SEE ALASKA RIGHT!

A week aboard UnCruise’s Wilderness Adventurer

by A.V. Eichenbaum
SGN Managing Editor

“Look over there!” Jill, the woman who became one of my regular road-trip companions aboard the Wilderness Adventurer, was pointing out the window of the van. “Bald eagles!”

We, our driver, shrugged. “Yeah, probably about 30 or 40. They’re trash birds.”

I blinked. “What?”

“They’re trash birds! Y’know, scavengers. They eat scraps. The ravens around here pick on ‘em all the time.”

“Huh.”

Thus began my weeklong sojourn into the wild and wonderful world of Southeast Alaska, a trip generously provided to me by Seattle’s own UnCruise Adventures.


I learned a lot about moss.

To know more, you’ll have to keep reading.

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ALASKA
continued from cover

The ship
If you are accustomed to vacationing aboard numerous floating palaces with lavish accommodations alongside hundreds of nameless strangers, UnCruise may not be for you. We were at half-capacity with 31 passengers — all COVID-tested, all friendly. Jill remarked at dinner that this sort of trip "seems like a family on a cruise." After spending time getting to know every- one — whether during a hike or happy hour — I’m inclined to agree.
That evening we spent: compact showers, a shelf storage area, and a single window made complete with a pair of binoculars for birdwatching or sightings once we were underway. I found out quickly that my neighbors had a Bluetooth speaker with them.
They were from Europe.
Humbled though the accommodations might have seemed, we were by no means roughing it. My first thought when waking into my room — a Trailblazer cabin — was that the bed was twice the size of the one I have in my studio apartment. Swoon, yes?
My second was that the wood paneling was absolutely gorgeous. The Wilderness Adventurer was built in 1984. I guess I’m a sucker for the classics.

The crew
We were greeted before boarding by Capt- ain Alan, a warm man with a genuine smile. The few conversations I had with him were pleasant and, having not left Seattle for sev- eral months, refreshingly down-to-earth. We spent an rainy afternoon on the sundeck. "The way I see it," he said, "I wouldn’t ask this crew to do anything out here I wouldn’t do myself. Sometimes, I sit down there with the stewards and clean glasses with them."
That openness and passion for the work resonated throughout the ship’s crew, who hailed from all different backgrounds. Their lives — a Seattle bartender, an MS in fisheries science, an MA in gender stud- ies, and a career in the fashion industry, to mention just a few — were all changed and guided to the UnCruise by their mutual love of our ocean and the life in it.

There was a strong feminine energy to the crew. Working and living on a ship has long been thought to be a “man’s job,” and it was heartening to see so many strong fearless women presence, especially when taking into account how many families with chil- dren ride with the UnCruise every season.
"Last week, we had a little girl who got picked on at school for thinking bugs and nature are cool," Taylor, an expedition guide, told me one evening in the lounge. They smiled. "And after seeing me and this crew, she was like ‘Wow! I can do that? I want to do that!’ It was really awesome."

One steward, Roberto, confided in me one evening that it was his first time working on a ship.
"It’s great here! Everyone’s really nice. It’s only my first week, but if that changes by the end of it, I’ll let you know."

Whether it was a kind word in the morn- ing from a steward or an enthusiastic slide- show lecture from a guide when the day was warm and steamy, you could see the spark in every crewmember’s eyes. They wanted to be there, and they were excited to share things about Alaska, which we all seem to have missed.
That first morning, watching the sun rise over the mountains of Tracy Arm, I felt a sense of wonder swell up in my chest — something I’d thought was long since stamped out by leisure luxury high rises and amusement rides.
Thank God for kind mandates or else every time someone looked at me, they’d have seen me gritting my teeth or like an idiot.

The voyage
Our path was pretty clear-cut. We traveled from Juneau into Tracy Arm, where we stopped to see the Sawyer Glacier. Out on a skiff, we witnessed a magnificent glaci- er culving, blue and white cascading down from impossibly white heights in the summer sun.
From there, we traveled to Thomas Bay and Cascade Creek, where I had the pleasure of learning how to kayak for the first time before hitting a lush Tongass National Forest hiking trail.
Each day’s activities were determined the afternoon before. We were told on the first night that our plans and trajectory could change from the original script if it looked like we would cross paths with a different cruise ship, or our way was blocked by some sort of natural phenomenon. Options were presented daily, with activities ranging from all-day bushwalks to mild skill hikes.

That made the trip accessible to all ages; the oldest of the passengers was 87, the youngest 11. I’ll be the first to admit I was relieved to see a family of five on board, if only for the single fact that I was no longer the youngest. I still have an irrational fear of being sent to the kids’ table, despite having lived and worked with people twice or three times my age my entire career. Beyond that, it was nice to see a family having a good time.

Every day, as previously mentioned, we would draw in the lounge with an educa- tional lecture on a variety of topics. One night was a speculative journey through what it takes to live in the ocean. Another was about conservation and leaving no foot- print behind as we explore the wilderness. Another taught us more about moss and lichens than I’d ever hoped to know. Did you know that moss can have sex with itself? And even if it appears dry or dead, it may just be cutting back on life support, in order to spread, in order to survive in drier climates.

That particular lecture kept coming up in conversation among the passengers. If you get a chance, I highly recommend it.

On the third day, I opted for the "Yak and Walk" tour, where two hours by kayak to land, two hours of bushwalking through untamed wild. I was assigned one of the stewards, Lindsey, as a partner. "They encourage us to try to get off the boat as much as we can," she told me when we were about halfway to our destination.

Openness and passion for the work resonated throughout the ship’s crew, who hailed from all different backgrounds. Their lives — a Seattle bartender, an MS in fisheries science, an MA in gender studies, and a career in the fashion industry, to mention just a few — were all changed and guided to the UnCruise by their mutual love of our ocean and the life in it.

