



# Gay and Lesbian Travel in the Yukon Territory Focus Group - May 2006

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## *Methodology*

On May 4, 2006, Community Marketing, Inc., convened a focus group of nine gay men of diverse ages in San Francisco to discuss gay and lesbian travel to the Yukon Territory. Participants were selected based on responses to the online study, conducted by Community Marketing, Inc., in December 2005 for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Yukon. Participants for the focus group were selected because they indicated that they would be likely to take an adventure-oriented vacation.

Focus group participants were asked to respond based on both their personal experiences and to provide impressions of the destination based on the media and word of mouth.

## *Demographics:*

Participants had a median age of 44 (three were in late 30s, two 40s, three 50s, and one in 60s), were college graduates (four have masters or doctorate degrees), median household income \$150,000 (two, both single, had incomes of approx \$35,000), five were single and four were in relationships. All had valid passports and most had never visited Alaska, Yukon or the Northwest Territories.

Each participant in this focus group travels for leisure purposes at least twice each year. Some take three or four leisure trips each year, and some combine business trips with vacation time. In the last year, participants had taken leisure trips of five or more nights to: Tucson, Vietnam, Europe, Eastern Europe, Hawaii, Palm Springs, Aruba, Southeast Asia, and an RSVP cruise.



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Travel Habits

When asked about their habits for exotic or “off the beaten track” destinations, participants indicated they had done a variety of adventure type travel including: trekking Northern Thailand for two weeks, dog sledding/winter carnival in Alaska, backpacking in Australia, hiking in New Zealand, and whitewater rafting in Idaho. Others indicated they had visited Peru, Nepal, Vietnam, Antarctica, the Greek Islands, and Costa Rica.

Participants typically responded that it was important to them to go someplace “off the beaten track” regularly. They said culture can be a strong influence, and that they liked destinations that did not feel “Americanized.” They sought out destinations that others had yet to visit, and that lack the commercialization of tourist destinations. One participant said that a destination’s uniqueness plays a pivotal role in his decision making process. Other participants were influenced partially by safety issues and environmental issues. Participants tended to plan at least one trip each year where the focus was on adventure.

Participants defined “adventure travel” as: off-beat, roughing it, challenging yourself, getting away from what we know, physical and emotional challenges, hard to get to. Some expressed that, in order for a destination to be of interest to them, it was still important to them that an adventure destination have an element of urban culture available. They noted that, for some, adventure could mean Mardi Gras in Australia or staying in a Holiday Inn [lower-end hotel property]. For purposes of the focus group, we agreed to define “adventure travel” as outdoor activities that did not have to be extreme.

Focus group participants wrote down the top things they would look for when choosing an adventure destination. The most common attribute was hiking. Adrenalin rushes, uniqueness, culture, scenery and warm weather followed.

Hiking/trekking	4
Culture	3
Warm weather	3
Adrenaline	3
Scenery	3
Unique	3
Remote	2
Adventure	2
Ease of access	2
Different/new	1
Safe	1
Friendly	1
Archeology	1
Value	1
View of night sky	1



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Respondents also wrote down their favorite activities when on an adventure travel trip. All of the respondents said they liked to hike. A number of participants noted water related sports, but the remainder of the responses varied as widely as individual tastes.

Hiking	9
Rafting	3
Boating/sailing	3
Scuba	2
Swimming	2
Skiing/snowboarding/x-country	2
Trekking	2
Race cars	1
Zip lines	1
Rock climbing	1
Surfing	1

### IMAGES

Participants were shown nine photos without being given any information about them, and asked to rank each photo on a scale of one to five, with one being unattractive/not something they would like to do, and five being very appealing/something they could see doing very soon. (Scores were calculated by multiplying the number of responses by the ranking: Red Sky = (3x1)+(4x2)+(5x6) = 41. Percentages compare the relevant values of each response compared to the response for all other images and total 100%.) See Appendix A for handout.

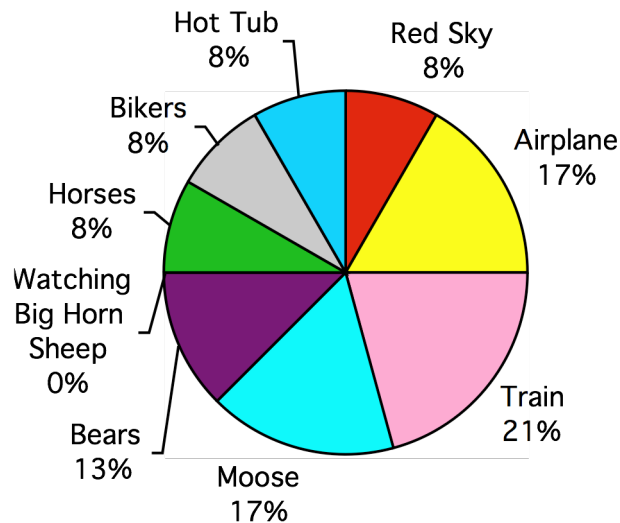
Photo Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	Score	
Red Sky			1	2	6	41	13.8%
Airplane			2	3	4	38	12.8%
Train			4	2	3	35	11.8%
Moose			4	3	2	34	11.4%
Bears		1	2	4	2	34	11.4%
Watching Big Horn Sheep	1		3	4	1	30	10.1%
Horses	1	2	1	2	3	30	10.1%
Bikers		3	2	1	3	31	10.4%
Hot Tub	3	1	1	1	3	24	8.1%

