



PRIDE MONTH

# United States of Pride

Destinations nationwide are putting out the welcome mat for LGBTQ+ travelers

**Matt Alderton** Special to USA TODAY

**L**GBTQ+ travelers routinely swarm the same vacation destinations every year: San Francisco, Palm Springs, Miami Beach, Key West, Provincetown, Fire Island. Known for being not only fabulous and fun, but also safe and inclusive, these destinations have been pillars of LGBTQ+ travel for decades thanks to residents, businesses and governments that welcomed gays and lesbians in an era when many cities outlawed them.

But times have changed. And so have LGBTQ+ itineraries.

"While classic destinations like Palm Springs and Provincetown remain popular — and for good reason — new LGBTQ+-friendly hot spots are emerging across the globe," reports John Tanzella, president and CEO of the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA), who says LGBTQ+ travel destinations offer more than just a vacation. "They provide a chance to connect, celebrate and be part of a global community. They are a powerful symbol of progress and a reminder that travel can be an enriching and affirming experience for everyone."

In that spirit, here are inclusive destinations in every region of the country — some of which might surprise you:

Athens is a hub for the LGBTQ+ community, says Becky Loccisano, head of the Athens Pride and Queer Collective. "There is always something fun happening.... You'll never be bored."

JOSHUA L. JONES  
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### NORTHEAST Ogunquit, Maine

"Ogunquit is rich in LGBTQ+ history and has always been front and center embracing and empowering the equality of all social communities," says Mark Holt, general manager of The Admiral's Inn, a local hotel. "Ogunquit was initially a destination for artists and performers, which has translated into a thriving, welcoming community for all types of travelers."

Holt says visitors should check out the beloved piano bar The Front Porch; Mainstreet, a gay nightclub known for dueling drag queens; and the Ogunquit Playhouse, which has been staging Broadway-quality shows since 1937.

Don't miss the beach, adds hotelier Tim Harrington, who owns local properties The Dunes and The Wanderer: "Our beach is arguably the most beautiful beach in New England."

### Pittsburgh

In the hit Showtime series "Queer as Folk," which ran in the early aughts, Pittsburgh seemed an unreal setting for the show's thriving queer community. Twenty years later, however, LGBTQ+ Pittsburgh is decidedly more fact than fiction.

"There's 90 neighborhoods that make up the city of Pittsburgh, and there's probably about a dozen of them that have their own Pride celebration," points out Jerad Bachar, the first openly gay president and CEO of VisitPITTSBURGH.

In addition to the Andy Warhol Museum, which celebrates the work of queer artist and city native Warhol, Bachar recommends the Mattress Factory and Liberty Avenue. The former is a contemporary art museum displaying the work of transgender artist Greer Lankton, while the latter is Pittsburgh's original gay district. He also recommends Love, Katie Distilling, an LGBTQ+-owned distillery; Harold's Haunt, Pittsburgh's first and only "they" bar; and Trace Brewing, a craft brewery and coffeehouse known for its pro-LGBTQ+ policies and events.

### MIDWEST Minneapolis-St. Paul

In size, the LGBTQ+ capital of the Midwest is Chicago. In spirit, however, Minnesota's Twin Cities are serious



contenders. LGBTQ+ visitors should check out drag bingo and drag brunch at LUSH Lounge & Theater, browse handmade LGBTQ+ wares at the whimsical shop I Like You and watch a game at queer-owned soccer bar The Black Hart of Saint Paul. Other must-stops include the black-, women- and queer-owned bookstore Black Garnet Books; Urban Growler Brewing Co., Minnesota's first women-owned microbrewery; and Gay 90's, a labyrinthine gay nightclub with roots dating to 1948. Don't forget to pay tribute to Minneapolis' androgynous icon, Prince, by touring Paisley Park, the late artist's home and studio.

"The Twin Cities is ... an outstanding destination for LGBTQ+ travelers," says Minnesota Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan. "Through inclusive policies, a diverse arts and culture scene and uplifting LGBTQ+-owned establishments, we have fostered an atmosphere where the LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit community feels valued and seen."

### Saugatuck, Michigan

Every summer, LGBTQ+ Midwesterners flock to Saugatuck, an artsy community on the shore of Lake Michigan. Along with Pride flags that fly year-round, there are rainbow-painted sidewalks and benches and more than 140 LGBTQ+-owned and -friendly businesses. Favorites include Amazvi Contemporary Art, a gallery specializing in African artists; Kindel and Co., which sells home décor and furnishings alongside men's clothing, accessories and grooming products; Uncommon Coffee Roasters; and The Dunes Resort, whose pool and dance floor are the center of Saugatuck's LGBTQ+ social scene.

**The Black Hart of Saint Paul is an LGBTQ+-owned soccer bar a stone's throw from the home field of Minnesota's MLS club.**

EXPLORE MINNESOTA



**Pokémon Drag Brunch at Union Rooftop in Minneapolis.** DARIN KAMNETZ/FLIP PHONE EVENTS MINNEAPOLIS



**Pridefest in Athens, Georgia.** NICOLAS MEJIA/CAPTURE PHOTO CLUB

"People from all walks of life come here to find themselves, lose themselves, but most importantly, to be themselves," says Mike Jones, owner of The Dunes Resort. "You can be gay, straight, old or young and feel comfortable here."

### SOUTHEAST Athens, Georgia

Approximately 90 minutes east of Atlanta is Athens, known for launching musical acts like the B-52s, R.E.M. and the Indigo Girls.

"From the rich LGBTQIA+ history, to the recently added rainbow crosswalk, Athens is a hub for the LGBTQIA+ community," says Becky Loccisano, president of the Athens Pride and Queer Collective. "There is always something fun happening; whether it's a drag show, a festival, a concert or the weekly farmers' market, you'll never be bored."