Lunch on a bed of sphagnum moss in the middle of an old-growth temperate rain- forest is an experience unlike any other, though "peaceful" isn’t the first word that comes to mind. Laughing, snacking, and singing camp songs to ward off bears, we made our way through the woods on Kuskulana Island to the beach and back again.

The rest of the days were much the same way, one adventure after the next, with some downtime in between. From there to Taku Fjord, George Inlet, to Glacier Bay National Park, and then back home again. Snorkeling gear was provided for the bolder among us on the fifth day. I would’ve regretted not going if it weren’t for the other things out there to see.

We were encouraged to mark the wildlife we spotted on a large whiteboard located near the dining area. We were notified over the cumm system any time whales were spotted. Notable among the other wildlife sightings were a black bear, six-legged sea stars, and, at 9:30pm on July 1, passengers swear up and down they spotted a bright white UFO hovering overhead.

I cannot promise your experience will include a UFO.
I can say with certainty that the shear magnitude of the Tongass National Forest in particular, where we were told to a hidden rocky beach, complete with a dark oil spill just off the coast, electric violet flowers — will fill you with awe.

There was no cell service for most of the trip, but it didn’t matter. We were busy exploring.

Those moments of calm and wonder that come with finding a chicken-legged-wood mushroom the size of a small dog or a prime specimen of bone sheath lichen in the middle of a drizzle-filled morning hike are ones you have to feel for yourself, moments you won’t capture in your Instagram stories, moments you won’t have again.

The food
Three pots and a cot are all I hoped for when booking the Wilderness Adventurer. Regular readers of my column will know my usual breakfast here in the Emerald City consists largely of instant coffee and instant soup greens.

What we were served well surpassed my expectations. Three gourmet meals a day starting at the breakfast buffet and ending with a choice of sea, land, or vegetarian options — is what we get. Salmon the first night, lamb another, steak another. All expertly prepared and followed by a dessert specially prepared by the ship’s pastry chef to complement the course.

UnCruise works with the Monterey Bay Aquarium to ensure that their seafood options make as little impact as possible on
the ecosystem, another example that stood out to me of the company’s commitment to spreading ecological awareness, as well as enjoyment to their passengers.

What’s more, I noticed on several occasions their willingness to work with guests’ dietary restrictions and allergies at what seemed like a moment’s notice.

We dined with other passengers. Most of the time I ate with Jill, as mentioned, and her friend Susan and David, a couple from Seattle who invited me to dinner once we were back in the city. (The answer is still yes to that, by the way.) Our dinner conversation delved into topics like politics, transhumanism, science fiction recommendations, and even Elon Musk. There are few things I appreciate more than interesting dinner conversation, and, no matter who I sat with, it was never boring.

For the last meal of our trip, I was among a handful chosen to dine at the captain’s table. I ordered the stuffed portobello and listened with interest as those at the table discussed raising kids, living meaningfully, and, ultimately, various philosophies on life itself. If this sounds like a good time to you, you’re in luck. Spending a week with strangers on a ship elicits conversations like this regularly.

Food and drink are included in your ticket price, and every evening before dinner we had cocktail hour in the lounge. The bartender, Heather, was kind enough to make me my favorite — Death in the Afternoon — on the first night, and it became my not-so-secret mission to convert my fellow shipmates to Hemingway’s absinthe and sparkling wine blend by the end of the week.

Sitting there in the lounge, surrounded by books on local ecology and chatting with other passengers while we gazed out at the ocean, I — a twenty-something queer journalist with badly chipped nail polish — felt completely at ease among the myriad retirees, teachers, and government scientists on board. I determined once again that Jill’s previous assessment had been true: this type of trip naturally weaves out the assholes, leaving nothing but interesting people with fascinating stories.

My one complaint would be the coffee, which, though provided freely and without limit, didn’t quite meet base levels of the freakish amount of caffeine I consume on a regular basis, even at four cups a day.

The last day

We’d been blessed by unusually warm weather most of the week, leading some to hope the dry spell would last until Friday. Pulling into Glacier Bay National Park, the sky was a gray expanse. Little droplets of rain hit us during our morning stretches on the sundeck.

Some of us opted for a hike to the top of the glacier, while others chose a skiff tour on kayak around the area.

Clambering up the side of the mountain, my regret at not having packed my bug spray quickly gave way to my appreciation of the view. There’s something about the enormity of a glacier that makes you lose track of perspective. Sitting on a cliff ledge and looking down, I could see the ship, small and insignificant against a backdrop of blue-white ice reaching up into the clouds.

Alana, a psychologist and jazz musician from Delaware, had brought his harmonica with him to the top. As he serenaded us in that icy landscape, I watched as glacial ice fell slowly into the water.

It brought to mind a saying from Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher we had to read in school. “You can’t step in the same river twice.”

To me, this trip was once in a lifetime. My experiences are my own, and no matter how many people go on the same or similar cruises, there will only ever be this one. That feeling is enhanced by the unseas-sonable sunshine we encountered. The climate is changing. The ice is melting. Several crew members remarked how, in their few years working in Southeast Alaska, the glaciers had receded quickly from where they’d been for decades, if not centuries.

You can’t step in the same river twice. No two ice-drifting adventures are alike, and, as the world keeps changing, eventually even that river will dry up.

A bittersweet end to a dream-come-true voyage, but don’t worry. Any depressing philosophical musings I had were shoved out of my head during the Polar Plunge later that day. Doing a cannonball next to a mountain of ice will do that to you.

To learn more about UnCruise Adventures or schedule a trip of your own, visit www.uncruise.com.
Travel

HAWAII

An ocean's length of social distancing requested by native Hawaiians

Photo by Tor Johnson / Hawaii Tourism Authority

by Janice Aftall
SGN Contributing Writer

In 1893 the United States armed forces illegally invaded the Kingdom of Hawaii. The coup was staged — without presidential approval — by white American sugar cane growers living on the islands. Their profits had suffered greatly from a tariff that raised import rates on foreign sugar, so their intention was to get Hawaii annexed. This would make the tariff disappear.

