

SGN

Queer Journeys



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TAIPEI, MON AMOUR

A QUEER LOVE LETTER TO LIFE IN TAIWAN

BY MADISON JONES

TAIPEI CITY SUNSET SKYLINE
MADISON JONES

"I am a woman who loves women. The tears I cry, they spring from a river and drain across my face like egg yolk," author Qiu Miaojin wrote in her 1994 book *Notes of a Crocodile*, about a Lesbian student at National Taiwan University in late 1980s Taipei navigating her coming out, toxic Queer relationships, and social isolation. The story's heroine meets a tragic end, much like the author herself, who sadly took her own life only a year after its publication.

But much has changed for the LGBTQIA+ people of Taiwan since Qiu's time. Now considered one of the most socially progressive countries in the region, it was one of the first to pass anti-discrimination protections as well as legalize Gay marriage back in 2019.

Taipei has one of the most vibrant nightlife scenes in the world, offering a vast array of late-night markets, eateries, music venues, and of course Gay bars. With accessible public transit and no laws against drinking in public spaces, it is immensely difficult not to spend every available moment outside, roaming the city's streets alongside friends.

Similarly to Qiu's book, I came to experience my own Queer journey, with its own woes and triumphs, while living in Taipei for a year and working as a writer and English teacher at a public elementary school.

Stepping off the plane again

A lot of different life circumstances culminated in the decision to leave Seattle for Taipei a year and a half ago. I had always been a huge fan of Chinese culture growing up. As a kid, I watched cartoons like *Sagwa*, *The Chinese Siamese Cat* and *Jackie Chan Adventures* on Saturday morning, begging my grandma during to take me out to the local Chinese buffet in Yakima. At 15, I taught myself how to make chow mein from a YouTube tutorial, kicking off a lifelong obsession with Chinese food and cooking. At university, I studied Chinese history and language, spending two summers abroad, first in Hangzhou, China, the next in Taipei at Chengchi University through the DC-based program American Councils.

That first Taipei trip had a huge impact on my coming out experience. Forming friendships with some of the girls in my cohort became the partial catalyst for me realizing at age 21 that I was, in fact, a Transgender woman, and they would be among the first I came out to (hooray for the

power of having girlfriends!). That journey began during my senior year, only a couple months after the trip had concluded. After a few more years of grad school, gender transition logistics, and COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, I became increasingly restless about getting to live in Asia again.

The opportunity finally came one day when a Taiwanese education company reached out for an interview. At 11 p.m. Pacific, I delivered a five-minute teaching demo and answered a few questions regarding credentials. A couple of days later, I was sent a conditional job offer to come work in Taipei, with a full-year contract and work visa.

Stepping off the plane again at Taoyuan International Airport with a new name and gender marker on my passport was a surreal moment, it felt like I was about to experience the country all over again for the first time, but as the new me.

The ambiance

Step out of any Taipei MRT station, and you will be warmly greeted by a cacophony of sights, sounds, and aromas beckoning you to explore the city just a little further. To say it is "bustling" would simply be an understatement, as Taipei is as densely packed a metropolis as they come. Hordes of vehicles pollute the arterials of the city center. Alleyways and sidewalks are filled to the brim with parked motorbikes as pedestrians snake their way through the gaps to their next destination.

The daytime heat and humidity force most to seek refuge in the air-conditioned halls of large shopping centers like SOGO and Taipei City Mall. It is no wonder that boba tea was invented in these conditions, as the subtropical climate necessitates the constant need for iced, sugary treats.

The city is well renowned for its food scene, yet there are so many local delicacies that go underappreciated by visitors. Much of the traditional culture of Taipei revolves around its food stalls and night markets, each of which has its different characteristics. But common fare includes blood rice cakes 血米糰, oyster omelets 蚵仔煎, pepper buns 胡椒餅, sweet potato balls 地瓜球, guábào (pork belly buns) 掛包, and stinky tofu 臭豆腐. One of my favorite traditional desserts is called dòuhuā 豆花, in which delicate tender tofu is accompanied by toppings like syrupy blanched peanuts, red beans, black sesame paste, or brown sugar boba.

Teaching as a foreigner

The relatively low cost of living plus the high demand for English teachers attracts expats from around the world looking for a little adventure and a change of pace. My colleagues came from the US and several other countries, including the UK, Australia, Belize, Singapore, and Canada. A chunk of us were some flavor of LGBTQIA+ and in our twenties or thirties too, making for lots of group chats, hangouts, and excursions.

One of the first off-the-clock get-togethers was at something called *rècháo* 熱炒. This is more than just a banquet-style food affair, but a Taiwanese institution in which roadside hovels are packed with large groups that sit around massive tables fitted with a lazy Susan. Everyone sips on small shot glasses of Taiwan Beer and nibbles at their rice bowls as staff bring out plate after plate of stir-fried meats and veggies for the table. *Rècháo* is usually a celebratory affair for friends, family and/or coworkers to commemorate a special occasion or birthday by sharing a late-night meal. Going out to *rècháo*, especially with local friends, is one of the most quintessentially Taiwanese things to do.

My assigned elementary school was located in a neighborhood where conservative Kuomintang politicians and affluent business people lived. Despite how friendly and hospitable the coworkers at my host school were, as I was their first-ever foreign English teacher, I quickly got the sense that LGBTQIA+-related topics were taboo.

There was only one instance when I tried to broach the topic, in a conversation with my coworker who I became closest with during one of our weekly lunch outings at a café. I told her that I was excited to begin writing articles about Taiwan for the *SGN*, but I could tell by the reaction in her face that the insinuation of me writing for an LGBTQIA+ publication made her feel uncomfortable.

She and many other staff and students expressed conservative beliefs about gender norms, like boys are not supposed to have long hair or play with dolls. We remained friends after that day, but I was to stay completely closeted about my Queerness in the workplace for the rest of the school year.

The LGBTQIA+ scene

Overall, Taipei is an incredibly safe city to be Queer and a woman. I did not

encounter difficulties being vocally out with friends in social and public settings. October is Pride Month in Taiwan, dating back to the days of authoritarian rule, when Pride was disguised under the pretense of Halloween to fend off the violence of the police.

For Taipei Pride 2023, the front of the city hall was inundated with vendors selling gender-affirming clothes, leather gear, adult toys, Pride merch, and much more. Many came out to join the accompanying march. It felt so amazing to be a part of another country's Pride celebration, where the right to freedom of expression has been hard-fought.

The Gay and Lesbian bars of the city bring their own energy to the scene. One night, my group all met for a friend's birthday party at a venue called Barcade that was hosting a "Seven Deadly Sins"-themed drag night. The lineup was composed of both local and foreign performers, but primarily kings such as Uncle Southside. During his performance as the sin of sloth, he utterly lampooned a Taipei politician for being a stuffy conservative shill. Another one of the kings, who played "wrath" as an evangelical Southern missionary turned Gay hedonist, even got a thigh tattoo done live on stage by another drag performer.

Then there is also Café Dalida, located in Taipei's historic Queer district of Ximen and owned by Gay elder Alvin Chang. In his life, Chang hosted and was the mother to many a Taipei drag queen. Dalida is where *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 16 winner Nymphia Wind got her start performing; the bar hosted watch parties, and I attended a few. (I also had the good fortune to interview Chang about Nymphia's rise to stardom and historic win for the *SGN* last year.)

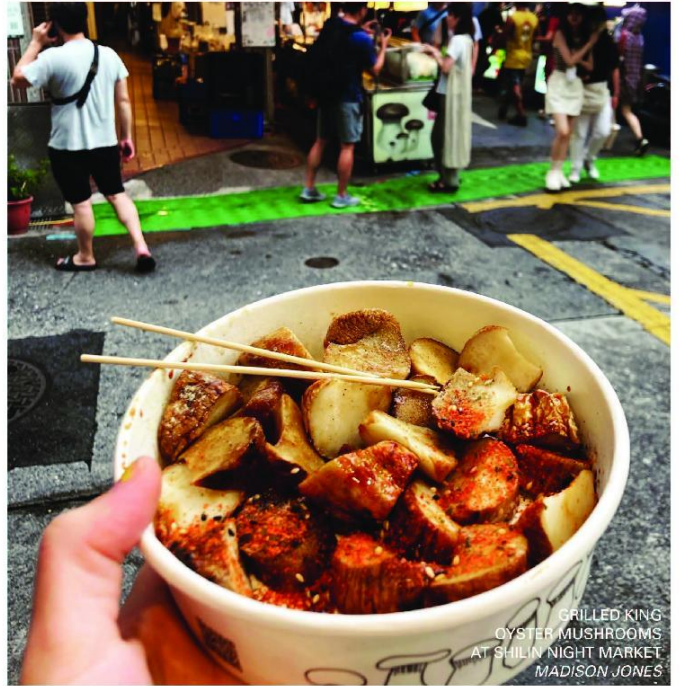
Living in Taipei was a rejuvenating experience that saw so many aspects of my life come full circle. Other obligations ended up bringing me back to the US instead of staying another year, but I gladly would have under different circumstances. I believe Taipei is still often an overlooked destination for many LGBTQIA+ travelers who prefer going to Japan or Thailand, but if you are planning a trip to the region, give it a chance. It will not disappoint!



