pool, dining out or hitting the town, the Palm Springs Aerial Tram allows you to truly see the sights of Palm Springs. Climb aboard the world's largest rotating aerial tram and ascend 2.5 miles—from the desert floor to the snow-capped mountains. Once at the top, grab a bite to eat at the Tramway's two dining options—Peaks, which offers fine California cuisine, and The Pines Café, a cafeteria-style restaurant. pstramway.com



For those of you who like to show-off what your momma gave you, book a weekend at one of these gorgeous, relaxing clothing-optional resorts:

All Worlds Resort
allworldsresorts.com

Camp Palm Springs
camp-palm-springs.com

Canyon Club
canyonclubhotel.com

Casa Ocotillo
casaoctillo.com

CCBC
ccbcps.com

Chaps Inn
chapsinn.com

Desert Paradise
desertparadise.com

INNduge
innduge.com

La Dolce Vita Santiago
sandogovort.com

The View Palm Springs
theviewpalm Springs.com

Warm Sands Villas
warmsandsvillas.com

you are here.

Pridefest June 9-13

pridefestkeywest.com

Tropical Heat Aug 19-22

tropicalheatkw.com

★ Womenfest Sept 7-12

womenfest.com



we want you here

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gaykeywestfl.com



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PUERTO VALLARTA

Hacienda San Angel is a boutique resort set high up on the streets overlooking Colonial Puerto Vallarta. It charmingly blends serene sophistication with rustic simplicity—you'll find bubbling fountains, fragrant frangipani, fine linens and antique furnishings. The resort is comprised of four villas connected by gardens and a central courtyard, offering 19 suites in addition to three pools, a fine dining rooftop restaurant and in-room spa services. The mix of exquisite aesthetics and modern luxuries make Hacienda San Angel the perfect vacation spot for those who wish to live like royalty. haciendasanangel.com

If you're more in the mood for a gay vacation south of the border, there's only one option—**Hotel Blue Chairs by the Sea**. The first gay and lesbian beachfront resort in Puerto Vallarta, its 40 rooms have amazing ocean views and elegant style. While you're in town, renew and indulge your mind, body, and soul with one of the hotel's on-site spa treatments, including massages, facials and body treatments. Not only is Blue Chairs steps away from the beach, but it sits in a central part of town, close to restaurants, bars and the most popular nightclubs. hotelbluechairs.com





Las Vegas may bill itself as "Sin City," but the city's gay scene is surprisingly compact with a small-town feel. While there are plenty of shows and slots to appease the gay masses, Vegas gay bars can be hit-or-miss. Next time you plan a trip to the big lights of The Strip, check out these fun, gay-friendly events and locales.



For a guaranteed day of rest and relaxation, check out The Bathhouse at Mandalay Bay. Unlike the other spas you'll find in Las Vegas, The Bathhouse features uniquely European styling, with slate walls, marble floors and breathtaking water features throughout. The 14,000-square-foot spa offers steam rooms and saunas, as well as 12 treatment rooms where you can enjoy massages, wraps and facials. As if that wasn't enough, they also offer a full salon and The Gym, a complete workout facility. mandalaybay.com



Cher returns to The Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas from April 11-May 30 and June 15-July 4 with her extraordinary production. Witness the gay icon's record-breaking hits, stunning choreography and one-of-a-kind Bob Mackie costumes. Packages that include two tickets to the show and a one-night stay at luxurious Caesars Palace are available starting at just \$239. To book a package, visit caesarspalace.com or call (800) 727-5019.

Some of you may never get to Heaven, but at least you can check out the new weekly gay dance party that transforms The Mirage's Bare Pool Lounge into an outdoor nightclub where anything goes. An acrylic cover transforms the pool into a dance floor, while a laser-light show creates a roof over the crowd. Add to that a roster of rotating DJs and Amanda Lepore as a monthly resident performer, and you'll never want to leave. Heaven builds on the success of promoter Eduardo Cordova's other popular event, Revolution's The Closet Sundays. For reservations call (702) 693-8300.

Enjoy a honeymoon experience at Paris Las Vegas, whether you can get hitched legally or not! The hotel's Honeymoon in Vegas package includes the best that Vegas has to offer—a two-night stay at the award-winning hotel, two 50-minute treatments at Mandara, the on-site spa, a \$50 food credit valid at any of the hotel's restaurants and two passes to Krave, the only gay bar on The Strip. The offer's only valid through March 31, so book your honeymoon soon! parislasvegas.com



SPA WEEK

Sometimes "escaping from L.A." isn't really an option thanks to time and monetary restrictions. In fact, in the past year "staycations" have become all the rage. What better way to escape—mentally, at least—than a trip to the spa?

The 12th edition of Spa Week is slated for April 12-18, when over 800 spas across North America offer spa treatments at only \$50. The goal is to introduce a new generation of consumers to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle by

opening up the spa industry to the masses.

Spa Week brings the cutting edge of health and wellness technology to the average consumer. In addition to offering traditionally beneficial stress-busting and immune-boosting spa treatments like massage, Spa Week brings intensive, clinical therapies to consumers, all at the same \$50 price point.

For more information on Spa Week and to see the list of participating spas, go to spaweek.com.