Ships landed in Honolulu with 160 armed soldiers, disregarding peace agreements with the monarch, Queen Liliuokalani. Outnumbered and hoping to avoid casualties, Liliuokalani made the mistake of believing she could trust the US to deliver justice, so she agreed to a conditional surrender.

President Grover Cleveland believed Americans had behaved shamefully, so he appointed Special Commissioner James Bleust to investigate the overthrow of the queen’s government. He wanted to return Liliuokalani to her throne, but the American people strongly favored annexation.

Because of this, the matter was prolonged until after Cleveland left office and William McKinley was inaugurated as president. In 1898 McKinley signed a joint resolution annexing the islands. Hawaii remained a territory until 1959, when it became the fiftieth state.

The colonization of the Hawaiian Islands and the boom of its tourism industry has had a negative impact on the native people of Hawaii and brought their culture close to extinction. Despite the $48.6 million spent daily (as of 2019) by visitors, Hawaiians are the poorest of all people in Hawaii; they are the most unemployed and largest recipients of welfare, and they dominate the prison population.

The locals in these stolen and oppressed islands have complained about overtourism for many years. They live there, yet rarely get to enjoy what their own islands have to offer and get stuck in low-end jobs that don’t pay what they need to survive (estimated to be $212,000 annually to live comfortably).

On top of that, the islands don’t have many natural resources, instead relying heavily on imports to sustain the massive number of tourists, which contributes to the high cost of living. They have a limited water supply, which they have been forced to share with as many as 9.4 million visitors a year. This has devastated the roughly 1.4 million natives suffering in their own homes.

When the world shut down in 2020, during the coronavirus outbreak, native Hawaiians got to see what life could have been like for them — clear beaches, the ability to live and not just survive, and some of the lowest COVID numbers in the country.

But as of April 2021, more than 23,000 tourists are arriving in Hawaii every day, and those numbers have been increasing, approaching pre-pandemic levels. Native Hawaiians feared that these incoming travelers would cause coronavirus cases to rise — and they weren’t wrong. They’ve been urging tourists not to visit, and not just due to the pandemic. Maui officials even made an unexpected request to airlines, begging them not to bring too many people to their island.

But they are not being heard. Tourism is only interested in self-preservation as an industry, and those profiting don’t care for the well-being of the native community.

As the United States begins to emerge from the pandemic, Maui began to suffer from some of the same problems seen on the mainland. With a shortage of hospitality workers and restaurants still operating at limited capacity, they are struggling to keep up with the influx of visitors.

To add insult to infection, mainlanders’ sense of entitlement has skyrocketed. Visitors have been reportedly disrespectful, not just of COVID recommendations and restrictions but to natives as well, who have been assaulted, screamed at, and spit on by those who couldn’t get their way. Tourists have also blocked highways and refused to move when asked.

They seem to have forgotten that their chosen vacation destination is someone else’s home. People actually live their lives on these islands; they have families to get home to and jobs to do that make their vacation possible.
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There are a million things to love about traveling the United States — from our sprawling national parks and historic coastal cities to tucked-away small towns and Southern hospitality — but every once in a while we need to experience our people in our places.

As it turns out, there's a Queer fun to be found everywhere — in areas that you would never suspect, in fact — throughout the entire country. When planning your next "family"-friendly getaway, consider these welcoming attractions, establishments, events, and gatherings in all 50 states and the nation's capital that exist by and for the LGBTQ+ community.

Alabama
Praise Him on high (before hitting a boozey brunch; wine is Jones-approved, remember) at Cornerstone Metropolis Community Church in Mobile, a predominantly LGBTQ+ congregation led by Lesbian pastor Reverend Sara Sills. Sunday services begin at 10:45 a.m. Arrive early for easy parking, visit the institution's welcome center, and take a guided tour of the campus.

Alaska
Newly renovated Mad Myrna's, in downtown Anchorage, hosts a wide range of LGBTQ+ events, including movie nights, drag and strip shows, karaoke, and Pride pageants. This nighttime mainstay, along with Queer dive bar The Raven just down the street, has provided last-frontier fabulousness for over two decades.

Arizona
A pair of well-worn cowboy boots and a bottle of sunscreen are all you'll need for a rugged, clothing-optional weekend at the all-male Copper Cactus Ranch, quietly nestled deep in the foothills of the Superstition Mountains in Queen Valley. Weekends feature bonfires, musical jam sessions, drum circles, and body painting, among other activities that encourage boys to be boys.

Arkansas
Pet-friendly Proud Mountain Lodge is the longest continuously operating Gay-owned resort in Eureka Springs, where you can enjoy the great outdoors while hiking, fishing, swimming, picnicking, and more. It's also become a Queer wedding destination in the South since the landmark SCOTUS marriage-equality decision was handed down.

California
You may recognize Lesbian-owned Hicksville Trailer Palace as the setting for Lana Del Rey's "White Dress" music video, but this dog-friendly, 21-and-older desert oasis in Joshua Tree hosts travelers in 11 individually designed, vintage mini-motel homes situated on seven acres flush with fun and games, including a ball pit, arcade, cornhole, put-putt, a BB gun and archery range, shuffleboard, ping-pong, and darts.

Colorado
Memorialize your road trip with fresh ink — maybe your route map or a memorable symbol — at LGBTQ+-owned Pens & Needles Custom Tattoo Company, voted Best Tattoo Shop in Colorado Springs.