TEMPLE OUTSIDE OF RAOHE NIGHT MARKET
MADISON JONES



DADAOCHENG FOOD MARKET
MADISON JONES



GRILLED KING OYSTER MUSHROOMS AT SHILIN NIGHT MARKET
MADISON JONES



DRAG PERFORMER SQUIRTER BEER GUN AT CAFE DALIDA RUPAUL WATCH PARTY
MADISON JONES



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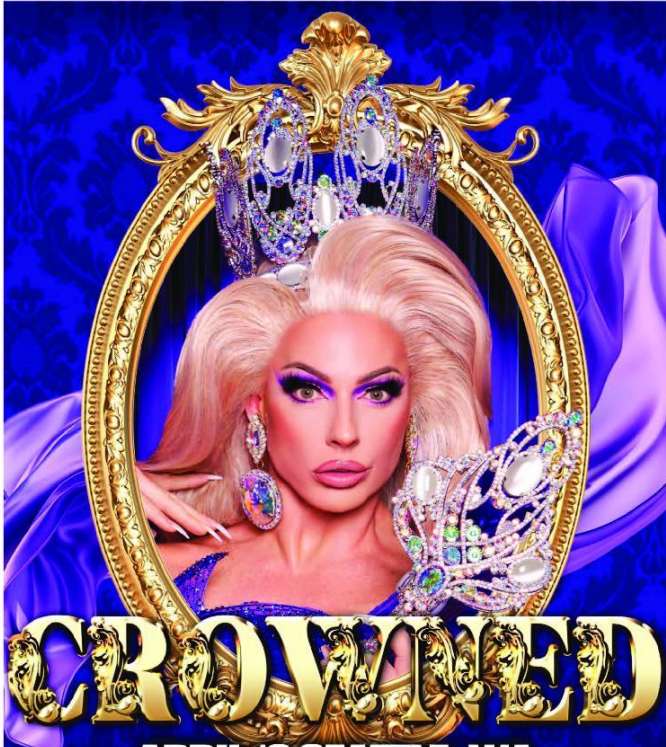
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COURTESY THOMPSON HOTEL

BY BILL MALCOLM

Just a hundred miles east of L.A., there's always something going on in Palm Springs and the other cities of the Coachella Valley, nestled among the desert palm trees but with stunning views of the nearby snow-capped mountains. This trip was no exception.

There is nowhere else like it. Like Wilton Manors, Florida, it is an LGBTQ oasis. (And they both have a Hunters bar with great happy hours.)

What to do

Hike with Great Outdoors Palm Springs (<https://greatoutdoors.wildapricot.org/ps>). We took a walk with the Oswit Land Trust (<https://oswitlandtrust.org>) at the new Desert Dunes Preserve. The former golf course is a delight for bird watchers and plant lovers. Beware of unmarked golf signs though.

In nearby Rancho Mirage, visit the Sunnyslans Center and Gardens (<https://sunnyslans.org>), the winter home of the Annenbergs. You can also tour the house.

Walk with the Frontrunners through the Prescott Preserve (another Oswit land). They meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot of the Mizell Center Mondays through Saturdays (7:30 a.m. May through September).

Enjoy the exhibit "David Hockney: Perspective Should Be Reversed" at the Palm Springs Art Museum. The museum is free

Thursday nights for the Village Festival downtown. Another exhibit not to miss is "To Move Toward the Limits of Living," which examines how LGBTQ+ artists "have used diverse strategies to respond to experiences of exclusion and discover new possibilities. More at <https://www.psmuseum.org/art/exhibitions>.

Swim at the Palm Springs Swim Center, although nonresidents pay a still \$16 fee.

Where to eat and drink

Enjoy a lemon tart at the Peninsula Bakery, open Thursday through Sunday (611 S. Palm Canyon). *Pratiquez votre français ici* (the owner is from France).

Have a delicious bagel sandwich and americano at the Townie Bagel (650 East Sunny Dunes), which has a cult-like following, so weekend lines can be long. They open at 6:30 a.m. daily.

Sit in a first-class airline seat with a cocktail over dinner at the PS Air Bar inside Bouschet (611-633 S Palm Canyon Dr.), where the bartender dresses like a pilot and airline paraphernalia adorns the walls. Fasten your seat belts!

Enjoy a freshly squeezed carrot juice at Nature's Health Food and Café (555 S. Sunrise Way). The vegan fajita plate is excellent, as is the stir fry with brown rice and vegetables.

Have a sandwich on homemade sourdough at Aspen Mills (555 S. Sunrise and other locations). I liked the Aspen sandwich with turkey.

The Tool Shed leather and Levis bar (600 E. Sunny Dunes) has food as well as special events every night.

Many of the bars are on Arenas Street, and they all have specials or happy hours. I like Hunters (302 E. Arenas) and Street Bar (224 E Arenas).

Where to stay

The new Thompson Hotel (414 N Palm Canyon Dr) includes a tapas restaurant. It is quite the hit.

Being a bargain lover, I like the Motel 6 Palm Springs Downtown (666 S. Palm Canyon), close to the bars on Arenas Street and lots of shops and restaurants. Best of all, they don't charge a resort fee. (Check out a show at the Revolution Stage Company or pick up some gently used merchandise at Revival across the street (also home to the French bakery, Peninsula, the Palm Greens Café, and Bouschet/PS Air Bar).)

The Twin Palms (two locations) is nice, as is the Descanso (288 E. Camino Monte Vista); both are all-male resorts.

Getting there and getting around

I took Southwest to Palm Springs Inter-

national Airport, which is mostly outdoors and very handy. Warning: Southwest will charge for baggage, seat selection, and more starting soon. You may want to try Delta or American instead; they have the same policies but the service and often the fares are better. I am switching.

Ride the Sunline bus for just \$1. You can catch it across the street from the Airport (#2 line) for the two-mile ride downtown. Otherwise I walked or took Uber. Rental car not needed.

More tips

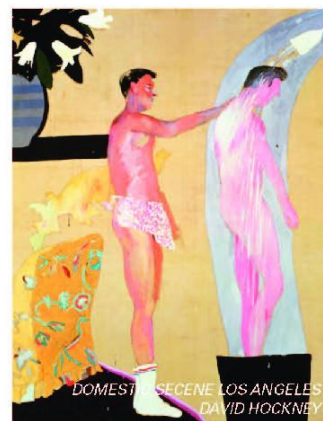
GayDesertGuide, one of several LGBTQ magazines, has a map and listing of things to do.

Pride this year will run November 6-9, 2025.

The iconic Marilyn Monroe statue has been moved a few feet away but is now in a new city park (near the art museum).

You will always find something new on your visit to Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. I do!

Bill Malcolm's syndicated travel column now appears in Sacramento's Outlook, South Florida's OutSUL, GRAB Chicago, and other select LGBTQ+ publications, as well as the GLTA website. He receives no compensation of any kind for this column.





SNOWBIRDING IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

BY BENNY LOY

HURRICANE
DAMAGED PIER
VENICE BEACH
BENNY LOY

We make many assumptions about Florida. At one point, everyone has read a “Florida Man” or DeSantis headline and wondered whether the long flight is even worth it. I was more anxious about the people there than the gators, but most were too concerned with work or play to pay us any mind.

If you live in the Pacific Northwest, I’m sure (especially this year) you have been thankful that you reside here. In my opinion, we have a surplus of almost everything any Queer person could want, except for consistent sunshine and warm oceans. It’s not a surprise that going to Florida is a common pilgrimage among Gay people, as it offers plenty of opportunities for respite (or partying).

A caveat: My wife and I are two Lesbians in our thirties, so I won’t be discussing the nightlife in Florida. However, if you love relaxation, nature, and theme parks, keep reading.

The plan was to spend two weeks in late February and early March. The temperatures stayed a comfortable 70-80 degrees. We only experienced rain three times, each

downpour short yet intense. Our time was divided thus: two days each in Orlando, Miami, and Key West, and the remainder with family in Venice.

After a red-eye flight, we landed in Tampa, were picked up by my father-in-law, and then arrived at his home in Venice. I immediately noticed the birds and their calls, which were new to me. I quickly learned that Florida is an excellent place for birdwatching, as herons, cranes, pelicans, and other kinds can be observed in the many bodies of water, small and large. My mother-in-law said I was just in time to see the rare roseate spoonbill, so we walked to a nearby marsh. I’m grateful I had the opportunity to see its pink plumage.

Sarasota and Venice Beach

After the first day spent birdwatching in the neighborhood and relaxing in the pool, we all went to Siesta Key Beach in Sarasota. It was very crowded — and for good reason. The sands are white and incredibly soft, consisting of 99% quartz. If barefoot, it will make your feet look sugarcoated.

The reflective surface of the sand keeps it cool to the touch, though. We sunbathed on beach towels, and it was so peaceful that I caught myself drifting off several times.

