

CATCH A WAVE AT GAY SURF CAMP IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL



Like other lifestyle sports, surfing is part of a culture built on some pretty exacting gender norms. All you have to do is flip through the pages of a surfing magazine to see that men are overrepresented, and even more discouragingly, the focus on female surfers is on swimsuits rather than shredding. Still, you can't hold back an ocean, and a surge in female interest is driving a new generation of surfing fans and athletes. Around the world, surf camps aimed at women and girls are cropping up, but only one in South America—Gay Surf Brazil by Brazil Ecojourneys—specifically invites lesbians (and their gay, trans, and allied friends) to learn to ride the waves.

Although lesbian-owned and -operated, with tours specifically designed to be inclusive and diverse, Brazil Ecojourneys wasn't originally imagined as a gay travel company. "We were never keen on offering the traditional 'gay' packages," co-owner Marta Dalla Chiesa says, adding that she and partner Lesley Cushing were more interested in showcasing what the region has to offer than importing existing party scenes. In 2013, however, the LGBT surfing community site (and force behind the 2014 documentary *Out*

in the Line-Up) gaysurfers.net contacted them to propose a partnership. Right away, the pair realized this was a unique opportunity. "Surf is a very non-stereotypical sport for gays," Dalla Chiesa says. "Even I was surprised that a social website with thousands of gay surfers existed. We knew we wanted to get involved."

An LGBT surf camp was an idea whose time had come, and Brazil Ecojourneys—already operating out of a gay-friendly surfer's paradise—was the right company to offer it. Since the 1980s, when an influx of artists and surfers transformed Florianópolis (known as Floripa) into a diverse and inclusive community, the formerly provincial capital has garnered a reputation for welcoming "all tribes." Dalla Chiesa elaborates: "For decades, Florianópolis has had a strong LGBT carnival, and its Pride has become a favorite among Brazilians." But this is more than a South American Provincetown; Floripa is a close-knit community. "Brazil lacks anti-discrimination laws, but Floripa has one. Also, a pioneer health unit catering to trans people opened last year, and there's an openly gay man serving on the town council." And then there are the waves. The vast majority of Florianópolis

is on a large island (read: tons of coastline) with dozens of sweet surfing beaches. One of these, in nearby Imbituba, is Praia do Rosa, and it's where students at Gay Surf Brazil learn their moves.

The group's instructor, Capitão David, runs the oldest surf school in Rosa and he's taught more than 10,000 people everything from the basics ("You must stand upright, like a king!") to the advanced art of reading the swells. With instruction and practice over five consecutive days, punctuated by two much-needed yoga sessions, guests get to live the surfing life.

Those unsure about their abilities needn't worry, either. "Surfing's not for everyone," co-owner Lesley Cushing shrugs. While her partner spends the days carving up the waves, Cushing takes a more laid-back approach to the camp. "There's colonial history, good seafood, and lots of other activities besides surfing, like biking, walking trails, and really great beaches to relax on."

The camp runs for a full week and includes five days of instruction and surfing. There are opportunities for local day trips, and arrangements can be made for specific extensions. Learn more at facebook.com/GaySurfWeekBrazil.

BRAZIL: IF YOU GO

Brazil requires U.S. citizens to carry a valid U.S. passport and visa when traveling to Brazil for any purpose. Check with the U.S. State Department website for updates (travel.state.gov) and obtain your Brazilian visa in advance from the

Brazilian Embassy or consulate nearest to your place of residence. The Zika Virus Alert for Brazil is at Level 2, which means practice enhanced precautions and especially avoid mosquito bites. The virus can be transmitted through unprotected

sexual intercourse, but female-female transmission is as yet unknown. For updated information visit the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov). Crimes such as theft are common so don't travel with valuables, or secure them.