Connecticut
Once you've quelled your hunger pangs with the Traveler Restaurant's classic dining options, like linguini and meatballs, pizza, fried seafood platters, and BLTs, browse the stacks — of books, that is — to find your favorite LGBTQ+ authors or stories. This quaint country eatery in Union allows each person to take home up to three titles — for free — from the selection of thousands that line its walls.

see US OF GAY page 10
Florida — Photo courtesy of Stonewall National Museum and Archives

Illinois
Pay homage to the Queer pioneers who blazed their own trails toward LGBTQ+ equality on a self-guided tour of the Legacy Walk in Chicago’s Northside neighborhood, the placard of which on the series’ 40 rainbow-colored pylons honor our community’s heroes, including Oscar Wilde, Har- vy Milk, Antonio Pastrana, Frida Kahlo, and Alix DeLay.

Indiana
Put your name on the list at popular Bloomington distillery/bake/kitchen Cardinal Spirits, where you’ll be welcomed into the fold, and get a taste of Indiana corn and a glass of the local whiskey.

Iowa
Stop for a photo op at the “American Gothic” cottage in Eldon, famously depicted in Gay artist Grant Wood’s oft-parodied same-name 1930 painting, which has since become an iconic example of 20th-century American art.

Kansas
With its rainbow-flag-painted facade, Equality House, a project of Planting Peace in Topeka, gained international notoriety (or notoriety you saw the news everywhere) when it revealed itself as a beacon of hope and equality against anti-LGBTQ+ forces, specifically the anti-everything Westboro Baptist Church, which is right across the street.

Kentucky
Bourbon — but make it gay. That’s your task as you browse one of the state’s most well-known distilleries, not just to learn about the history of bourbon, but also about the impact it has on the state’s economy.

Louisiana
Best the oppressive New Orleans heat with a summertime treat at Queer whorehouse-turned-restaurant in Hell Sodality, a traveling water-in-a-cup pop-up shop in the Bywater that serves frozen cocktails and some of the best food in town.

Maine
When in Maine, why not head to the lobster roll! — given — but when dining in Ogunquit’s Gay-owned The Front Porch you have your pick of elevated seafood. Start with blue cheese mussels or the oyster trio before settling into entrées like lobster risotto or haddock tacos. When you’re stuffed to the gills (fish pun intended), head upstairs to the restaurant’s bar, where you can sing along nightly to show tunes and standards around a grand piano (the pianist takes requests). It is, of course, BYOB and served from old-fashioned hors d’oeuvres.

Maryland
One of the last bastions of LGBTQ+ Baltimore nightlife (Charity City has lost most of its Queer bars and lounges in the past few years), the Eagle, which celebrates its 20th years on the scene in 2021, has triumphed over financial ups and downs to keep its doors open to the leather and kink communities and those who love them. Pro-tip: head to the Toolbox for all the what-when-where-things-stay-there excitement you’re seeking.

Massachusetts
Following the route of Boston’s first Gay Pride March in 1971, the Equality Trail walk will include 13 sites around Beantown, including a 50-year-old Gay bar, Haymarket, a police headquarters on Berkeley Street, the State House on Beacon Hill, and the site of a federal on Tenceon Street. Fifty years later, peaceful protests inspired a list of civil rights demands at each location.

Michigan
Test your pop-culture prowess at Fis5, a retail shop with a stage (and bar) in downtown Royal Oak, on its drag-queen trivia nights, the latest of which featured Selma’s Creed-centric questions. If memory jogs aren’t your thing, opt for less-skilled activities, like weekend drag bingo and the Sunday Drag Brunch Cookbook.

Minnesota
Friends of Dorothy can follow a yellow brick road (of sorts) to the Andy Garland Museum, established in the actress’s birth town of Grand Rapids, where you’ll learn about the troubled star’s illustrious life and career, or, on a lucky day, attend a Garland- themed event, book signing, or festival.

Mississippi
Set sail for Ship Island, off the Gulf Islands National Seashore in Biloxi, in your private vessel, or hop aboard the public ferry in Gulfport from March to October. If you arrive in your own boat, anchor near Fort Massachusetts, swim ashore, and make the trek on foot to the easternmost end of the island for legal running and fishing in the buff.

Missouri
Foolies will get a crash course in late-19th-century American cuisine from James Beard semi-finalist chef Rob Connelly, who presents a reservation-required, seven-course, Grant-inspired tasting menu Thursdays to Sundays at Balmin in St. Louis. Each meal includes staff explanations of the dishes, a history, and QR code—accessible videos on the top-rated restaurant’s research projects.

Montana
Research will show that there’s not much in the way of LGBTQ+-specific recreation in traditionally conservative Montana, but if you’re traveling through Big Sky Country, consider a stop into Missoula’s Gay Men’s Meeting at The Center, every Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m.

Nebraska
Belly up to the bar at Omaha Mining Company—an on-the-fringe Gay watering hole that has, according to one Yelp reviewer, “existed since the 1890s between the Douglas County jail and urban nightlife” (though it’s not as crowded as it used to be). Order a cold beer or something more sophisticated (like a martini) at the bar, or try one of the many creative cocktails on the menu.

Nebraska
After you’ve made your requisite donation to Los Angeles’ gay-friendly cancer case, the pain with a trip to the Fruit Loop, a cluster of Gay bars and clubs along East Naples Drive, near the University of Nevada. Boulders Saloon and Charlie’s, both country-western bars (this is the desert, after all), along with the Las Vegas Eagle and Freezone, offer plenty of men without losing your ass — unless that’s what you’re into.