We then went to Venice Beach to watch the sunset, of which Florida offers some of the most beautiful. There is a pier used for fishing or to get a closer look at the dolphins breaching in the distance. The sand is coarser here, but if you sift through it, you can find some decent shells and even shark teeth. On another day, my wife and I scoured and sifted in the ocean and collected a decent haul.

Venice Beach also features nearby stores filled with souvenirs and beach-themed accessories. I found a cute sunhat and a book on fossil hunting in Florida.

Orlando Universal Studios

Next was Universal Studios in Orlando, and we were excited to see how different it was from the L.A. location. We set up in a nearby hotel by night and explored Universal Studios Florida Park and the Islands of Adventure Park by day. The former is much

larger than its L.A. counterpart. (If you intend to explore all four parks, plan to spend more than two days there.) There were a few rides that I had already experienced in L.A., but overall I much preferred Orlando.

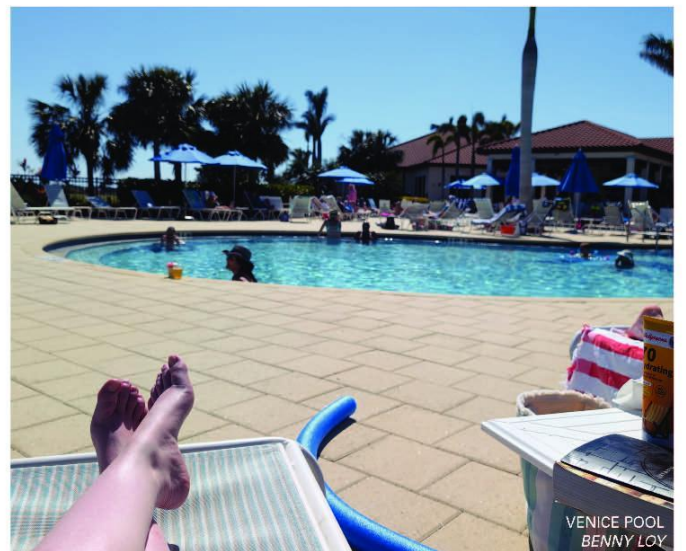
The parks have much to offer movie buffs, whether rides or merchandise. My favorite attractions were E.T. Adventure and the Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit Coaster. Food-wise, save your appetite for a reservation at the Mythos Restaurant, where the lamb meatballs and mango jassi were mouthwatering. The “grotto of the gods” design is an oceanic cavern setting so immersive that I would not have been surprised to see Zeus sitting at the next table.

Crystal River Manatees

The highlight of our trip was visiting Crystal River to see the manatees. We signed up to snorkel in the spring water with those gentle giants, and it was well worth the chilly early morning boat ride. I’d advise researching the tour service you choose to ensure that your group is small and that they emphasize passive obser-



VENICE BEACHGOERS SIFTING FOR SHELLS AND LOUNGING
BENNY LOY



VENICE POOL
BENNY LOY



B & M MARKET IN MIAMI
BENNY LOY



CRYSTAL RIVER MANATEE
BENNY LOY



B & M MARKET OWNERS
WITH ANTHONY BOURDAIN
BENNY LOY



KEY WEST REEF
BENNY LOY

vance. It's critically important that humans do not touch or corner the manatees as they warm up during the winter.

We gently floated on top of the water and observed the docile sea cows resting along the bottom of the river. I was surprised by their size and Zen-like nature. Algae grow on their backs and fish would approach to clean them off in return for a free meal. One manatee, napping, lethargically waved away with its flipper a fish interrupting its rest and then returned to snoozing. I hope to be as round, wrinkled, and chill as these manatees in my golden years.

Miami and Little Havana

Here are some things about Miami to take note of before you go: Budget for the exorbitant food prices — the average cheeseburger costs \$16. If your hotel offers you a choice between a complimentary glass of wine or complimentary breakfast, take the breakfast. If driving, do not enter the passing lane unless you are willing to go 85 MPH or above. Floridians treat weaving through traffic and not using their blinkers as routine as brushing their teeth. Lastly, areas popular with tourists will be flush with police, so use your best judgement there.

Our first stop before Miami Beach was B & M Market for its fall-off-the-bone oxtail, which I will dream about for the next several months. The market is a hidden gem, serving up classic Jamaican food for over 30 years. One of the owners shared how Anthony Bourdain once visited.

After our meal, my wife and I traveled to Miami Beach to swim among the waves. The sand was hot and the ocean was warm, perfect for relaxing with a book or wading in the cerulean blue water.

The next day, we headed for Little Havana, the Cuban heart of Miami. We

explored Calle Ocho to get a taste of cigars, Latin American art, domino games, and empanadas in the jazz era Ball & Chain restaurant/nightclub. Go for the art galleries and stay for the local chicken population, which roam the sidewalks with the pedestrians.

Key West

The southernmost point of Florida, Key West is a gorgeous little island. I recommend exploring the historic neighborhoods filled with their famous conch houses in pastel colors, snorkeling at Fort Zachary Beach, and ordering a Cuban sandwich at Sandy's Café.

Do not pass up scuba diving in the tropical reefs. If you lack certification, the Snuba of Key West offers guided "snuba," which uses oxygen tanks attached to an inflatable raft that you can return to, if you are nervous, by following your oxygen line. Your guide will monitor your oxygen levels so you can focus on the brightly colored fish that trail along the sea floor.

Once my wife and I acclimated to diving, we glided through the water, pecking around every rock and seagrass leaf to spy on the teeming aquatic life. Unfortunately, due to the effects of climate change, there was not much coral. Hopefully environmental action and the efforts of sanctuaries will save this critical part of the reef's ecosystem.

The experience was still well worth it, and the fact that we bonded with our guide Dennis, a fellow Washingtonian, was a bonus. If you take up Snuba of Key West's offer, request Dennis, as his work and conversation are both excellent.

After two weeks, I became homesick, but Florida was an incredible getaway from the rainy Seattle weather. The sunshine and warm seawater restored the pep in my step after a stressful January and has given me new cherished memories with my wife and in-laws. The state offers unique experiences in nature that you can't find in the Pacific Northwest and has a lot of charm. Just don't forget to pack plenty of sunscreen!



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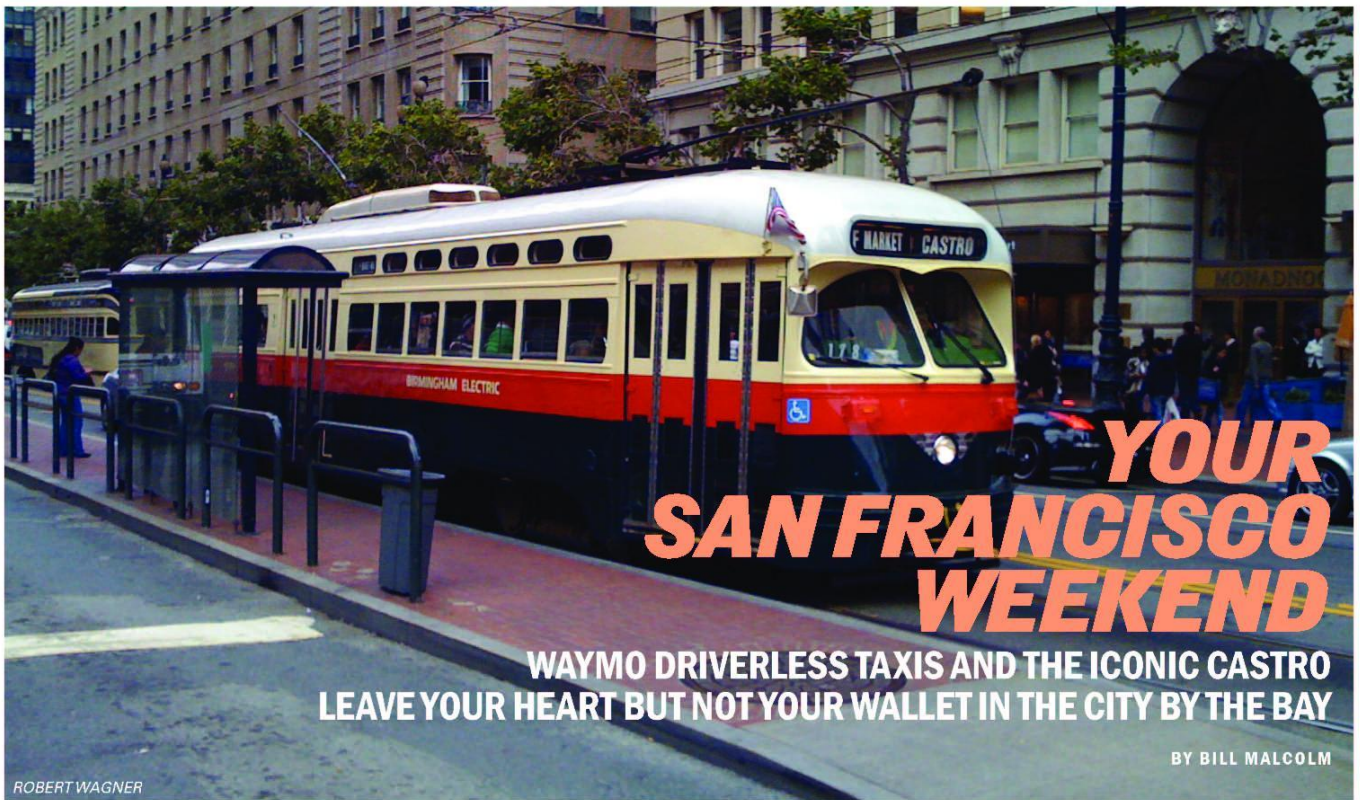
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QUEER ASTORIA



OUT IN L.C.





