***For Immediate Release***

**Media Contact:**

Patrick Gunn, VACAYA CMO

+1 310.633.4097

patrick@myvacaya.com

**VACAYA Releases Kaboodle of Drag Queens in Antarctica During its**

**History-Making First All-LGBT+ Antarctica Expedition Cruise**

New York, December 17, 2022

Since Antarctic expeditions began in 1820 with explorers Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, Mikhail Lazarev, and John Davis (who was the first person to step foot on Antarctica in 1821), never before has an all-LGBT+ expedition sailing taken place… until now. Leading nearly 200 LGBT+ explorers, VACAYA boarded PONANT’s Le Boreal on December 7, 2022 in Ushuaia, Argentina and began the 2.5-day crossing of the Drake Passage, where the Atlantic, Pacific, and Southern Oceans converge, creating the most treacherous waters on earth. At 5:12pm on December 10, 2022, The Vacayans (those who travel with VACAYA are known as “Vacayans”) stepped foot on “The Ice” in Neko Harbor, Antarctica – making history with the first successful all-LGBT+ expedition cruise to Antarctica.

VACAYA Co-founder Randle Roper exclaimed, “It’s taken over 200 years of Antarctic exploration to get here, but with VACAYA, the LGBT+ community has now officially left their mark on the 7th continent! The incredible work of the VACAYA team, our Expedition Leaders, and our fearless Captain made this journey possible.”

In the world of gay ship captains, the total number can almost be counted on one hand. Out and proud Le Boreal Captain Florian Richard adds, “I thank VACAYA for such an open minded and fun sailing. I’m proud to be a part of this history-making expedition.”

In addition to being the first all-LGBT+ expedition cruise to Antarctica, VACAYA also released the very first kaboodle of drag queens onto the continent: Sister Helen Holy (Paul J. Williams), The Liquor Mini (Danny Cabrera), Pissi Myles (Joseph D’Angio), Mini More (Stephen Harms), and Dixie Longate (Kris Andersson) planted the pride flag onto the continent to mark the occasion.

The Vacayan explorers’ reactions to making history ranged from unadulterated joy to humble introspection:

Jacob Carson of Orlando, Florida: “Words don’t do Antarctica justice. To be part of this historic expedition with VACAYA and my queer family is beyond my wildest dreams.”

Aaron Centric & Stephen Harms of Rocklin, California: “We never imagined coming to Antarctica until VACAYA made it possible to be here with our LGBT+ family, experiencing the immeasurable beauty of this distant land. We hope this expedition inspires others to travel to places they otherwise wouldn’t.”

Christopher Chandler-Liu of Washington, DC: “Even at 28 years old, it’s really fantastic to be able to check off this most bucket-y of bucket list destinations, recognizing I’ve had incredible fortune to explore a place on earth so few people ever get to experience. I would have never been able to do this without VACAYA. I am now part of LGBT+ travel history and am humbled by the magnitude of this moment. Antarctica changes you in incalculable ways and my world will never be the same.”

Michele Booher of East Lansing, Michigan: “After first traveling to Greece with VACAYA, I just knew I had to travel with them again. As a bisexual woman, I can totally be myself without fear of judgment when I travel with VACAYA. This expedition to Antarctica has been the best trip I never really knew I wanted to take, but after visiting this beautiful place, I can’t imagine spending this type of money with anyone else. The VACAYA family is supportive, fun, and always full of so much love. It doesn’t get any better than this.”

VACAYA Cruise Director Paul J. Williams of Dallas, Texas: “Traveling to Antarctica has been a life-long dream. Merely the opportunity to do this was overwhelming, and to do it with VACAYA and my LGBT+ siblings? Simply indescribable. Upon my first sighting of the 7th continent, I wept with awe as this dream became a reality. From a strictly personal perspective, I’ve had a fascination with penguins since early adulthood, and my home is full of penguin collectibles. To finally see them up close and personal in their natural habitat has brought me infinite penguin pleasure.”

Randle Roper concluded by saying, “Although we had great fun on the journey, the significance of this voyage is just starting to sink in with the men, women, and non-binary explorers who joined VACAYA on this first-of-its-kind expedition. Their adventure with us will be a tale of discovery, friendship, and LGBT+ history they’ll be able to share for all time.”

**About Captain Florian Richard (in his own words)**

Although I’ve never struggled with who I am at PONANT or any of the other companies I’ve worked for, I never really brought my orientation forward. I always played the professional – fair, human, a strong manager – and ultimately that led to being promoted to Captain nearly 5 years ago.

Focusing on the technical aspects of the ships, I was recognized mostly for my skills and talents as opposed to my orientation. Of course, I was always inspired by public gay figures who were also celebrated for their work: Oscar Wild, Tim Cook, Tom Ford, and an endless number of sportsmen/women, authors, politicians, entrepreneurs, lawyers, and doctors. Now, I’m inspired by The Vacayans and their willingness to go where no one before them has gone.

Being gay in the navy or on merchant marine ships is certainly difficult, but I do believe that every gay marine officer could have a bright and satisfying career at sea if they approach their role with professionalism and a thoughtful management style.

For this VACAYA expedition to Antarctica, I had the chance to have my husband along. It was incredible to be able to kiss him in front of all guests and crew, knowing I wouldn’t be judged – even though I’m in a “front page” role. I can’t thank VACAYA enough for having me at the helm for this history-making expedition. <https://escales.ponant.com/en/florian-richard-ponant/>

**IMAGES FROM THE EVENT:** <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/px0yfgxbidpb6efk95ftw/h?dl=0&rlkey=h9j08pky4g1ztlpmajiecjwb8>

Photo Credit: VACAYA

**About VACAYA**

VACAYA is a fresh approach to LGBT+ travel, one focused entirely on its guests and creating memorable bespoke full-ship and full-resort travel experiences built around amazing destinations, stellar entertainment, world-class hospitality, and endless fun. VACAYA charters entire ships and resorts, so LGBT+ travelers and their straight ally friends have the freedom to express their individuality, make personal connections, celebrate life, rev up, or simply relax… together.

VACAYA’s big-ship, small-ship, and resort vacations can be booked online directly @ [VACAYA.com](file:///Users/randleroper/Desktop/VACAYA.com).

Connect with us on social: [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/myvacaya/), on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/myvacaya/), on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMhOkIDdThzifl_-ly2PAQ), and on [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/@myvacaya?lang=en).

**About VACAYA’s Co-founders and Leadership**

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|  | **CEO Randle Roper** brings more than 30 years of experience in guest service and travel with leadership roles at Universal Studios, Starwood Hotels, and most recently as President of RSVP Vacations. His experience, combined with extensive international travels (all 7 continents and 125 countries so far), gives him an all-encompassing perspective on LGBT+ travelers, their options, and the greater industry, all contributing to VACAYA’s strong values. |
|  | **CMO Patrick Gunn** For over 30 years, Patrick developed marketing strategies and teams for Fortune 500 companies P&G, Disney, HP, and Yahoo! He also served 3 years as VP of Marketing for Atlantis Events and RSVP Vacations where he built an understanding of the cruise and resort industry, and LGBT+ travelers in particular. An avid traveler, Patrick has visited over 40 countries and is committed to several charities benefiting the LGBT community. Patrick holds an MBA from the University of San Francisco. |

**Media Contact**:

Patrick Gunn

Chief Marketing Officer, VACAYA

P: 310.633.4097

E: [patrick@myVACAYA.com](mailto:patrick@myVACAYA.com)