New Hampshire
Dabble in the dark arts with a visit to the “mugick retirement” cottage of Bisexual British occultist and “Wickedest Man in the World” Aleister Crowley, whose four-month stay at this house in Henniker, owned by self-professed medium Evan- line Adams, resulted in myriad “secret and arcane” activities. If you’re superstitious of the supernatural, there’s a church conveniently located next door to cleanse your saucy soul.
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US of Gay
continued from page 10

New Jersey
Asbury Park, a 1.6-square-mile city located on the northern Jersey Shore, has a long and storied history — from disproportionately impoverished minority communities and racial strife to political corruption and a severely underserved school system — but it has overcome many of those obstacles to emerge as one of the most densely populated LGBTQ+ communities in the Mid-Atlantic. There’s tons for you and your queer friends to do here, too. Stop by the Asbury Park Pride Center for event info and a map of the city. And don’t forget to visit the Asbury Park Museum, which explores the history of the city and its LGBTQ+ residents.

North Dakota
If you’re exploring the state, North Dakota is a must-visit destination. This Midwestern state is known for its vast farmlands and small towns, but it also has a thriving LGBTQ+ community. The state’s largest city, Fargo, is home to the Fargo-Moorhead Gay & Lesbian Community Center, which offers a variety of resources and events throughout the year.

Ohio
Cleveland-based DJ Alon is credited with being one of the first LGBTQ+ DJ’s to play in the early 1980s. The city has a vibrant nightlife scene, with bars, clubs, and dance parties throughout the year. Check out the LGBTQ+ friendly bars and clubs in the Tremont neighborhood, or head to the historic Haight-Ashbury district for an underground dance party experience.

Pennsylvania
Pay your respects by setting a can of Campbell’s Soup beside the final resting place of Gay pop-artist Andy Warhol, whose grave is at St. John’s Baptiste Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in the town of Oval. Shae & Sons is the gay-friendly neighborhood spot for all your LGBTQ+ needs.

Rhode Island
After a day of exploring in Providence, grab a slice of pizza at The Bistro, a LGBTQ+ friendly eatery in downtown Providence. And don’t miss a performance at the Rhode Island Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, which showcases the talents of LGBTQ+ artists and business owners.

South Carolina
In a walking city like Charleston, you can spend an entire day sightseeing and eating at one of the many popular spots. The city’s rich history and diverse culture make it a must-visit destination for LGBTQ+ travelers.

Tennessee
Throw your hands up as you barrel through the Thunderhead rollercoaster, stroll through the Chasing Rainbows Museum, and tap your feet to the Dreamland Drive-In musical show at Dollywood, the namesake theme park of everyone’s favorite LGBTQ+… who doesn’t love Dolly Parton in Pigeon Forge.

Texas
Download the 1956 Western film Giant to your tablet, open a bottle of wine, snuggle up in bed and press play in a stately room at Marfa’s Hotel Paisano, which hosted LGBTQ+ icons Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, and James Dean in their final roles as they shot scenes for the flick in this charming far-west Texas town 66 years ago.

Utah
Despite its Mormon upbringing, wild Wild West nation. Butch Cassidy might have been Gay. Allegedly, his mother heard noises and wondered what he and his new cowboy friend Mike Cassidy, whose last name he eventually took, “were doing wrong by the corral.” (A mother always knows what’s up, doesn’t she?) See where it all started with a visit to the Wild West, with a heart of gold, the humble boyhood abode, and poke around the family plot, located in Paunzutch.

Vermont
Fill a waffle cone with your favorite Ben & Jerry’s flavor at its factory-store Scoop Shop in Waterbury before taking a saunter through the behold-the-building-and-up-the-hill Flower Garden, where discontinued pies, like Schweddy Balls and Vermont Python, rest in peace. The confectionary connoisseurs are longtime supporters of the LGBTQ+ community, most recently celebrating International Transgender Day of Visibility.

Virginia
Satisfy your sweet tooth at Ruby Scoops, a Black- and LGBTQ+ owned ice cream shop in Richmond’s Brookland Park neighborhood, which serves up premium, small-batch, made-from-scratch ice creams, sorbets, sherbets, and desserts in a family-friendly, dog-friendly, and kid-friendly atmosphere.

Washington
Come for a haircut, stay for the coffee at Seattle-based Squirrel Chops, a queer-owned hybrid salon and cafe where you can enjoy two dishes with one stone while you grab a latte and your daily pick-me-up.

West Virginia
Photo-capture rainbows in the mist as you ride along the scenic drives of the New River Gorge National River Falls in the Allegheny Mountains of Tucker County, then pitch a tent at the state park’s campground for a night of star-gazing and stargazing under the stars.

Wisconsin
Pizza and wine are a treasured culinary combo — at least for boisterous and junk-food enthusiasts (i.e., non-vegans) — and you’ll find options aplenty at the city’s LGBTQ+ friendly bars and cafes.

Wyoming
You may have trouble finding the exact spot where Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and left to die by two homophobic men in 1998, as it remains unaufklärlich to this day, but a memorial bench on the University of Wyoming campus in Laramie serves as a sufficient spot to remember our modern-day martyr.

MikeyRox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 800 publications across the world. He’s currently working on a book called “Gay Travels,” which will be published in 2021.
An LGBT-friendly destination on Mexico's west coast

by Ed Wash
Special to the SGN

Within an hour after landing at Puerto Vallarta’s airport last month, I was enjoying a cocktail by the pool at the upscale Westin Resort and Spa. It itself as a wellness resort, and I felt very well indeed, enjoying the warm breezes off the Bay of Banderas.

The hotel was 80% booked, but because the property is so expansive, it didn’t feel crowded. Its COVID-19 protocols requiring masks in the indoor common areas and for its employees made it feel very safe.

Puerto Vallarta (aka “PV”) has long been Mexico’s most popular LGBTQ beach vacation destination.

Within the city’s Gay-focused businesses have survived the pandemic, with the exception of the city’s newest Gay bar, Casa Bar, which closed earlier this year after the building’s owner bought out the lease. The bars that don’t also serve food had to close for months of August, as the delta variant became a concern, but things are expected to get back to normal in time for the high season, in late fall and winter.

Most of the larger hotels, including the Westin and Marriott, will give you a test in the hotel for free. You can also get a test at Puerto Vallarta’s airport for about $20.