YOUR SAN FRANCISCO WEEKEND

WAYMO DRIVERLESS TAXIS AND THE ICONIC CASTRO
LEAVE YOUR HEART BUT NOT YOUR WALLET IN THE CITY BY THE BAY

BY BILL MALCOLM

ROBERT WAGNER

You cannot beat a weekend in San Francisco, the City by the Bay. Thought rents are sky high, the homeless situation has improved and there's a new mayor. Employees of high-tech companies now live in "the City" and take premium buses to their jobs on the peninsula. Plus, the drought is over.

And there's so much to do. You may not leave your heart in SF, but if you follow my tips, you won't leave your wallet there either.

What to do

Walk or run with the Frontrunners, who meet Saturday at 9 a.m. in Golden Gate Park. The walkers do two loops around Stowe Lake. It's a friendly group; we went to the fabulous Crepevine on 624 Irving for brunch (try the turkey sandwich with fries). You can also pick up the free shuttle to go anywhere else in the park (the De Young Museum, Asian Museum, Botanical Gardens, and/or Pacific beaches). Details at <https://www.sffr.org>.

Hike with the San Francisco Hiking Club (I co-founded it and was the first president), which meets at the Whole Foods on Market near the Safeway on Saturdays and hikes in the many parks around the Bay. I led a hike while I was there, which featured Corona Heights, Randall Museum, and Buena Vista Park, followed by a ride on the historic F-Line streetcar to the Ferry Building for lunch and scenic views of the bay. Details at <https://www.sfhiking.com>.

Explore the many neighborhoods. The Castro is the "gayborhood." Over the hill, you can check out the too-cute Noe Valley. Try Eric's for great Chinese food (1500 Church). The West Portal is also very cute and just a 10-minute subway ride from the Castro.

Learn about the history of LGBT culture in SF at the GLBT Historical Society Museum (4127 18th).

Work out with the hotties at a class at Barry's (various locations).

Where to eat and drink

Enjoy the nightlife in the many bars in the Castro. I like the Midnight Sun, Toad Hall, Moby Dick, The Overlook, and Beaux, which has a fun drag weekend brunch. Hi Tops (2247 Market) is a fun sports bar with food. A new Lesbian sports bar is opening soon across the street from Beck's on Market Street as well.

Grab coffee or a sandwich at the new Epicurean Trader (2240 Market). They also have fresh baked goods.

Enjoy an It's-It ice cream sandwich (a SF tradition): graham crackers with ice cream in the middle, covered with a light coating of chocolate.

Grab a carrot juice and freshly made sandwich at Courtney's Produce (101 Castro).

Where to stay

I always stay at Beck's Motor Lodge (Sanchez and Market). It offers free parking (although you don't need a car to visit SF) and cute, updated motel-style rooms. Peet's Coffee is across the street, and there are many bars and restaurants just steps away. Tell owner Brittany that Bill sent you.

There is also one other hotel (with no staff) across from Mollie Brown's Natural Food Store on 18th near Castro. There are also B&Bs close by. Other lodgings are mostly around Union Square and environs, a short Muni ride from the Castro.

Getting there and back, and getting around

I took Southwest through Denver to SFO. The flight was late, as rain and fog slows operations at SFO, but Southwest had put me on an earlier flight without giving me the third degree. On the plane, I ran into the band SoLo, which was playing that night at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium.

I checked out the eponymous exhibit in the Harvey Milk Terminal, as well as the SFO Museum (which was spotlighting the now-defunct Virgin American Airlines).

On the way back, Delta rerouted me through Oakland Airport, which does not suffer the weather delays that SFO does; it even offered to put me on the United non-stop. I love Delta's new purple uniforms and in-flight entertainment (I streamed *Matlock* plus free internet and streaming of Paramount).

Getting around San Francisco, I walked, took Muni Metro (the city light rail and subway) and of course the regional subway known as BART (which serves both airports and now extends to North San José).

Other fun facts

The Gloss, *Bay Area Reporter*, and *SF Bay Times* are the three publications in print and online.

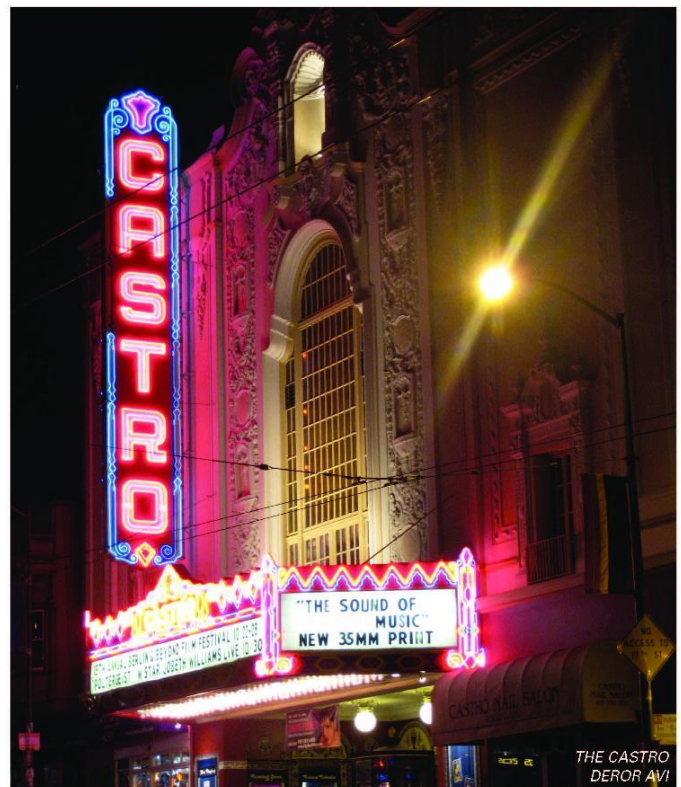
Spring is a perfect time to visit: the hills are emerald green, and there are wildflowers everywhere, including native California poppies.

Look out for the driverless Waymo cars. They are everywhere! My friends take them and like that you don't have to tip (unlike Uber and Lyft), and the fares are comparable. Download the Waymo app to schedule a ride (or save your money and walk, take MUNI, or take BART). PS: They do not go to either airport at this time.

I always enjoy a visit to San Francisco and this time was no exception!

Bill Malcolm is North America's only syndicated LGBTQ value travel columnist.

