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# curve

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SPECIAL TRAVEL REPORT

## Girls Gone Wild

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ANTARCTICA,  
TAOS,  
CHARLESTON

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AND HOUSEBOATING  
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### Three Cheers for Fairy Butch

Longtime *curve* advice columnist Karlyn Lotney, aka **Fairy Butch**, faced a challenge no one had given her any advice for this past summer, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. In July she successfully had a double mastectomy combined with chest-reconstruction surgery and later began a series of chemotherapy treatments to best ensure she would beat the cancer. Although doctors had to remove her nipples because the cancer had spread to the ducts, Lotney says that she is looking forward to getting nipple tattoos, wearing button-down shirts and enjoying her new manly chest. Be sure to send her your get-well wishes by visiting [fairybutch.com](http://fairybutch.com).

### Mistresses of the Web

If you haven't visited [curvemag.com](http://curvemag.com) lately, why not? Once there you'll find not only a slew of stories you can't read in the magazine, but also a lively community forum where dykes from all over the world chat about lesbian life. Web Forum Administrator **Julie Houghton**, a moderator since 2001 who hails from London, reports that "members tend to be genuinely interested and don't like creating a total dramarama." Houghton heads up a team of nine additional moderators: **Wendy Armitage, Liz Clarke, Autumn Congrove, Annie Daniels, Susan Hinson, Kari Itamoto, Karen Miller, Pam Morris** and **Eliza Rhee**, who come from all over the world to contribute to *curve*'s community. Morris, who has been a part of the community for five years, says that she came to [curvemag.com](http://curvemag.com) because "I was living in a small town with no gay community. It was a place for me to discuss topics of interest to me with some very smart lesbians and bisexual women." What's the weirdest thing that some moderators have had to do? Clarke, who is from Toronto, answers, "Remove ads for Viagra. Ew." Join in on the dialogue by visiting [curvemag.com](http://curvemag.com) and clicking on "Community."



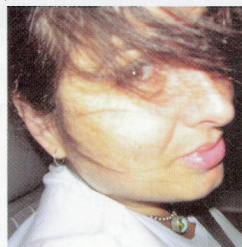
"I always knew Charleston had a queer underbelly, but until I wrote this article I had no idea how secretly gay this city has always been — since the days of pirates in butch drag!" says **Amanda Hollinger** of her article on Charleston, S.C. (see page 34). In this issue, Hollinger captures intriguing contradictions of this historic Southern city and encourages anyone with a red-state inhibition to give Charleston a try. In addition to freelance writing and sporadic day jobs, Hollinger is at work on her first book, a memoir about recreating the road trip that her grandmother and four other women took in 1935. Hollinger also stars on the big screen — or at least the big board — as part of a billboard campaign sponsored by AFFA, Charleston's LGBT equality organization, to defeat a proposed anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment.



Contributor **Gabriana Marks** reports that her friends were shocked when she told them she was going backpacking across Europe alone, an experience she writes about in this issue (see page 24). "I'm still not sure if it was the traveling alone or the idea of me fitting my stuff in a backpack that got to them," she says. Marks grew up in the Bay area and has a journalism degree from the University of Southern California. She also spent a year in Israel and worked for CBS Radio in Los Angeles for three years. Besides writing and traveling, she designs the Pink Collection of bustiers for her mom's business, [SparklePlentyCreations.com](http://SparklePlentyCreations.com). She's currently the campaign administrative coordinator at the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation and hopes to do a lot more traveling and writing in the future.



Writer **Karen Schechner**, who has moved between New Mexico and New York twice, wrote about Albuquerque (see page 36) for this issue. "Recently, I went back to New Mexico, but this time just to visit my ex-girlfriend/best friend and her boyfriend, and meet her new girlfriend who's now the new ex," she says. "That seems to be a fairly typical Albuquerque GLBT social Venn diagram." Schechner currently works as the staff writer for the American Booksellers Association, the national trade organization of independent bookstores, and freelances for *Bookslut*. Also a member in good standing of the New York Mycological Society, she lives in Yonkers, N.Y., with her girlfriend and their two, perfectly reasonable dogs.