Much to offer LGBT visitors

Puerto Vallarta has about two-dozen Gay bars and more than a half-dozen LGBT hotels.

Almost all of the Gay stuff is to be found in the Zona Romantica area, which is just south of downtown, just on the other side of the Cuale River. Some people also call that neighborhood Old Town, which is a misnomer, since downtown is much older. The Gay epicenter of Puerto Vallarta is at the corner of Lázaro Cárdenas and Ignacio L. Vallarta, where the very popular open-air club Mr. Flamingo is. Playa’s Beach next door is busiest at night due to its popular drag shows, which generally don’t start until after midnight.

The other clubs on that block include La Noche, CC Slaughter’s, and the newest clubs on the block, Industry and Co-De.

Puerto Vallarta boasts three Gay news and information guides: Gay PV, Gay Guide Vallarta, and Out and About PV. You can find them all over the Zona Romantica, and some of the more Gay-friendly mainstream hotels have them in stock at the concierge desk. T.J. Wilson, the owner of Gay PV (gaypv.com), also runs Gay bar tours, which is a great way to have fun and get the inside scoop on the city’s LGBT nightlife.

The unofficial Gay beach is the stretch of the public Los Muertos Beach in front of the Blue Chairs Resort, which is where the Vallarta Cora was, and the property was completely renovated and looks better than ever.

The newest Gay hotel in Puerto Vallarta is Amara Villas, which is on a jungle hillside about a 15-minute Uber ride from the Zona Romantica. Most hotels will accept dollars as payment, but they usually won’t give you a good exchange rate, and they will give you change in pesos. You can also withdraw money from an ATM in pesos, but you will be assessed a fee for every withdrawal, and the exchange rate may be a little less than you would get if you exchanged money with a traveler.

4. Water: Don’t be afraid of the water.

Puerto Vallarta’s tap water has won awards for quality and safety. Drinking tap water instead of bottled water is also better for the environment. The one exception is that if you are staying in a building that relies on a water tank at the top of the building to provide water pressure and if the tank is contaminated, you could get into trouble. But you won’t have a problem at a major hotel.

5. Taxing Taxis in Puerto Vallarta are not metered, so be sure to establish a price before you get into the taxi. It is not customary to tip cab drivers in Mexico, but if they give you extra service, such as helping you carry your bags, you should give them a tip. Tips are usually cheaper and the best way to ensure that you won’t be ripped off by a taxi driver. But sometimes during peak times, when there is a high demand, taxis may be cheaper than Uber.
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Escape to a small-town feeling

by Lindsey Anderson
SGW Contributing Writer

Spokane is a charming place, described by visitors and residents as a "mediterranean-sized city with a small-town feel." If you're looking to escape the Seattle freeze or just catch a little bit of that Eastern Washington heat before summer fades away, then look no further than the Inland Empire.

Classy lodging
Spokane is home to many beautiful hotels, but there is no better option than lodging in one of the classic Davenport Hotels: the Historic Davenport Hotel, epitome of luxury, along with the Davenport Grand and Davenport Tower. Originally built in 1914, the historic Davenport Hotel features turn-of-the-century charm, from the Victorian balconies to the red-carpeted staircases, and a chilling secret: it is said to be haunted! Mr. Davenport himself, the hotel's founder, is rumored to walk the halls of the top floor late at night, inspecting his masterpiece. Davenport passed away on the top floor, and Spokane locals swear his soul has never left the building. The hotel is also said to be haunted by the ghost of Mrs. McNairan, a woman dressed in 1920s fashion who can be seen peering over the railing of the lobby if you look at just the right time. The story of the hotel and Mr. Davenport is a part of the history of the hotel and explored through a self-guided tour, available at www.thespokanecourageous.com. The story of the hotel and Mrs. McNairan is a part of the history of the hotel and explored through a self-guided tour, available at www.thespokanecourageous.com.

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Fine dining
As you make your way past the falls, you'll find some of Spokane's best restaurants. Anthony's provides guests with the best views in the city, overlooking the falls, and as the sun sets, the beautiful colors of downtown. Anthony's has a classic seafood menu, showcasing some of the best catches to come out of Eastern Washington.

Another option for fine dining is Clin-ken's, a must for any first-timers to the city. It's a Spokane landmark offering views of the river and skyline, as well as perfectly grilled steak and salmon.

For more casual but still excellent food in Spokane, there is perhaps no better place than the classic Frank's Diner. Located in an old train car with a 1920s feel, Frank's offers a relaxed atmosphere and great food. It's a perfect spot to stop in for a bite to eat before continuing on your adventure.

Shop till you drop
Spokane has some excellent retail stores to check out while you're visiting the city. The Downtown District features a variety of shops, including the unique and charming Riverpark Square shopping center.

Riverfront Park is also home to the Looff Carousel. Opened in 1909, the carousel still retains its original charm, and even if the horse figurines no longer feature real horse hair manes, they still bob up and down to old-fashioned music, and older kids can try to catch the brass ring as they whirl past it. The park is also home to the "Little Red Wagon," a giant, kid-friendly sculpture that doubles as a slide and monkey bars. The wagon is situated on the bank of the river, where ducks and geese will come right up to you looking for an afternoon snack.

Right outside the carousel you can find more Spokane charm! The Gorge Goat, a metal sculpture, keen to eat your trash and keep the park clean. Across from the goat sits the skate ribbon, featuring ice skating in the winter and roller skating in the summer. High above all the action of the park soar Spokane's gondolas, purple cars that will take you on a romantic journey with views of the river, the falls, and the downtown skyline. For a close-up view of the falls, downtown Spokane has several footbridges with breathtaking views of the rushing river and the falls.