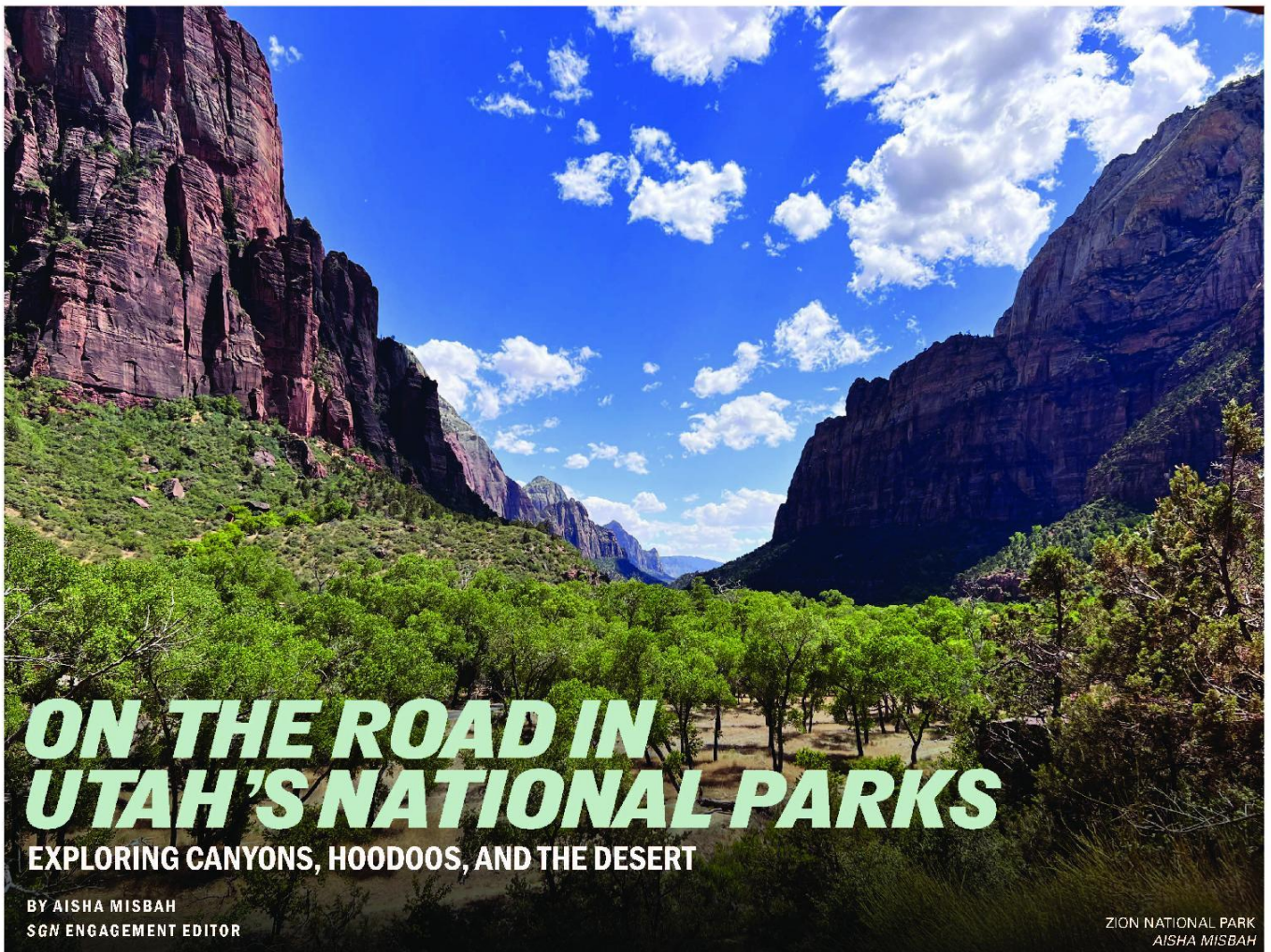
He received no compensation of any kind for this trip, and his views are his own. A former resident of the Castro, he co-founded and was the first president of the SF Hiking Club.



THE CASTRO DEROR AVI



WAYMO DRIVERLESS TAXI DANIEL RAMIREZ



ON THE ROAD IN UTAH'S NATIONAL PARKS

EXPLORING CANYONS, HOODOOS, AND THE DESERT

BY AISHA MISBAH
SGN ENGAGEMENT EDITOR

ZION NATIONAL PARK
AISHA MISBAH

While Utah may not be your first thought when planning your next vacation, you won't regret visiting for its otherworldly arches, mile-long canyons, and gorgeous mountains.

Millions of people visit the state every year. Its five national parks — Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, and Zion — saw about 11 million people in 2024.

My sister and I flew down from Seattle to Las Vegas one morning in June 2024, starting our trip there since we had never visited. We rented a car and spent the rest of the day reveling in what Vegas had to offer: brunch at Snooze A.M. Eatery, the gigantic Bellagio Conservatory, and the aliens at Area15 (an entertainment venue).

Having indulged ourselves, we set off early the following day on a three-hour road trip to Utah, distracted along the way by all the interesting structures, like the Aztec sandstone formations that looked like giant beehives in Valley of Fire State Park.

I never felt out of place when visiting the state, but I mainly stuck to the national parks. For those looking into a more urban visit, Salt Lake City is a very LGBTQIA+-friendly place, with its large and established population of Queers. It ranks third in the nation for the proportion of married same-sex couples in 2020, according to the Census Bureau.

Zion National Park

Zion National Park has an abundance of activities, from climbing Angel's Landing to trekking the desert trails. One of its most famous locations, The Narrows, allows people to trudge upstream through the narrowest section of Zion Canyon as they marvel at the smooth grooves of the walls, carved by water millions of years ago.

I recommend hikers rent neoprene socks, canyoneering boots, and a walking stick from one of the few rental shops around the park, which offer gear for various seasons (we used Zion Outfitters).

Very early in the morning, we picked up our equipment and got on the shuttle bus,

as cars are not allowed in the park past the visitor center.

After multiple stops at the park's many attractions, the Narrows trailhead, the Temple of Sinawava, is the very last one. I advise going as early as possible to beat the crowds, as this will give you more time with your traveling partners and nature.

The Narrows is 16 miles long, but most people don't go that far. My sister and I did a total of eight miles round-trip. The water levels vary depending on the time of year: in the summer, they are lower than in the winter or spring, when you could expect to be wading — or more like swimming — through water reaching up to your neck or

higher. Most of our hike was through water that reached our knees, but at one point, it rose to our chests. The cool feeling was a welcome relief, since the morning turned into a quickly blistering afternoon.

It felt surreal hiking through the canyon. As some of the few people there so early in the morning, we took in everything around us in relative quiet. We felt the cool water against our heating skin, the smooth walls of the canyon, and the plants and trees that dotted the area around us, sometimes growing in from the top of the canyon.

Another popular Zion attraction is Angel's Landing, a large rock formation, where the hike turns into a climb, with only

a chain to hold onto. It is one of the more dangerous park adventures, requiring a permit. My sister and I did not do it, but if you're daring and experienced enough, go for it.

Bryce Canyon National Park

If Zion was a fantasy world, then crossing over to Bryce Canyon, about a two-hour drive, was like stepping onto Mars. There, you can find the largest concentration of hoodoos (irregular columns of rocks) on earth. The structures, dirt, and rocks are a rusty red, offering visitors an otherworldly landscape to explore.

While hiking is a great way to tour Bryce, horseback riding was one of our best choices. My sister and I opted for the three-hour ride; while it was a little pricey, it was worth the money. We gave our tired legs a rest from the previous few days as we rode through the landscape on beautiful horses, past trees and along steep climbs among the hoodoos. It felt like being in a Western film, with the heat on our backs, the steady pace of riding a horse, and the desert surrounding us.

Another key part of the park is the Southern Scenic Drive from the Visitor Center to Rainbow Point, at over 9,000 feet, the result of uneven tectonic forces that uplifted the region over the last 20 million years. There are several places to stop on the way, such as Sunrise and Sunset Points, Natural Bridge, and Agua Canyon Overlook.

Looking back on this trip with my sister, it's apparent to me that it's important — now more than ever — to support national and state parks to preserve nature and educate people about our world, especially considering the Trump administration's stalling and funding cuts.

Utah may not be your first choice to visit, but I highly recommend it. You might be pleasantly surprised!

Visit the National Park Service's website for more information about Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks (<https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>).



RED ARCH NATURAL BRIDGE
AISHA MISBAH



HORSE RIDING AT BRYCE CANYON
AISHA MISBAH



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SPRING HAS SPRUNG IN WASHINGTON, DC

NEW MUSEUM EXHIBITS MAKE FOR THE PERFECT WEEKEND VISIT

BY BILL MALCOLM

CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN DC
NICOLAS RAYMOND

New exhibits at galleries in Washington, DC make it just right for a weekend visit. And most of the museums are free. Upcoming events include the Cherry Blossom Festival, World Pride, the May open-house tours of the embassies, and a new Gay bar (the DC Eagle) on top of the five that have opened in the last two years. Indeed, the district now has over 10 bars counting.

What to do

Walk or run with the Frontrunners in Rock Creek Park (<https://defrontrunners.org>).

GoGayDC (<https://www.mccetup.com/gogaydc/events>) has Friday night happy hours where you can meet the locals; the location varies. I went to the one at the bar at the Hotel Zena in Thomas Circle.

Walk around the great neighborhoods. I like the Dupont Circle area, although NoMa is a lot of fun as well.

Take in an exhibit at the many free museums. Don't miss the Frank Lloyd Wright and Brutalist architecture exhibits at the National Building Museum (<https://nbm.org>). The National Portrait Gallery (<https://www.si.edu/museums/portrait-gallery>) is a must, as is the DC History Center (<https://dchistory.org/about/carnegieliibrary>). All are free.

The Phillips Collection (<https://www.phillipscollection.org>) in Dupont Circle (1600 21st NW) is not free, but its new "Timeless Mucha: the Magic of Line" exhibit is great.

Where to eat and drink

Le Pain Quotidien in Dupont Circle (2000 P St. NW) has great French food and is your go-to for fast casual or sit-down brunch spot.

Sweetgreen (various locations, including 1461 P St. NW) is my favorite. I like the steak salad.

I like Trade (1410 14th St. NW), a Gay bar with a happy hour that runs until 9 p.m. There are events every night and a great outdoor patio. Number 9 nearby is also fun (1435 P St. NW).

Try the garlic shrimp at Jaleo (480 Seventh St. NW, across from the Kimpton Monaco). It's the best Spanish food in town.

Enjoy a drink at the Denson Liquor Bar (600 F St. NW).

Pick up some great food to go or some

Route 11 Virginia potato chips at Streets Market (1221 Mass. Ave.). The Wawa nearby on Thomas Circle is open 24 hours and has great salads.

Where to stay

I always stay at the Comfort Inn (1201 13th St. NW). It's walkable to all the bars, museums, and the great Logan Circle/14th Street shops and restaurants.

