

All in the Family

The travel industry has discovered a new niche market: gays with kids

By ERIKA MILVY

"HOW MANY OF YOU OUT THERE HAVE two moms or two dads?" hollered Roxanna Ward, an entertainer performing at Club Med in Port St. Lucie, Fla., last fall. "All the kids raised their hands," recalled Steven Boullianne, a gay father of two small boys. "Never before had any of those kids been around 300 other people where that question was asked, and they got to raise their hands."

For Boullianne, this was one of many heart-swelling moments at the resort, which was holding its first-ever gay-family week in conjunction with Olivia Cruises and Resorts, a gay travel group. For many, "Club Olivia" offered a vacation from invisibility, circumspection and a nagging sense of otherness. Though Boullianne, 34, and his partner of 11 years, Olivier De Wulf, 41, live in San Francisco, where otherness is a sanctioned way of life, travel can present a problem. Kids tend to be unwelcome at gay hot spots where partying and pairing up, not potty training, are on the agenda. Likewise, gays may feel unwelcome at kid-friendly spots where traditional-

family-values proponents might not value their nontraditional families. Playing it straight isn't comfortable either. "There's some element of shame in not holding my partner's hand," says Boullianne, an information-technology consultant who works for Olivia. "I don't want those feelings around my kids. I know they can feel my every heartbeat."

Upwards of 250,000 kids in the U.S. are being raised by gay couples, according to the Urban Institute. The 2000 Census showed that one-third of lesbian households and one-fifth of gay male households have children. This "gayby" boom has given birth to a new niche-within-a-niche travel market. Olivia intends to make its Club Med excursion an annual event and has plans for a deluxe camping trip to Yellowstone National Park this summer. Disney is cooperating with the Family Pride Coalition, an advocacy group, on a special Father's Day weekend event expected to draw 35 gay families. And in July, R Families Vacations, a Rosie O'Donnell-branded upstart, inaugurates its first Caribbean cruise for gays and their clans. Rosie will be on board the *Norwegian Dawn* along with her partner Kelli O'Donnell and their four kids. The voyage will feature special workshops on topics from surrogacy to schools, as well as Rosie-chosen entertainment. R Family is planning a

series of ski trips, camping trips and European tours.

The travel industry has already discovered that gays and lesbians are big spenders, representing a \$54.1 billion travel market. Now it is learning that where there's a gay parent, there's often a grandparent or two, eager to spend quality, flack-free time with the grandkids. Olivia and R Family are casting a wide net to welcome straight friends and relatives to all their activities. Olivia's president, Judy Dlugacz, 52, took her partner of 25 years, Rachel Wahba, their straight daughter Tiffany Cook and granddaughter Rebecca, 5, to Club Olivia.

Also soaking up the atmosphere of tolerance were two meticulously closeted members of the U.S. Air Force who got to let down their guard before one was deployed to Iraq. The couple agonizes over how to deal with the secrecy their employment requires and what messages it sends to their two young kids. "How do we impart to them a sense of pride?" one asked. "We try to convey that we're a loving good family and there are other families like us though we're the only one you see." Their Florida furlough and similar vacations in the future will go a long way toward doing just that. ■

Boullianne and De Wulf lounge on the beach with sons Laurent and Patrice