Overall the Red Sky photo ranked highest, followed by the airplane, train, moose and bear photos. Participants liked the idea of sitting back, relaxing and enjoying watching a beautiful sunset. They also liked the idea of taking a scenic seaplane flight or a scenic train trip. Scenery again played an important role in selecting the moose and bear photos.



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Participants selected the train, airplane, moose, and bear photographs as their favorites photos when they were asked to choose two or three favorites. Here the response was more about the image itself than the activity. Participants liked the three wildlife pictures moderately, but felt the people shots were less impactful. They thought lesbians might respond better to the sheep photo because they thought the people in that photo might be lesbian. However none of the gay men on the panel selected the sheep photo as one of their favorites (see below).



### Comments about images:

- **Big horn sheep:** familiar - have done that, sedentary, brought back fun memories, seemed more gay/lesbian than other shots.
- **Moose:** beautiful! Alaska, Yellowstone.
- **Bears:** favorite picture
- **Red sky:** serenity, emotional, ready to visit next week. Familiar/generic.
- **Train:** engineering element, movement, comfort, don't have to sleep in a tent.
- **Horses:** every brochure ever done for Wyoming/Montana, about half saw themselves in photo (*Brokeback Mountain* references)
- **Hot tub:** worst of lot. Loved it. Indifferent, would not sell me in a brochure. Some liked snowmobile, some liked hot tub. Winter.
- **Sea plane:** adventure, remote place, exclusive, challenging and into it, something I always wanted to do.
- **Bikes:** could see doing that.



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### *Yukon Impressions*

When thinking of Yukon, participants used the words: gold, mining, remote, hard to get to, vast, indigenous people, and global warming problems. Participants reported that they would not have thought of the seaplane, hot tub and train as photos from Yukon. The fact that these images were unexpected created additional interest in Yukon as a destination.

Focus group participants were also impressed by the images on the Yukon government's tourism website, [travelyukon.com/en/](http://travelyukon.com/en/). They commented about the overall diversity and splendor of the images.

All but one of the participants indicated that they would consider visiting Yukon in the near future. They looked at Yukon as an alternative to Alaska, and felt Yukon might feel more international or remote than Alaska. The one participant who did not feel he would visit Yukon said that type of destination no longer felt exotic to him, as he had already visited Alaska numerous times.

There was some debate over when and where to see Northern Lights - winter, north of Arctic Circle, etc. The majority of participants felt viewing the Northern Lights would be a major motivation for a visit. This discussion highlights the need for information gays and lesbians may have before ever confirming a reservation for travel to Yukon. It also indicates a level of interest that can be tapped.

### *Marketing*

Participants said that if they were in charge of marketing Yukon to gays and lesbians, they would create a buzz with stories in gay magazines, advertise in local publications and participate in trade events like Gay expos. They noted that images such as the one used on the Summer page for Yukon Pride for "In the Light of the Solstice" and "Let the Festival Begin" differed from their perception of Yukon, and would encourage them to visit. Only one person had noticed anything about Yukon in the gay press. Another recalled the placement in the *Canada Vacation Planner*. Another recalls seeing Montreal at all the gay expos. One person did not think that ads in gay travel magazines would attract as great a response as if they were placed in a more mainstream gay magazine, as he did not feel that gay adventure travelers were typically interested in the mainstream-type destinations typically covered in gay travel magazines.

Websites are another good way to create interest in a destination. 100% of the focus group participants said they use the internet to help plan a trip. They prefer CVB / tourism office sites to commercial sites, such as those done by suppliers or local chambers. Guidebooks, such as *Lonely Planet*, and referrals from friends are also very important resources.



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Participants felt that dealing potential objections upfront would be beneficial. They had questions accessibility, climate, history and cultures of the region, and felt that it was important in the decision making process to get these questions answered easily.

Participants felt the target market would be lesbians and gay men in their mid-30s to 40s. The marketing should be appealing to single travelers, couples and groups of friends.



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***Appendix A***

**Photos**

- 1. Watching Big Horn Sheep**
- 2. Moose**
- 3. Bears**
- 4. Red Sky**
- 5. Train**
- 6. Horses**
- 7. Hot tub / snowmobiles**
- 8. Airplane / seaplane**
- 9. Bikers**
- 10. Tour Yukon website [travelyukon.com/en/](http://travelyukon.com/en/)**
- 11. Map of Yukon Territory**