Loccisano suggests taking the Queer Space Self-Guided Tour, compiled by the Historic Athens Welcome Center. In a city full of LGBTQ+-friendly spots, her recommendations include 1000 Faces Coffee for a jolt of ethically sourced caffeine; Authentic Brewing Co. for local craft beer and a weekly queer trivia night; Sister Louisa's Church for queer-friendly cocktails; The Rook & Pawn for a night of board games; and indie-owned Avid Bookshop. Don't forget to fill up with something sweet and Southern at beloved breakfast spot Mama's Boy.

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### Sylva, North Carolina

LGBTQ+ travelers have for years been flocking to Asheville, North Carolina, for its progressive values and creative community. Less than an hour west is a lesser-known queer enclave: the small town of Sylva.

"Sylva is an incredibly welcoming and diverse place," says Travis A. Rountree, assistant professor of English at Western Carolina University and former president of Sylva Pride, which organizes the town's 3-year-old Pride festival. "I'm so grateful to be a part of this community that not only welcomes queer life, but celebrates it."

Local LGBTQ+ community center Cornbread & Roses publishes a "Rainbow Directory" of LGBTQ+-owned and -friendly businesses. Favorites include City Lights Cafe and Bookstore; Noon, which sells handmade local gifts; craft cocktail bar The Cut; and Ilda, helmed by a Michelin-trained chef who also owns a welcoming wine bar, Sante, with his sommelier wife.

Don't miss the town's Insta-worthy "You Belong Here" mural or its drag performances, staged regularly at various local venues by the Sylva Belles Drag Group.

### PACIFIC

#### Guerneville, California

"Wine country" often evokes images of suburban chardonnay moms and wealthy wine bros. Guerneville isn't that. Located among the redwoods in western Sonoma County, its take on wine country is approachable, accessible and inclusive.

"Guerneville ... is a vibrant LGBTQ+ destination rich in history for our community," says Gary Saperstein, owner of Out in the Vineyard, a local experiential event and travel company. "It is a place to relax, have fun and connect with community."

Saperstein's recommendations include iconic gay bar Rainbow Cattle Co., a downtown staple since 1979; Equality Wines, a shop specializing in cause-based wines; R3 Hotel, an LGBTQ+ hotel, bar and restaurant; and Boon Eat + Drink, a farm-to-table café from celebrity chef and LGBTQ+ community member Crista Luedtke, who also owns boutique hotel Boon Hotel + Spa and glamping resort The Highlands.



Boise, the capital of Idaho, hosts a large Pride celebration in September, rather than the usual June, to avoid competing with other events.

COURTESY OF JASON MCADAM FOR BOISE PRIDE



City Lights Cafe and Bookstore is a favorite in Sylva, North Carolina.

COURTESY OF JCTDA

### McMinnville, Oregon

Another queer riff on wine country is rural McMinnville, Oregon. Located an hour outside Portland, in the heart of the vineyard-rich Willamette Valley, it's a wellspring of LGBTQ+ community, says Lee McCollins, director of marketing and communications for Visit McMinnville, who credits the leadership of Mayor Remy Drabkin, a queer winemaker.

Along with wineries — there are more than 250 within 20 miles, including Drabkin's Remy Wines — McCollins recommends restaurants Okta and Hayward. Helmed by a Michelin-starred chef, the former was named one of the country's 50 best restaurants in 2023 by The New York Times. The latter was nominated for a James Beard Award.

Also notable are trans-owned brewery Bierly Brewing, ally-owned bookstore Third Street Books and Harvest Fresh, a women-owned grocer and deli specializing in all-natural foods.

"When my husband and I moved here, it was one of the most magical turns of events in our relationship ... because it made us realize that queer folks can thrive in small towns," McCollins says. "We have community everywhere we go — especially in McMinnville."

### WEST

#### Boise, Idaho

Because Idaho is uncharted territory for many LGBTQ+ Americans, its capital is full of pleasant surprises — including a large Pride celebration that takes place in September instead of June to avoid competing with other events.

"Boise stands out from other LGBTQ+ travel destinations because of the kind, welcoming nature of Boiseans, and the unique experiences available to explore," says attorney Will Ranstrom, a member of the Boise Pride Business League.

Mainstays of Boise's LGBTQ+ community include Water Bear Bar, a lesbian-owned cocktail and oyster bar with a 100% gluten-free kitchen; The Balcony Club, popular for late-night dancing; and Somewhere, a gay bar known inside for drag shows and outside for its giant, storied horse sculpture. Also popular are Mullet Proof Hair Co., an LGBTQ+-owned salon offering gender-neutral haircuts, and Flying M Coffee, an ally-owned coffee shop known for its quirky gifts, mismatched furniture and pro-LGBTQ+ fundraising.

#### Park City, Utah

Park City is best known for the Sundance Film Festival each January, during which LGBTQ+ cinema often takes center stage. There's also Gay Ski Week in February and Queerski in March. The former is a wintry circuit party and the latter a locally organized alternative whose focus is sport, inclusivity and community, says Queerski founder Joe Uranker, who describes Park City as "its own kind of bubble in the middle of Utah."

That bubble makes Park City a safe space not only during the town's winter events, but year-round, according to Dan Howard, vice president of communications for Visit Park City.

"For a tiny little Western mountain town, Park City is surprisingly conscious and big-minded," says Howard, whose favorite spots include Riverhorse on Main, one of Park City's oldest and nicest restaurants; Palomino, Riverhorse's new cocktail bar; High West Distillery, which calls itself the world's only "ski-in gastro-distillery"; and Meredith Marks, a boutique whose namesake not only stars in Bravo's "The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City," but also is an outspoken LGBTQ+ ally.