Near nature, near perfect
Spokane is the perfect destination for anyone fond of nature adventures. With a Washington State Adventure Pass, you can get into any state park in Spokane and explore gorgeous hills, breathtaking views, and some of the most charming wildlife meadows in the state. The most popular hiking trails, for both beginners and seasoned adventurers, can be found at Riverbend State Park, nicknamed the "Bowl and Pitcher" by locals for its unique rock formation. To enter the park, guests cross a swinging footbridge high above the rapids of the Spokane River, a breathtaking sight.

Another great location for nature lovers is the Oxbow Park, the preserve of Idaho. The park features towering trees and a serene atmosphere.

Parks-a-Plenty!
If nature is your thing but you like it inside the city limits, never fear: Spokane has plenty of beautiful and well-maintained parks to explore. Manito Park, one of the best loved parks in the city, is filled with lush gardens originally designed by Frederick Olmsted, who also designed New York's Central Park. The park features a variety of trails, including the Rose Garden and the Japanese Garden, both of which offer stunning views and opportunities to relax and unwind. Manito Park's beautiful and well-maintained parks to explore. Manito Park, one of the best loved parks in the city, is filled with lush gardens originally designed by Frederick Olmsted, who also designed New York's Central Park. The park features a variety of trails, including the Rose Garden and the Japanese Garden, both of which offer stunning views and opportunities to relax and unwind.

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Sunflowers, blue doors, and sunsets on the plains

A New Mexico vacation

by Josephine Baird
SGN Contributing Writer

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the idea of traveling has been seemingly off limits for the past year and a half. But with continued safety measures, traveling no longer feels like a pipe dream. This summer, a personal milestone—finishing my master’s degree program—my mother and I went to New Mexico. While I’d never had much interest in visiting the state before, my mother promised it was worth a visit—and she wasn’t wrong.

In all my travels, I’ve never been in a place quite like New Mexico, with its unique culture that combines Indigenous heritage and the historic remnants of the cowboy era as well as Spanish and Mexican rule. The adobe homes with their round-edged walls and brightly colored accents make for picture-postcard sights in town, while the highways wind through the stark and stunning beauty of the desert plains.

To start our trip, we flew into Albuquerque, the largest city in New Mexico, and stayed at the Hotel Andaluz, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Home to New Mexico’s first elevator and a gorgeous interior, the hotel also houses MAS, a restaurant known for its unique take on traditional Spanish cooking. The restaurant didn’t disappoint our party and was accommodating to our vegetarian needs, making this one of the best meals we had in the state.

After Albuquerque, we drove to Santa Fe, taking the scenic route through Jemez Springs and its famed hot springs. To take part in the local culture, my mom and I went to a local hot spring with four different pools. The pools’ temperature usually hovers around 100 degrees Fahrenheit, but on the hot day of our visit, the pools were warmer than usual—one pool was even too hot to enter with more than a toe. Bracing ourselves, we slipped into one of the other, cooler pools for a relaxing day in Jemez.

Next we headed to New Mexico’s state capital, Santa Fe. At more than 7,000 feet above sea level, it’s the highest state capital in the United States, and with a founding date in the early 1600s, it’s also America’s second-oldest city. Our day in Santa Fe remains my favorite part of the trip. Our hotel of choice was the Hotel St. Francis with its iconic entryway and its proximity to the heart of Santa Fe. We spent part of the day walking the gorgeous old streets and drifting through the town’s galleries and museums, including the New Mexico Museum of Art.

A small-town church with a picturesque entrance – Photo by Josephine Baird

The adobe homes with their round-edged walls and brightly colored accents make for picture-postcard sights in town, while the highways wind through the stark and stunning beauty of the desert plains.

We ate crepes at the French Pastry Shop and got coffee at the Café Des Artistes, and then it was back for more strolling and shopping. The culture of Santa Fe was on full display at the Palace of Governors’ Native American Art Fair, where scores of local Indigenous artists display their craft skills and artistry.

One of the things we were most excited about was strolling through the Old Town area, which was once the center of Santa Fe’s Native American community. The city’s adobe architecture is a testament to the layers of history that make up the city. While Santa Fe was a major hub for native artists, the buildings themselves are a testament to the city’s history. The adobe architecture is a testament to the layers of history that make up the city. The city’s adobe architecture is a testament to the layers of history that make up the city.

On our way out of town we visited Canyons Road, Santa Fe’s historic art district and mile-long artists community. The vitality of Canyons Road art scene made me wonder if I would find the same works hanging in the New Mexico Museum of Art in 30 years. The quality of the art was impressive, and the variety of styles was amazing. We found many buildings that were full of art, and it was clear that Santa Fe is a major center for contemporary art. We spent a lot of time exploring the art district and checking out the galleries.

To end the trip, my mom and I headed to Taos, a northern New Mexico town and unique artist community in the high desert. The peak of this part of the trip was catching a gorgeous sunset on the Taos Pueblo.

While Taos was scenic, I wasn’t in the mood for more art galleries at that point. So we went for a stroll along the Rio Grande River and found a great place to eat. We ended the day at the Taos Ski Valley, the area’s main mountain town, and checked out the beautiful scenery and great views.

We spent the last day of our trip strolling through Taos and visiting all the art galleries. We spent the last day of our trip strolling through Taos and visiting all the art galleries. We spent the last day of our trip strolling through Taos and visiting all the art galleries.

After a year and a half confined inside, we were excited to be out and about, exploring new places and enjoying the beauty of New Mexico. If you’re looking to brighten your life with the sight of sunflower-strewn fields, bright blue doors and sunsets on the plains, New Mexico might just be the place for you. But be prepared, a trip like this is more fun with sturdy sandals, a fully charged camera and—most importantly—food companions.
Vancouver: An underrated Washington getaway

by Hannah Saunders
SGN Contributing Writer

With its rich history, proximity to Portland and diverse community, Vancouver—also known as the "Cove"—is Washington's hidden gem. The former Northwest trading hub sits on the banks of the Columbia River and was named after British explorer George Vancouver, who mapped the Northwest coast in the 18th century. Red brick buildings give the downtown area an old-time feel, while vibrant murals are up to the minute.

