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CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

The Provincetown Queer Council is rolling out the rainbow carpet

After the pandemic stripped Provincetown of its parties and tourism base, a group plots its ‘re-queerification.’

By [Christopher Muther](#) Globe Staff , Updated June 2, 2021, 3:30 p.m.



The Provincetown Queer Council makes a toast to its first season of the "re-queerification" of Provincetown. From left: João Santos, Qya Cristál, Mackenzie, Jonathan Hawkins, and Bob Sanborn. CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

PROVINCETOWN — It's difficult to think of Provincetown without the letters LGBTQ appearing in the same sentence. Maybe we're just saying this out of local pride, but the town at the tip of the Cape is arguably the top gay beach destination on the East Coast (take that Fire Island) and perhaps even the best LGBTQ vacation town in the country. (Sorry, Palm Springs.)

But what were to happen if Provincetown wasn't filled with quite so many colorful characters? You know, if the script was flipped and Provincetown were to go hetero? As impossible as it seems, many locals saw the phenomenon occur last summer during the pandemic when national and international LGBTQ visitors dropped their vacation plans. Groups of friends who had rented houses for the town's popular theme weeks opted to stay home. Straight tourists, many day-trippers, came to Provincetown instead.

Suddenly, those year-rounders — business owners, entertainers, restaurateurs, and artists — who took refuge in Provincetown in order to no longer feel like outsiders, felt like outsiders again. To make sure the summer of 2021 is not a repeat, a group of residents decided to do something about it. They formed the Provincetown Queer Council.

Its mission is simple: They're plotting the "re-queerification" of Provincetown.

Armed with insider knowledge and savoir faire to spare, Volunteer Queer Council ambassadors will walk Commercial Street and help tourists find the best parties, the best drag shows, and the finest galleries. They're ready to make recommendations with a smile and a rainbow sash. They want to welcome the LGBTQ community back with a taffeta hug and let them know they've been missed. Like, really missed.

"Provincetown welcomes everyone, but we never want to lose our queer edge," said Bob Sanborn, executive director of the Provincetown Business Guild. "That's partly what makes us magic. We have so much to offer with the beaches and the arts and history, but a lot of it is the queer edge."

Bottom line: All you straight day-trippers had your fun last summer, but the gays of Provincetown now want their town back. That's an exaggeration, but you get the idea: The council would like to tip the scale back in the direction of rainbows and unicorns.

Sanborn said the town did a pre-COVID survey of visitors and found that 66 percent identified as LGBTQ. There was no survey of visitors during the

pandemic summer of 2020, but Sanborn and others interviewed said there was a noticeable difference in the gay/straight balance of tourists.

“I think emotionally it taxed all of us,” said drag performer Mackenzie. “The vibrancy of Provincetown dimmed a little bit. It didn’t feel like a rainbow.”

Not only did the town itself feel muted, but those larger-than-life personalities felt as if they also needed to mute their appearance.

“Even the way we walked down the street changed last year,” said singer João Santos. “For the first time we were the minority in Provincetown. I would think twice before looking too extravagant or too queer or too gay or too something before I left the house. This is kind of our effort to get that back.”



Members of the Provincetown Queer Council, Mackenzie, João Santos, and Qya Cristal (pictured here before the mask mandate was lifted), will help visitors find activities and parties this summer. CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

Please don’t think of the Provincetown Queer Council as a bunch of heterophobes. Heck, some of their best friends and family members are straight. They’re still welcoming to everyone, but this is a town that leans heavily on LGBTQ tourists, and to keep from losing that market to other destinations, it’s important that the town rolls out the rainbow carpet.

One of the ways that Provincetown has built up its gay tourism base is by hosting a number of theme weeks, such as Pride (which happens this weekend), Womxn of Color Weekend, Independence Week, Bear Week, Girl Splash, and, the biggest of them all, Carnival. But in addition to welcoming LGBTQ tourists back to town, the Provincetown Queer Council is also trying to reach members of the community who may not identify as part of a niche group. For those individuals, the council has created “Express Yourself” days.

At least one day during each of the theme weeks will be designated as an “Express Yourself” day. That way you can have fun being whoever you want to be.

“Folks enjoy coming to Provincetown can have a little fun and express their queer self by dressing up however they feel comfortable,” Sanborn said. “Some in a harness, some in a singlet, some in a Speedo, others dress in drag.”

And yes, even bros, both gay and straight, can come in their baggy cargo shorts if they like. Anyone can express themselves.

Even with restrictions lifting and a return to normalcy here, there is still some trepidation in the town. Like everywhere on the Cape, there is a shortage of workers, a shortage of housing for workers, and for Provincetown, a concern that the national and international market may not fully return in 2021. But there is one group here that is looking forward to this summer no matter what the outcome: Drag queens.

“Have you ever had to paint your face, and then cover half of it with a mask?” asked drag performer Qya Cristál. “Let me tell you, it should be a crime. This summer people will see all this beauty. No mask!”

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