

Are You Two ... Together? A Gay And Lesbian Travel Guide to Europe

by Lindsay Van Gelder and Robin Brandt

Terje Anderson

Information for gay and lesbian international travelers has always been hard to come by. The existing gay guidebooks (*Spartacus*, *Gais's Guide*, etc) tend to offer little more than an out of date list of names and addresses of bars and cruising areas, accompanied by indecipherable codes and symbols as clues to the nature of the place. (Using these codes, I once ended up in an elegant and pricey restaurant in Amsterdam clad in bar-oriented tattered denim - oops, so much for the guidebook). And to most straight guidebooks, we're invisible, or worse, gay places are an annoyance to be avoided by the respectable traveler.

Into this vacuum enters *Are You Two...Together?*, a comprehensive, readable and altogether enjoyable guide for lesbian and gay visitors to fourteen European destinations.

Far more than just a guide to gay nightlife, this is travel writing at its very best. For each city, Van Gelder and Brandt include a section of general information; highlights of the area's gay and lesbian history, culture and politics; notes on local language and customs; sites of particular queer interest; and, the most fun, lots of anecdotal accounts of their travels, meetings with other gay men and lesbians, and encounters with the local straight population.

They write with a real queer sensibility; brutally honest and at times ironic and uproariously funny (their section on visiting Berlin before The Wall came down left me laughing out loud every paragraph.) After reading their book, I don't just want to go back to Europe, I want to travel with these women - they simply must be loads of fun. Their sense of curiosity, excitement, and very un-American openness to the ways of other cultures would undoubtedly make them the perfect travelling companions.

The descriptive sections are augmented by thorough listings for each city - gay nightlife, gay-oriented or gay-friendly restaurants and hotels, and local lesbian and gay community resources. The listings are annotated, with full descriptions of everything (including delicious accounts of the food which could make you gain weight just from reading them). And, at least for the cities I've visited in the last few years, I can attest to the absolute accuracy of their listings.

While much of the book is geared to lesbian and gay couples (the ins and outs of getting a double bed for a same sex couple are described in detail), the book is just as valuable for the single queer traveling alone. In fact, their descriptions of gay men's bars are undoubtedly the most insightful and useful (as well as the funniest) I've ever read.

If you're planning a trip to Europe, don't even think of going without this book (although if you're going on a tight budget, you'll want to augment it with something else geared to the hostel-style traveler, like the very gay-friendly *Let's Go* guidebooks.

And even if you're not going anywhere in the near future, this book is perfect for curling up next to the fire on a cold Vermont winter evening and dreaming of being somewhere else. It's not quite as good as being there, but it's close.

My only complaint with this book is a simple one: why wasn't it published years ago, before my last trip? Oh well, at least the next time I won't blunder into a candlelight romantic gay restaurant wearing torn blue jeans more suited to a backroom.

Are You Two... Together? is available in paperback from Random House. ▼

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