Vancouver does not leave residents or vacationers lacking when it comes to activities. The location of the city provides endless opportunities for outdoor adventures and social outings. Here are some of my favorite things to do in "the Cove."

Brewed Awakenings

On every morning of a visit to Vancouver, my dog and I go for our favorite morning treat: he gets a biscuit and I get cold brew with heavy cream. Out of all the coffee stands in the state, Brewed Awakenings is my hands-down favorite!

The company sources certified organic, shade grown, fair trade and bird friendly coffee from around the globe and artisally roasts their beans. And the baristas? They're the sweetest ones you'll ever meet. I can't think of a more perfect way to start my day than with delicious coffee and an overjoyed puppy.

Fort Vancouver

Established in 1825, the historic and now decommissioned Fort Vancouver is a popular destinations today. It was originally the headquarters for the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trade, which expanded to support the Army, but the original buildings were burned down during an 1866 wildfire. Rebuilt and preserved, in 1961, Fort Van- couver was named a National Historic Site. Its Persian Field is ideal for plane-watching, and there are endless meadows, mak- ing it dog friendly as well.

I love going to Fort Vancouver for an early morning walk so I can watch the birds sway down, or an evening stroll so I can watch the sky turn orange with the setting sun. The entire site is so beautiful that many couples hold their wedding there.

The Smokin' Oak

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Multnomah Falls

How could I fail to mention the stunning waterfalls, only a 30 minute drive from town? Everything about a trip to Multnomah Falls is breathtaking. I always drive on the historic Columbia River Highway, dotted with waterfalls, stone bridges and scenic viewpoints.

Multnomah Falls is the most popular stop on the Historic Columbia River Highway, and for good reason. It's a two-tiered, 690-foot high waterfall with a beautiful bridge of stone balustrades. If you've never seen it, Google it now, and then plan your trip to Vancouver!

Everything you need to know about WorldPride 2021

Party in Scandinavia with the happiest people on Earth

by Mikey Rox
Special to the SGN

It's been two years since Stonewall 50 WorldPride NYC 2019 became the largest international Pride celebration in history, but the "bye" year of 2020 (spoiler alert!) wasn't due to the pandemic.

The global celebration is held only every odd-numbered year, starting in 2017, given it's a massive logistical undertaking (before that, it was held in 2000, 2006, 2012, and 2014), and WorldPride Copenhagen/Malmö 2021 couldn't have come at a better time.

Hundreds of thousands of queer-identified participants and allies will flock to the twin host cities in Denmark and Sweden, respectively, from August 12 to 22, to party with the happiest people on the planet—a delightful distinction provided to the Scandinavian countries by the United Nations' famous World Happiness Report. (The United States ranked number 19 in the most recent report, FYI.)

So what's in store for this year's all out progressive-flag-flying festival? Read on for more.

WorldPride 2021 will coincide with two LGBTQ+ anniversaries in Denmark

If you can believe it, it's been 70 years since Danish doctors in 1951 performed the world's first successful genital reconstruction surgery (just that is your trivia hat), a medical marvel that provided hope to trans people the world over. This year is also the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Gay Liberation Front, the Danish chapter, which has been instrumental in blazing trails toward equality for the country. Look how far it's come!

Opening ceremonies kick off in Copenhagen...with (hmn, dmn!) COVID restrictions

In conjunction with Copenhagen Pride, WorldPride will officially start on the late afternoon of August 13, but in adherence with COVID-19 protocols, the opening cer- emony won't be held in WorldPride Square—a makeshift village of sorts (similar to the Olympics) located within Copenhagen's main square—at least not as of press time (things could—and probably will—change).

That potential snafu notwithstanding, Copenhagen welcomes vaccinated US travelers and, if any testing is needed, both PCR and antigen tests will be available free to everyone, including tourists. 24/7 Munchen. Copenhagen is OPENHAGEN again, y'all.

WorldPride Square will be open for the rest of the fest

WorldPride Square will provide a gathering place for all attendees that have traveled from far and wide. LGBTQ+ and nongovernmental organizations spanning the globe will set up shop in the square to greet pedestrians, provide information, and invite folks to get involved. Art exhibits also will be a centerpiece of the village, alongside a street-food market and bars with plenty of space to relax.

Eur Games will be held simultaneously

If you enjoy watching hims, hers, and thens compete in variety of sports that range from boxing and badminton to dancing and dodgeball, add the spectator-friendly Euro Games to your list of-do's while you're in Copenhagen. If you want to get hands-on (but not handsy; mind ya business, see), consider sign up to become a volunteer at the games, to be held August 18 to 20. Euro Games' website is currently accepting those applications.

Spread out and explore other WorldPride villages

While WorldPride Square will serve as the jump-off for the 30 days of festivities, other villages will allow crowds to spread out and experience individual interests. In addition to Sports Village for Euro Games athletes and fans, villages will focus on kids and families, youth, women, and the Queer community, among others. The vibe and content of these villages will be tailored to audience specific but open to everyone.

You might have a brush with royalty

Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark, Countess of Monpezat, is patron of Copenhagen 2021, making her the first-ever royal to serve in the role for a major LGBTQ+ event. Say hi if you spot her, she knows a queen when she sees one.

Despite pandemic protocol, the show will go on

Organizers have said in public statement that despite some COVID-19 anticipations, they’re “continuing to plan for full delivery of all Copenhagen 2021 events, taking into account the guidance and rec- ommendations of government agencies. Doubting down, organizers have promised they will not cancel or postpone events.

Now there’s only one thing left to do: Let’s gooooooo!

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than a hundred outlets across the world. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels.
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