"People kept floating out of these incredible Baja skies, parachutes catching the wind above them, and the wide ocean everywhere around, wanting to nab them," **Elizabeth Stark** says about looking for adventure in Mexico (see page 30). "I wanted to do something different, but I couldn't quite picture myself stepping out at 12,000 feet ... onto nothing." Luckily, adventures of another kind awaited Stark, who grappled with perplexing insects and elusive fish, and discovered a hidden lesbian paradise where you'd least expect it. Stark is the author of the novel *Shy Girl* and a filmmaker whose latest film, *FtF: Female to Femme*, premiered at the San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival last June. Visit her online at [elizabethstark.com](http://elizabethstark.com).

# It's All About the Journey

Fourteen tips to get the most of your European backpacking trip. **By** *Gabriana Marks*

I'd wanted to backpack across Europe ever since my childhood, when my mom told me stories about her amazing hitchhiking adventures across the continent. (Of course, hitchhiking was much safer then.) After years of imagining what my own trip might look like, I finally decided to go. I had just finished college and had no job, no significant other and no real ties to keep me home — the perfect combination for the vacation of a lifetime. I'm happy to report that the journey was everything I'd dreamed of, plus a few unexpected surprises along the way. I learned that backpacking solo is a wonderful experience, but keep a few things in mind before setting off to conquer the world (or just Europe) alone.

**1. Plan ahead.** This is especially important when traveling with frequent flyer miles. Because I didn't make the decision to take off until early summer, I was very limited in available flights and ended up booking a flight to Frankfurt one month in advance.

**2. Make reservations for your first night.** I purchased the requisite tour books, but decided to be adventurous and not make any reservations for accommodations. In retrospect, reservations for at least the night of my arrival in Europe would have been a good idea. After an all-nighter of packing and an uncomfortable 10-hour plane ride, I was exhausted, and the German customs officer seemed quite concerned that I still had nowhere to sleep that night. I began to worry if I would even be admitted to the country, and wondered if poor forethought was grounds for putting me on the next plane home. But then the man smiled an "oh, you stupid American" smile and stamped my passport.

**3. Always change some money at home before leaving on a trip.** After making it through customs, I somehow ended up in a deserted entrance to the train station. It looked like it might be under construction, and the only sign of life was an erotica shop that was closed. No ATM, no food and nothing in English to help me find my way. I'd intended to find a place to change money in the airport, but that didn't quite mesh with the whole getting lost bit. At this point my confidence was starting to fade when by chance I met a young American on his way home from service in Iraq. Not only did he steer me onto the right train, he bought my ticket and gave me some local currency. I couldn't believe my luck.

**4. Never arrive in a European country on a Sunday and expect to find much open.** I have a very good sense of direction, so I wasn't worried that I wouldn't be able to find the local hostel where I planned to stay. But because nothing was open — not even drug stores where I could ask for directions — I wandered around the streets for a couple of hours carrying my increasingly heavy backpack before I finally found Hostelling International hostel. I was pleasantly surprised, though, to find it only cost 16 euros and included breakfast.

**5. Pack lightly.** Here's a good rule for how much to bring: Once you're done packing, take at least half out and leave it at home. You don't really need everything you think you do and toting a heavy backpack around gets old real fast. When I got into my room, I crashed. I awoke from my nap and found I had three roommates — none of whom spoke English (which was, of course, just part of the fun). I quickly decided to explore whatever areas of the city were open on a Sunday.

**6. Try new foods, but ask for suggestions.** I went to a cute, apple-wine tavern with outdoor seating and decided to be brave and try all-new foods. I ordered sweet apple wine (delicious) and *Handkäse mit*

*Musik* (literally hand-cheese with music). It's round cheese soaked in oil and vinegar and topped with onions. Sounds good, right? Wrong! It was a very bad choice — possibly even worse than landing in a new country without reservations. It tasted like I imagine horse hooves would taste (but not in the gelatin kind of way). I tried to hide my dislike of it for fear of being rude, but unbeknownst to me the waitress had been staring at me quite intently. She laughed and explained she didn't like it either. I was so relieved that I asked her to just bring me her favorite dish, which turned out to be a tasty combination of beef sausage, fried potatoes and fresh, herbed cucumbers in yogurt sauce. This turned out to be the best idea I'd had so far, and I repeated the request to servers across Europe.