I also like the Washington Plaza nearby (10 Thomas Cir. NW). The Hotel Zena (1155 14th St. NW) has been rebranded

and is also an option. I have stayed at the Kimpton Monaco (700 F St. NW) as well, although the Penn Quarter neighborhood is boring.

Also beware of resort fees (aka amenity fees and destination fees). I boycott hotels that charge them as they are a total ripoff.

New stuff

The Cherry Blossom Festival runs in March and April. Look for peak blooms this year in late March.

World Pride is coming to town in May

and June. Details at <https://worldpridedc.org>.

Some of the must-see museums and new exhibits that Visit DC recommends include the following:

Essex Hemphill: Take Care of Your Blessings (The Phillips Collection): May 17–Aug. 31 (<https://www.phillipscollection.org/event/2025-05-17-essex-hemphill-take-care-your-blessings>)

Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Always to Return (National Portrait Gallery): Oct. 18, 2024–July 6, 2025 (<https://npg.si.edu/exhibition/felix-gonzalez-torres-always-return>)

Guerrilla Girls: Making Trouble (National Museum of Women in the Arts): April 12–Sept. 28, 2025 (<https://nmwa.org/exhibitions/guerrilla-girls-making-trouble/>)

LGBTers in the Federal City (Capital Jewish Museum): Opens May 16 (<https://capitaljewishmuseum.org/exhibition/lgbtjews-in-the-federal-city/>)

Getting there and getting around

I took American Regional Jet's Republic Airlines nonstop into Washington Reagan and hopped on the Yellow Line metro to get to my hotel (the Comfort Inn, at Mt. Vernon Square/Convention Center). It's cheap and easy to find at DCA, and it only takes 15-20 minutes. I walked everywhere after that.

Other options include IAD (Dulles Airport), about a 40-minute metro ride on the new Silver Line, and BW1 (you can take Amtrak or the MARC train down to DC).

Best of all, DC has great Amtrak service, including the Acela express train to NYC.

Under no circumstances arrive by or rent a car. Parking is expensive, the drivers are rude, there are lots of toll roads, and the traffic is terrible.

For more information

The two Gay publications are the *DC Blade* (print and online) and *Metro Weekly* (online only).

There's always something new in DC. And this visit was no exception!

Special thanks to Destination DC for the update.

Bill Malcolm is a syndicated LGBTQ travel columnist who resides in Indianapolis.



JEAN HARLOW "STAR POWER" AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY. LEO BOUDREAU



VASHON ISLAND

WHIMSICAL, WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

DEN OF PIN
NOVA BERGER

BY NOVA BERGER

Vashon Island is a snapshot of Pacific Northwest storybook life. Its glacial history has made the soil nutrient rich and perfect for farming, in turn making Vashon a popular destination for its lavender, garlic, and annual strawberry festival (since 1909). There are also swashbuckling pirates, bikes stuck in trees, and curiosities at every street corner. Every visit there is a story in its own right.

For centuries, it's been cut off from the mainland and is only accessible by ferry — not an engineering problem but rather a choice of the islanders. That said, it's but a short adventure away for Seattleites.

Start your journey off by exploring the Vashon Pirate Camp, a massive ship hidden in the woods, which includes a multitude of playground equipment and a sandbox.

If the vintage silver-screen aesthetic is more your style, a meander down Main Street will lead you to Vashon Theatre. Built in 1947, the island's only cinema features first-run films, comedy, and concerts. The place itself is a time capsule, maintaining art, posters, and even a popcorn machine from the early '50s.

Have you ever been to a pinball museum? Den of Pin is a one-of-a-kind electromechanical interactive museum owned by Moe Davis, who found his niche restoring old machines. He's taken his passion to the public, and for \$10 you can travel back to a true vintage arcade.

Vashon is whimsical and full of lore. Remember how I mentioned a bicycle stuck in a tree earlier? There's a local tale about a boy who heroically fought in World

War I but left his bike in Vashon's woods. Over time, the forest grew around his bike, which can nowadays be seen embedded in a tree trunk. Various bikes can be spotted in trees across the island, according to the *Vashon-Maury Beachcomber* (which also tells the real story of the original bike).

If all those activities weren't enough for you, a walk through the woods will give you a plethora of wild and wonderful things to be awed at. There's a reason why it's an island of nature writers, with a king of the birds calling its woods home.

Oscar the Bird King is a whimsical wooden sculpture created by Danish artist Thomas Dambo, known for his large, eco-friendly art installations made from recycled materials. Dambo's work often focuses on creating environmentally con-

scious art that is interactive and accessible to the public. His creations, such as Oscar, combine playful designs with an underlying message of conservation, blending art and nature in urban settings. The last of his exhibits, The Bird King, is a main character in his own right: Dambo says Oscar is the protagonist of Dambo's own book documenting his troll-building journey.

A visit to Vashon Island is like coming home to a warm cup of tea or your favorite fairytale after a stop at your grandmother's place. It's a spot where you can go to forget the hustle and bustle of the city and remind yourself that sometimes less can be more, that simple things like taking a bike ride are really among life's pleasures.



ISLAND QUEEN
DOWNTOWN VASHON
NOVA BERGER



OSCAR THE BIRD KING
COURTESY THOMAS DAMBO



Nestled in southeastern Washington, the charming town of Walla Walla is a destination that combines rich history, award-winning wines, and an emerging culinary scene. With its picturesque vineyards, welcoming small-town atmosphere, and impressive gastronomic offerings, Walla Walla is an ideal getaway for food and wine lovers alike.

During my recent visit, I had the pleasure of experiencing some of the best this town has to offer, from cozy accommodations to must-visit dining spots and vineyards. What made this adventure even more fun was that I got to experience it with fellow LGBTQ+ content creators Matt of Michael & Matt, Mikah Meyer, and Adam Dupuis.

Lodging

My journey began at The GG, an elegant bed-and-breakfast in the heart of Walla Walla. This historic property exudes warmth and hospitality, offering a perfect blend of old-world charm and modern comforts.

The innkeeper took the time to give me a tour of the beautifully restored home,

detailing its history and unique features. The decor strikes a perfect balance between classic elegance and contemporary convenience, with tastefully furnished rooms featuring plush bedding, vintage details, and modern amenities. In the evenings, guests can unwind in the cozy salons, which feature fireplaces and an impressive collection of Louis Vuitton trunks. The outdoor spaces, including a charming garden, provided a serene escape to enjoy my morning coffee before heading out to explore.

Whether you're in town for a romantic retreat, a wine-focused getaway, or simply a relaxing escape, The GG provides an unparalleled experience. Its personalized service, attention to detail, and charming ambiance make it a top choice for travelers seeking a memorable stay in Walla Walla.

Dining

Visiting in February turned out to be a delightful decision, as Walla Walla hosts its annual Restaurant Month, an event that showcases the best of local cuisine. Participating restaurants offer prix-fixe menus

highlighting seasonal ingredients, creative dishes, and the region's renowned wines. This is an excellent opportunity for visitors to sample a variety of flavors at an affordable price.

For my first dinner in town, I made my way to Passalimpo Taverna, an Italian eatery renowned for its handmade pasta and inventive cocktails. The ambiance was warm and inviting, perfect for a relaxed evening out. We ordered a variety of appetizers to share including garlic and rosemary focaccia, marinated olives, and brussels and burrata, which was my favorite of the three. For entrees we shared a few of the specialty pasta selections, including rigatoni Bolognese and the gnocchi. Each was made from scratch and delicious. I wasn't expecting to have homemade pasta in Walla Walla, so this was an unexpected treat.

No visit to the city is complete without indulging in a satisfying brunch at LGBTQ+-owned Bacon & Eggs. This lively café serves up farm-fresh breakfast and brunch options, with a focus on high-quality ingredients and bold flavors. I opted for the signature crabcake Benedict, which

comes with two large crabcakes made daily with celery and green and red peppers, seasoned with old bay. Other selections that looked interesting were the huevos rancheros and chilaquiles. The locally sourced coffee provided the perfect morning pick-me-up, setting the tone for a day of exploration.

Wines and honey

To truly appreciate Walla Walla's world-class wines, I booked a tour with another LGBTQ+-owned business, True North Wine Tours, a company known for crafting personalized experiences. The knowledgeable guide curated an itinerary featuring some of the best wineries in the region, allowing me to taste an impressive range of varietals while learning about the area's winemaking history. The convenience of having a professional guide meant I could fully immerse myself in the experience without worrying about logistics. Whether you're a novice or a seasoned wine enthusiast, True North offers an unforgettable way to explore Walla Walla's renowned wine country.

In between tastings, I stopped by Sweet



Bee Honey, a delightful shop offering locally sourced honey and handcrafted products. The friendly owners were passionate about their work, and I enjoyed learning about the honey-making process and the importance of supporting local beekeepers. Of course, I had to purchase a few jars of honey to enjoy back home.

