

Rome's World Pride: making the eternal city an international gay tourism destination.

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## Rome's World Pride: Making the Eternal City an International Gay Tourism Destination

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

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Rome's World Pride

Making the Eternal City an International Gay Tourism Destination

World Pride was an international gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) event that took place in Rome in early July 2000 during the Vatican's Jubilee, commemorating two thousand years of Christianity. Just one of many millennium celebrations around the world, the Jubilee was meant to call attention to the very reason for the date itself: that Jesus Christ had been born two thousand years before. Millions of Catholic pilgrims arrived in Rome in 2000, many in the summer during Italy's peak tourist season.<sup>1</sup> World Pride's name suggests a reaching out beyond Italian borders, but Rome was specifically chosen as the host site because it is the nerve center of Catholicism and the Jubilee would take place concurrently.<sup>2</sup> World Pride's planners hoped to bring about improvements in the Roman and Italian gay and lesbian communities as well as to stimulate increased gay and lesbian tourism to Rome in order to sustain the momentum of change.<sup>3</sup> The planners hoped also to open a dialogue with the Catholic Church and induce it to change its anti-GLBT stance, thereby affecting the gay and lesbian community throughout the world.<sup>4</sup>

World Pride sought to bring together components of the gay and lesbian community from around the world to achieve these goals. Yet there were clearly distinct categories among the gays and lesbians at World Pride. Westerners, characterized by consumerist Americans and northern Europeans, represented one end of this spectrum. At the other end, perhaps less visible overall, were gays and lesbians from the developing world, many of whom were able to come because of the sponsorship of Western organizations. This essay examines how these communities interacted during World Pride. One of the event's goals was to infuse ideas from the global gay and lesbian community into the local Roman value system. This local change would then be projected out again globally both by participants **[End Page 167]** on their return home and by the hoped-for change in the attitude of the Catholic Church. Rome's event was the first World Pride, and future World Prides (Istanbul is one possible location) will continue the trend of effecting local change based on the global. As Mario Mieli, the Roman organization behind World Pride, was concerned with continuous change at the local level, so I will look at World Pride's potential impact on gay tourism to Rome.

Gay tourism as discussed in this essay refers primarily to travel by well-connected, mostly white gay men and some lesbians, usually from the middle and upper-middle classes, between Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco, Sydney, and other locations recognized as important gay and lesbian travel destinations.<sup>5</sup> As a gay travel writer and photographer, I was in Rome to cover the events from a journalistic standpoint. Yet these events were also a part of what I am as a gay Catholic Italian American. I observed, participated in, and volunteered at them. My experience of them was as inseparable from my observation of them as they were from what I am.

## Italy's Place in Gay and Lesbian History

Historically, the Mediterranean region has had a strong appeal for gay and lesbian travelers, particularly for the elite homosexual intellectuals of northern Europe. Nineteenth-century artists tried to capture the glory of ancient Greece and Rome in photographs and paintings of young Mediterranean men in the dress of their distant ancestors.<sup>6</sup> Many artists of the Italian Renaissance had same-sex lovers, though family members attempted to cover it up; Michelangelo's family, for instance, tried to obscure his authorship of his love poems to men.<sup>7</sup> While today the Catholic Church is associated with Italy's repressive treatment of homosexuality,<sup>8</sup> other European nations once regarded Catholicism as a source of homosexual behavior. Indeed, Dutch policy makers of the early 1700s...

# ROME'S WORLD PRIDE

## Making the Eternal City an International Gay Tourism Destination

Michael Luongo

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