**7. Network and be outgoing.** When I returned to my hostel, I followed the sounds of English and stumbled upon some solo travelers like myself. Once they found out I'd just arrived, they were eager to share travel tips and even invited me to stay in their homes. This sort of networking was key to a good trip where I could really experience local cultures. Plus, it provided a group of friends to go out with that night, and I landed a free place to stay later on in Madrid. I also quickly got over my discomfort with eating alone. I found that as long as I was friendly and willing to talk to strangers, I rarely got lonely. In fact, I met some very interesting people. On a bus in Nice, I met an Australian girl who'd just come from Paris where she'd had a brief love affair with a horseback policeman. In Spain I met a Canadian-American couple on a pre-wedding honeymoon. We shared cold medicine and funny stories, and later I ran into them on the train from France to Italy and then again in Florence.

**8. Be prepared.** Before I left for my trip, I got a small but very loud whistle and mini flashlight on a keychain that I kept with me at all times. I had a money belt for my wallet and locks for my camelback daypack and my large backpack. I even had pepper spray to protect myself (which I luckily remembered to pack in my checked luggage). As I was preparing everything, my mom warned me against using my iPod to fall asleep to as I do at home because she thought it would likely get stolen. This piece of advice came back to me as I returned to my hostel well after midnight that first night — to find all three of my roommates each hooked up to her own iPod. So much for Mom's advice.

**9. Hotel desk attendants can be very helpful.** As my summer-long adventure continued, the logistics became easier. I soon learned to go to the nearest hotel as soon as I got off the train in each city. At a hotel, I could surely find an English-speaking clerk with a free map and, hopefully, the kindness to point me in my desired direction. This worked just about every time.

**10. Find a hostel close to food and attractions.** After Germany, I headed up to Copenhagen, Denmark. My waterfront hostel was great for meeting people, but far away from the center of town and any attractions or stores. After that experience, I always made sure to secure central accommodations right after getting off the train.

**11. A woman traveling alone can attract unwanted attention, so learn how to avoid it.** I learned how to say "Go away; leave me alone" in several languages, but when the direct approach fails, don't be afraid to flee. Once, curiosity drove me to explore Amsterdam's Red Light District, and a strange man decided to accompany me around the area. He seemed nice at first, but then he wouldn't leave me alone. He kept



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offering me illegal drugs and alcohol, then followed me all the way back to my hostel, where I enlisted the desk clerk's help in getting rid of him. When the man went to use the bathroom, the clerk helped me slip up to my room. This trick worked many times in many countries. But while traveling on trains, it is harder to escape from unwanted attention. A very persistent and forceful man on the train from Rome to Naples wanted me to come home with him. He simply wouldn't take no for an answer. There was no help in sight, so I said I had to go to the bathroom and ran off with my luggage. The moment the train came to a halt, I jumped off, ran outside and threw myself into the first cab I could find. The added expense was worth getting rid of the unwanted man.

**12. Sit with families or elderly couples on trains.** They're usually very friendly and can help protect you against those with dishonorable intentions. They'll also watch your luggage for you while you go to the bathroom. This lesson made long train rides much easier. Another trick is to sit near the bathroom and lock your luggage to your train seat using a cable lock. They're not very expensive and will discourage someone from walking off with your bag.

**13. Treat yourself to the occasional hotel stay.** It's worth it. There are some downsides to hostels. You have to share a room and bathroom with strangers. The rooms aren't always clean, and the food often stinks. Some of the hostels lock you out during the day. But worst of all was my hostel in Paris, where I was eaten up by bugs during an afternoon nap. After that, I decided to treat myself to a couple nights in hotels, and I've never been so grateful for a comfortable bed, toilet and shelves. The other plus was having a phone in my room so my family could call me, although now most cell phones can be set up with international calling options (handy for emergencies).

**14. Keep a journal.** I filled the front of a lovely sketchbook with my favorite quotes and pictures from home, and brought with me a small watercolor and drawing set, a pen and glue. I used my journal as a scrapbook and pasted in train tickets, receipts, postcards and other bits I picked up along my trip. I also painted, sketched, and journaled about the places I visited and the people I met. The journal turned out to be the best possible souvenir from my trip. ■