One of my favorite stops was Rotie Cellars, a winery specializing in Rhône-style products. The tasting room's modern yet cozy design provided the perfect setting to enjoy their expertly crafted blends. The panoramic views made the experience even more memorable, providing a picturesque backdrop to an exceptional session. The winery produces a Stonewall rosé, with proceeds going to local LGBTQ organizations.

For an elevated tasting experience, Caprio Cellars delivered in every way possible. From the moment I arrived, I was greeted with warm hospitality and a curated wine-and-food pairing experience that highlighted the winery's commitment to excellence. The estate-grown wines were exquisite, with the cabernet sauvignon and Bordeaux-style blends standing out as my favorites. The thoughtful food pairings enhanced the flavors of each wine, making for an indulgent afternoon of fine dining and sipping.

The region is also known for its LGBTQ winemakers, including August Forest and TruthTeller Winery. Our group had a chance to sample their delicious wines at a reception at The GG later that evening, where we had the opportunity to speak the proprietors.

Adventure

For those looking to add outdoor adventure to their Walla Walla itinerary, Bluewood is a must-visit. Located just a short drive from town, this ski resort offers some of the best powder in the Pacific Northwest. With its family-friendly atmosphere, well-groomed runs, and stunning forested scenery, Bluewood is perfect for both seasoned

skiers and beginners.

Hop on a snowmobile for a ride through the mountains. Our guide zoomed us through the rugged terrain at nearly 30 mph, offering breathtaking views of the surroundings along with providing an exhilarating experience. As someone who doesn't love heights or speed, the snowmobile adventure was a bit outside of my comfort zone, but sometimes you need to do that when you travel. It will provide the most memorable experiences.

Hidden gem

Walla Walla is a destination that seamlessly blends small-town charm with world-class culinary and wine experiences. The town's dedication to quality food, wine, and hospitality makes it a hidden gem that deserves to be on every traveler's radar. Whether you're a food enthusiast, a wine lover, or simply seeking a relaxing escape, Walla Walla, Washington, is a place that will leave you eager to return. With its welcoming atmosphere, stunning landscapes, and vibrant food and wine scene, this charming town is sure to capture your heart — one sip and bite at a time.

Film lovers should consider visiting during Movie Crush, a short-film festival taking place July 11-13, while those looking to meet other LGBTQ locals should visit during Walla Walla Pride, which is typically held during the first week in June.

I hope you discover the magic of this wonderful Pacific Northwest destination.

Enjoy the journey!

Joey Amato is the founder and publisher of Pride Journeys, an LGBTQ travel website and syndicated column. For more LGBTQ travel ideas, please visit <https://www.pridejourneys.com>.



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David Capocci is one of the owners of the homestead campground, Paca Pride Guest Ranch, along with his husband, Glenn Budlow, and business partner, Tim Leingang. Having purchased land to build a legacy project in the mountains, they went from city boys to rural ranchers, turning their yurt camping experience into a business plan to reinvent the family farm and bring “glamping” to the public. This column shares their ongoing experience in working and living as out and proud members of their community in their guest ranch setting.

In 2004, after living on Capitol Hill with my husband, we and our best friend made the decision to move to the mountains, departing a metropolis that was about to burst forth with an insane amount of growth. This was when Democrats were in crisis and issued a clarion call to get out of our blue bubble and move to an area where change needed to happen. We heeded that call.

We had already been blessed to enjoy the national forest during the summers, camping in a yurt that we would set up for the season at the LGBTQ+ campground along the famed, scenic Mountain Loop Highway. This sparked our love of the area’s beauty and the magical experience of “glamping.” Parlaying that experience, we wrote a plan to bring that magic to the public.

We wanted to make manifest positive change in the world through hospitality, with the reinvention of the family farm. It was a time when people were starting to talk about agrotourism, sustainability, and green principles — and how better to experience that than staying on a farm, with alpacas setting the pastoral scene?

So we bought a 17-acre parcel of previously logged land. Not only did we have to build a homestead, we also had to build a business, including permitting for a hospi-

tality operator.

Imagine if you would, three Gay men moving to the rural mountains outside of Granite Falls, known for timber and quarries. If there truly was a frontierland, this would be it. Would we be accepted? Would we see success? What challenges would we have out here as Gay men?

I am happy to share that PacaPride Guest Ranch has become an ecotourism attraction for the many that venture to the hiking trails and scenic beauty of our beloved national forest.

Oh boy, what a journey it has been too! All along the way, we were unabashedly Gay — it never occurred to us that we would need to exercise caution or care in a rural area. Quite the opposite, we would be authentic always, lean in, and represent — even our business name would include a hat-tip to our community.

We’ve got twenty years under our belt now and plenty of stories to share about what this experience has been like. As we reap what we sow, the harvest has been bountiful, with inspiring moments. Sometimes those become repeating patterns that continue to humble us.

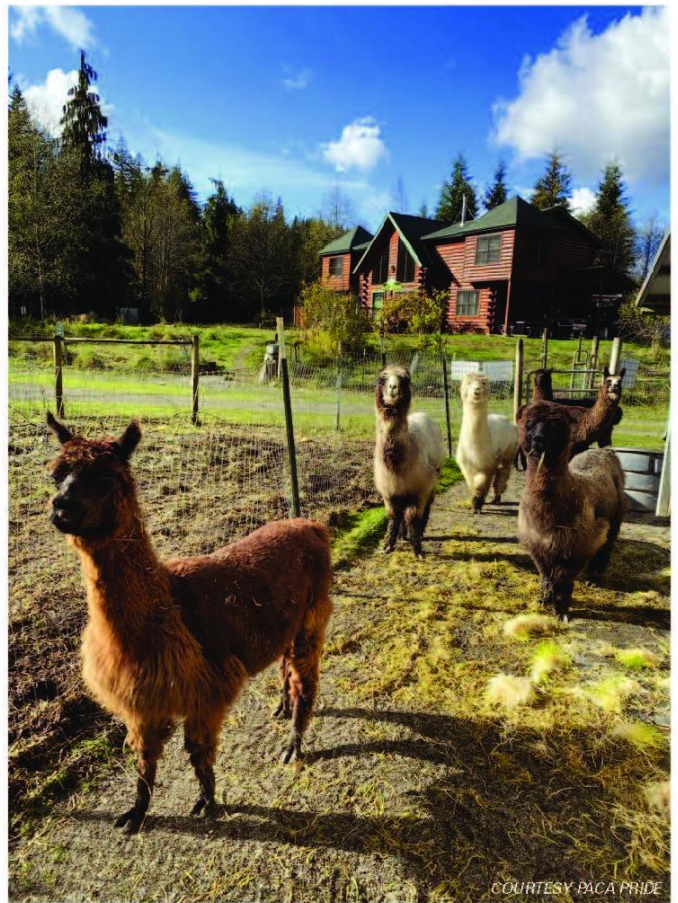
A common occurrence is playing host at the ranch to families with their pre-teens and teenagers. They return again for another visit a season or two later. It’s that second visit when we experience something profound.

After they settle into their yurt or campsite, the mom will come back up to the reception desk, a few tears welling up in her eyes. “Do you remember the last time we stayed?” she asks us. With slight trepidation, I respond, “Yes we do,” having no idea what I’m being set up for — they just arrived and she’s in tears.

“Well, my (son/daughter) was struggling. The last time we stayed, they saw you guys as such role models for who LGBTQ people could be that it gave them the courage to come out to us.” This has become a common experience at the ranch and reminds us that we are doing the right work, in the right place, at the right time.



COURTESY PACA PRIDE



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REAL ID law goes into effect next month: Are you ready to travel?

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

A NEW YORK REAL ID DRIVER'S LICENSE
NYS DMV

The federal REAL ID law becomes effective on May 7 after years of postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mandating "minimum security standards for state-issued driver licenses and ID cards," such as an enhanced driver's license, to travel by air or visit certain federal facilities. These can be used in place of a passport for reentry into the US from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean.

A spokesperson for the Washington Department of Licensing confirmed in May 2024 — one year prior to the law's

official enforcement — that nearly 22% of Washingtonians had already obtained the necessary IDs.

The REAL ID law was passed to prevent fraud and identity theft and is now required for anyone to access federal facilities, nuclear power plants, and commercial airlines.

The required IDs differ from standard identification, as they include proof of residency or legal status. Americans can still purchase airline tickets without them, but they should know the new restrictions

and acquire the proper document before traveling.

Regular IDs can still be used by Americans wishing to buy age-restricted substances and to enter 21+ venues. Travelers looking to jet-set beyond the Western Hemisphere will still be required to provide a passport at the time of travel and pass through customs and border checks.

With federal rollbacks on X gender markers and many Transgender travelers getting updated documents with the wrong gender, some are wary of attempting to

gain another form of ID.

Thomas Charlson, communications spokesperson at the DOL, told the SGN that the X gender marker will still be available for anyone obtaining a REAL ID-compliant identification in Washington.

"We are still offering the gender X designation... It's a state designation," Charlson said. "We do believe under the REAL ID Act that states have the power to determine this... The one thing we don't know is how TSA will handle identification with the letter X."

