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## A new frontier for the gay traveler

by Thomas E. Roth  
Special to Q-Notes

My first impression of Russia was upon arrival at St. Petersburg International Airport: amusement. It was all too much of a cliché. Almost a cartoon. The long lines to process documents, the longer lines to clear customs. The big decorated uniforms. Multiple staff for the job. The antiquated luggage conveyor belt. Leaving the airport, the police checkpoints. Somehow, it all made me smile. A warm and fuzzy feeling. Why, I am not quite sure; maybe because it met all my expectations and more!

Once the amusement about the clichés wears off, the city emerges in its splendor. Grand palaces reflecting in broad riverfronts. World class museums. Inspiring craftsmanship. Renowned performing arts. (I was impressed with the school children who seem to have a better grasp at the finer elements of life than most Americans do at any age.) Beyond the structures and arts, the magic abides in the people. They have been through a lot in recent years, yet they seem optimistic, resilient. In every way, they show a willingness to be accommodating and helpful. So, whatever the destination may lack — and frustrate — due to its infrastructure, it more than makes up in personality, sincerity and fundamental human charm.

Russians obviously take great pride in their homes and cities. Trash and graffiti, abundant now in most western cities, are hardly found in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This observation is a very pleasant surprise.

### Gay life in Russia

All homosexual behavior in the former Soviet Union was strictly outlawed by "Article 121" of the constitution, punishable by seven years in prison (or worse, a mental hospital). Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, this law has been abolished and the result is a tentative

"gay identity" emerging here. The gay community has more civil rights by law. But the "cruising areas" are less frequented because the cities are more dangerous for hanging out than ever before. The plazas and boulevards that used to be crowded and bustling on a spring evening are almost desolate. Still, there is an unshakable optimism here, one that is contagious.

Although being gay is no longer against the civil laws, it still takes time to change the attitudes of the people. Locals explain that in the larger cities, notably St. Petersburg and Moscow, gay people are far more accepted, but much less so in smaller cities and rural areas (sounds familiar). Moscow (and to a smaller degree St. Petersburg) boasts many new gay clubs and community centers and a greater visibility in society.



Renovation is taking place in all parts of the country. There is a spirit of reawakening and an acceptance of philosophies and lifestyles that were shunned. At the same time, this new freedom has seen an explosion of drug abuse, HIV infection and crime. With the good elements of newly found western-style freedoms have come a flood of western-style problems.

The gay "community" has evolved in two distinct groups: The older community, one that developed during the Soviet regime, and the younger "post-Soviet." Both are very different than we are used to in western countries.

The older community does not identify with the political/activist communities that formed the foundation of gay communities in the west. Instead, they see "homoactivism" as a leisure activity, one which they don't really have time for, nor see a need for. In fact, it was summed up like this: "Russians stay out of each others' business." Older gays are less likely to be "out" to family or at work, but most feel no need to discuss their personal matters in this way.

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tember 24 at the WTVI studios, 3242 Commonwealth Ave., Charlotte. Finalists will return on Monday, September 29. Candidates will be directed by a TV producer and will work with teleprompter, with memorized copy, in ad-lib and interview situations. Call (704) 372-2442 to schedule an audition.

The first issue of The International Journal of Transgenderism is now online. You may access it at <http://www.symposium.com/ijt>. The IJT is the first scholarly journal on transsexualism, crossdressing and related topics. The journal is peer-reviewed and its editorial board consists of many well known scientists from all over the world. Exclusively available on the internet, the IJT is published quarterly with additional updates during the respective quarter. Access to the current issue is free.

*The Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity* is looking for original scholarly articles, clinical studies, research papers, cultural and literary theory and analysis, history, as well as personal essays, interviews, and poetry which explore the intersections of GLBT and disabled identities. They would particularly welcome contributions from people with various disabilities (physical, mental, developmental and learning disabilities) and people of color. Deadlines: Scholarly articles: Require a 250 word abstract by Jan. 1, 1998. Personal essays, interviews and poetry also due by Jan. 1, 1998. Send for submission guidelines via email to dawn-atkins@uiowa.edu or with self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Dawn Atkins & Catherine Marston, 114 MacBride Hall, Anthropology, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.

### Have You Heard

Bear Trap III, sponsored by Carolina Bear Lodge, raised over \$2200 which was donated to the North Carolina Lambda Youth Network, Food Pantry of AIDS Service Agency of Wake County, North Carolina Pride Inc. and Project Aware of Gaston County Hospice.

This year's Grape Myrtle Festival enabled the organization to distribute \$50,000 in grants for the year to support HIV and AIDS service agencies and other relevant services for gay men and lesbians in the Triangle. ▼

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CHARLOTTE  
REALTY  
GROUP



Barrett Klutts



Michael Williams

## qfyi

Compiled by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

Effective immediately, UNC-Charlotte's GLBT group PRIDE has a new phone/fax number. It is (704) 332-GLBA (332-4522).

At least one — and possibly two — teams of gay/lesbian runners will compete in the 20th annual Richmond Newspapers marathon relay event on Sunday, October 19. Each runner will complete one-fourth of the regular 26.2-mile marathon course. The first team was coordinated by local gay runner Bob Greene, who has run "out" in the five-mile event for the past three years. Since the race is usually within a week or so of National Coming Out Day, Greene thought it was a great way for gay and lesbian runners to gain recognition as part of the larger running community. If you're interested in forming additional teams or want to help with future growth of this idea, contact Bob Greene at (804) 771-2911 during normal business hours.

"Behind Our Masks," the first mid-Atlantic GLBT writers conference will be held October 31-November 2 in Washington, DC. Sponsored by the *Lambda Book Report* and the Lambda Literary Foundation, the conference features an opening reception, an evening literary performance, a day and a half of panels and workshops, an author reading series, a poetry slam and a closing brunch. Registration for the conference is \$70; \$45 for students. For more information, contact conference programmer Sue Landers at *Lambda Book Report*, PO Box 73910, Washington, DC 20056-3910; (202) 462-7924; email: LBRAdvert@aol.com.

WTVI, the Public Broadcasting System affiliate in Charlotte, is auditioning for a prime-time host of the six-week TVi Tel-O-Rama, a holiday festival of television programs for, by and about the people in the Charlotte region. They are looking for someone with a warm smile, a persuasive voice and a winning personality who can project the excitement of live hometown TV. Auditions will be held Monday, September 22 and Wednesday, Sep-