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Interview: Joel Cabrera

Zoom Vacations was created to meet the evolving social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the gay and lesbian traveller creating holiday experiences that are modern, fun, luxurious, and value for money. Simply put, they are filled with adventure and culture, without sacrificing comfort and style.

We spoke to Joel Cabrera, the companies chief travel officer, to find out more.

How did Zoom Vacations come about?

Zoom Vacations as a concept had been brewing in my mind for many years. When I was a little kid, I used to go to the airport and spend all day watching planes landing and taking off and passengers coming and going. In those days you could walk right up to the gate even if you were not travelling.

Later, while in high school and undergraduate school I worked as a travel agent before becoming a lawyer. But, even as a lawyer my friends saw me more as a travel professional and would always make me their first stop when planning trips. Of course, I worked on their trips for fun and never earned a living at it, just because I loved it so much and was passionate about travelling and creating a meaningful experience for my friends.

As these passions grew, the quality of service I provided my friends grew as well and I went from Director of Legal Affairs for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Office of Tourism to pursuing my passion full time. Hence Zoom Vacations was born!

At the same time, a friend who had sold a very successful hotel brokerage firm two years earlier was now looking for his next career move as well. He loves travel, working for himself and starting new business ventures. It also did not take us long to realize that gay and lesbian travel is a strong niche market, that continues to grow at a rate of about 5% per year, a growth rate that any economy would be proud of. Today the gay and lesbian travel market share is a whopping 54 billion US Dollars per year.

What were you trying to achieve when you first started the company?

To create meaningful, affordable, yet luxurious travel experiences for my clients and friends; To expand the imagination and invigorate the spirits of my clients and friends; To provide a level of service and value that is still missing in the gay and lesbian travel sector; To pursue my passion, and; To create magic.

Do you think you've lived up to those original expectations?

Our first big trip will take place this Christmas and New Years to Rio de Janeiro from 26 December-2 January. I just got back from Rio where I spent very long days with my Brazilian suppliers ironing out all the final details of the accommodations, sightseeing, cocktails, events, logistics, etc. I can tell you that this will be a very exciting trip.

We are planning events and providing services that no other gay and lesbian travel companies provide. We will distinguish ourselves by making our clients feel pampered, safe and taken care of. We have already anticipated some of their needs, which will come as a big, yet pleasant, surprise. This service is all part of the Zoom experience.

Has the philosophy changed now Zoom has been going for a year?

Yes, we went from trying to offer many trips every month to concentrating on less and bigger



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trips a year.

What's been the best moment for you over this period?

Launching our website www.zoomvacations.com.

And the worst?

Not getting much sleep in the process of launching our website!

What areas of travel does Zoom Vacations specialise in?

We create group travel packages to Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Peru, Argentina, South Africa, Spain, Iceland and Thailand. Of course, our destinations will change to keep up with current gay travel trends and destination requests.

What do you think are the advantages of booking holidays through a gay company such as yourselves?

Zoom offers our clients the guarantee that any service or product we provide has been given a stamp of approval that the service or product is quality, a good value for the money, and is gay-owned, gay operated and/or gay friendly.



We don't like surprises. So you can be sure that if we use a certain hotel, our client will be welcomed there and treated as a VIP. We build relationships with management at all levels and with all our vendors and suppliers to allow them to understand our client's needs. So, when a gay couple checks into a hotel and asks for a queen size bed, there will be no issues.

Is there an average gay traveller who uses your service?

Not really. Our clients are all over the board. They are young and old, demanding and laid back, well travelled and novices, independent and high-maintenance, wealthy and poor, professionals and men of leisure. However, I would have to say that a good number of them are professional, successful, well travelled, savvy, curious and know what they want.

Have you found there to be a favourite gay destination?

We only go to destinations that are "hot" and on the gay travel radar. However, we have found that Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Spain and South Africa are very popular at the moment.

Is working in the travel industry as glamorous as we're led to believe?

It certainly can be. But I don't consider my job to be work, nor do I consider myself on vacation when I am travelling. Even when I travel First Class or stay in a 5 star hotel, I am still working and paying attention to all the details, accessing everything from how I was greeted at a hotel door to how a flight attendant served wine. As you can imagine, I am a very detail oriented person because I firmly believe that travel details make up the big picture.

Usually, a client will call you back because he or she has had an overall good time, not just because we did one minor thing right. Also, to make every trip magical, we always like to add a touch of glamour to our trips. We are always one step ahead of our traveller in anticipating their needs. On a Zoom Vacation we allow the traveller to relax and enjoy themselves while we take care of the details, so they don't have to.

Is there anywhere left in the world where you would like to travel to?

There are places that you can never return to enough. Italy and the Greek Islands in summer are perfect examples. It is always great to be there. However, I look forward to my first visit to India, the Maldives and mainland China.



What's the best thing about your job?

Creating a trip that showcases a destination in a way that was not seen before.

And Zoom Vacations?

Our travellers. Every day, I talk to new people and make the most interesting new friends. I find myself constantly getting off the phone with a new client and saying to a co-worker, "I just talked to the coolest person!"

Lots of travel firms want to break into the gay market. Would you ever be tempted to go straight?

No. Being in the gay travel market is just a natural for me.

Where would you like to see the company in five years time?

Number one on the most respected list of best gay tour operators.

Interview by Stephen Beeny

Find out more about Zoom Visitations by visiting their excellent [website](#) or emailing them at info@zoomvacations.com

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