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Singapore and the Christian far right's attack on Queer rights

BY MADISON JONES

Despite same-sex relations being decriminalized in Singapore in 2022, it continues to be a steep uphill battle for LGBTQIA+ rights there. From Gay marriage to inclusive sex education classes, the country's conservative politicians, with the backing of US far-right organizations, have been fighting tooth and nail against Queer-friendly legislation.

In this era of emboldened right-wing governments and outspoken evangelical religious groups around the world, activists Carissa Chew, Joyce Ng, and Lunc Loh spoke to the *SGN* about how Singapore has been at the focal point of the American right's agenda in the Asia-Pacific region.

Operation High Tide

Singapore has a long history of silencing political dissent. Carissa Chew has reported on how her government has conducted multiple political purges since the 1960s that crippled progressive activism. In the 1980s, Operation Spectrum was a McCarthy-style plot in which the government arrested and tortured progressive social workers, college students, and Catholic organizers.

Chew pointed out that by repeatedly perpetrating violence against progressive activists and liberal Christian organizations, the Singapore government has been paving the way for right-wing Christian groups and their ideology to spread unopposed. Starting in the 2010s, the American right-wing think tank Witherspoon Institute has been accused by Singaporean activists of colluding with government officials, informally coined Operation High Tide.

As an example, Chew brought up that a prominent conservative influencer and civil servant, Carol Loi, has been implicated through her affiliation with an offshoot of the Witherspoon Institute called Canavox, a US-based organization with the sole purpose of opposing same-sex marriage. Its website states unequivocally that "marriage is a comprehensive, permanent, and exclusive union between one man and one woman." Framing itself as a "cheerful" marriage movement, the group spreads "traditional" marriage values around the world by hosting reading groups, in which they disseminate materials justifying institutional homophobia.

In January 2022, Loi was listed on the Canavox website as the leader of the Singapore reading group. Chew said Loi's affiliation with Canavox tracks with her overall political stances, as "she has been framing herself as a parents' rights advocate."

Loi successfully campaigned to have an 18+ discussion about the differences between sex and gender shut down at the Singapore Science Centre last June. Objecting to its premise, she commented under the center's Facebook post that "it is not representative of good science... hopefully

this topic can still be discussed in a more objective and truly scientific way moving forward. Our children deserve to know the truth."

Chew also highlighted how Loi's vocal opposition to LGBTQIA+ education follows Singapore's overall trend, as waves of angry calls from concerned parents have shut down even the smallest reforms proposed by cabinet ministers.

Smart Nation 2.0

Public hostility toward LGBTQIA+ people has troubling implications in the realms of digital technology and government surveillance. Joyce Ng is a tech journalist who has been sounding the alarm on how right-wing Singaporeans have influenced tech policy.

To promote digital literacy and security, Singapore's Ministry of Digital Development and Information launched Smart Nation 2.0 last October. Within the plan's policy documents, Ng found recommendations by the government to attend Focus on the Family-run webinars on how to set internet boundaries for primary school children.

"Age-appropriate content restrictions" is a term often used to justify restrictions on Queer-affirming content," Ng said.

With the total lack of LGBTQIA+-friendly education in schools, she fears that groups like Focus on the Family are promoting digital practices that would completely close off access to online communities and resources for the next generation of Queer Singaporean youth.

Recent reforms around telehealth and virtual medicine have also created hardships. The lack of legal recognition of Transgender people's right to exist has created conditions that lead them to seek services from medical providers who may not be considered completely aboveboard.

#Justice4Harvey

Ng, Chew, and Lunc Loh all reported on how Transgender people have struggled to find doctors to prescribe hormone replacement therapy after multiple services were shut down by the Singapore Ministry of Health. This lack of institutional medical legitimacy for Singaporean Trans people has been a major contributor to the horrific experiences of a Transgender woman who has been continuously held and abused in a men's prison for multiple years.

Viekreman "Harvey" Chettiar is an Intersex Transgender woman who has been subjected to multiple injustices at the hands of the Singapore justice system. A survivor of sexual assault at the Institute of Mental Health, she was arrested in May 2023 on charges of allegedly threatening the Singapore president in an Instagram post.

While in prison, Harvey has been left in isolation, forced to undergo full-body strip searches, and de-transitioned against her



LUNE LOH

will by being given testosterone shots by prison staff.

Loh noted how prison guards have administered Harvey drugs during interrogations to extract a confession, which is now being used to incriminate her in court. To add onto the harrowingly transphobic environment Harvey faces in prison, Chew reported that one prison officer told Harvey, "You can either be a man in prison or a man outside prison, but you will be a man until the end of your case."

In a solo protest to bring attention to the horrendous conditions Harvey has endured, Loh stood outside of the attorney general's chambers and the state courts on March 30, 2024. She was arrested, as it is illegal to hold any public protest in Singapore without a permit, which is nearly impossible to obtain.

Loh issued a press release about why she decided to protest, listing in detail the many reasons why forcing Transgender women into male prisons is psychologically and physically torturous, along with

specific instances of rape perpetrated by prison guards against Harvey. Loh said she was willing to put her own safety on the line to highlight the injustices Transgender women face in prison all over the world.

Harvey's story may not be directly lied the influence of US right-wing groups, but when the recognition of Queer and Trans experience is completely erased in all avenues of life, that environment is naturally going to breed violence against those who deviate from it. That is ultimately what these organizations want to institute in the US and all over the world.

These anti-LGBTQIA+ movements and legislative efforts are on the rise: From Peru declaring Transgender identity a mental disorder to Uganda passing "Kill the Gays" laws, the thread that sadly ties many of these stories together is the support of US right-wing evangelical groups. Now, more than ever, is the time to organize and foster solidarity across the world for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.





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The unspoken anxiety of being Queer while visiting Trump territory

BY PERRIS LARSON
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

Seeing as I had a break from work, I took it as an opportunity to visit a friend in Lynchburg, Virginia, whom I had not seen in over a year. While I was excited, I was also hesitant to leave the comfort of Seattle.

Even though Virginia voted blue in the 2024 presidential election, I knew Lynchburg was anything but blue. As a Queer woman, I was nervous about staying in a town where almost every truck has a Trump 2024 sticker, and where the majority of homes had Trump 2024 signs on their front lawn. I was in Virginia for about a week, and I saw three Confederate flags compared to two Pride flag stickers.

While I knew there are conservative pockets in every state, this was something I hadn't seen before. Trump won 52% of the vote here, and in light of the decisions the administration has made only weeks into his term, the anxiety of being in a place that picked him was overwhelming.

It also did not ease my stress that Lynchburg is home to Liberty University, where my friend is a student. Liberty University is one of the worst campuses for LGBTQIA+

people, because it holds a Title IX exemption, allowing the school to discriminate against students based on their gender identity and sexual orientation, according to Campus Pride.

I tried telling myself that it wasn't a big deal, that I am a straight-passing woman, so the chances that people were going to approach me about the Pride pin on my coat were low. But I realized that it didn't matter if anyone said anything to my face. It was the knowledge that this community voted for Trump — a convicted felon — to be president of the United States.

Trump signed an executive order stating there were only two genders, attempting to erase the existence of Nonbinary and Transgender people. He wants DEI policies eradicated, and is working to ban Trans people from the military. I wound up thinking that a person who voted for Trump either supports or condones these harmful decisions. It made me angry and disappointed.

I was angry because I shouldn't have felt anxiety about visiting another state. I was



disappointed that, according to the popular vote, the country wanted Trump.

I would like to think that there was a time when political differences were just about preferences on policy, rather than deep divisions over identity and values. But this election wasn't just about policy differences — at least it wasn't for me. Morals and human rights were on the line. What the United States stood for was in jeopardy.

Studying history in college, I learned to see the hypocrisy of the United States. Its history of racism, sexism, and human rights violations has made me cynical. I

saw the election as a chance for America to prove me wrong, to show that we have progressed enough as a country that we would pick someone other than Trump to be our president, and that we wanted something better for the country.

I used to believe that progress was slow but inevitable. But after visiting Lynchburg following the election, I believe as a country we are only regressing — slipping back to a time where equality and morality are up for debate. It made me see more than ever that we're not the "united" states and has me questioning if we ever were.

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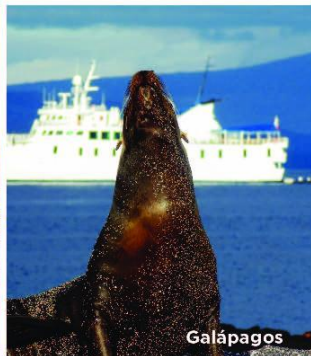
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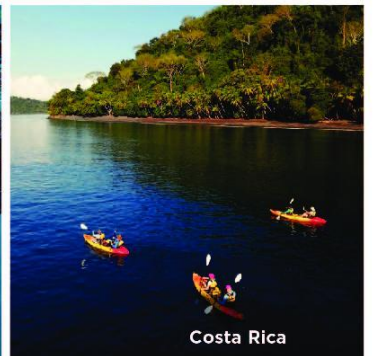
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