

Portland Pride

This Pacific Northwest city's LGBTQ+ community shines well beyond Pride Month, writes Domhnall O'Donoghue

A hush descends as velvet curtains rise. Staff tiptoe through a crowd of hen parties, tour groups and regulars, serving trays of potent cocktails. Earlier, my driver insisted that a visit to Portland was incomplete without experiencing a drag revue at Darcelle XV Showplace – and she was right. Performers appear out of nowhere sporting sequined gowns, feather boas and sky-scraping wigs. Uproarious applause eventually gives way to an iconic Sister Sledge anthem, which encapsulates the city's collective impulse to embrace every resident, no matter who they are. We Are Family becomes my new soundtrack for the city.

According to the venue's new owner, Jeremy Coryus-Peck, Darcelle's is a safe space that reflects Portland's inclusive and diverse culture. When he purchased the business from the late, eponymous owner, he was inundated with offers from Portlanders to restore the building to its former glory and shake off the residue of the pandemic and all the challenges it brought.

"So much has improved for gay people since Darcelle's opened in 1967," Jeremy says, adding that the building has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its role in advancing LGBTQ+ rights. "But it's not always easy being queer in America today, primarily because of what's happening at federal level."

In Hopscotch, a thrilling immersive art experience,

I notice statements such as 'No hate in my state' and 'Pride lives here' emblazoned across glass panels.

Heather Anderson, director of international tourism administration for Travel Portland, believes this northwestern city is a sanctuary for those seeking a reprieve from the political climate elsewhere in the country. "Here, Pride doesn't occur once a year but every day," she says. "We champion everyone, regardless of sexuality, gender or ethnicity."

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

Those venturing to the city will be richly rewarded, both culturally and otherwise. Thanks to the abundance of fresh produce available on Portland's doorstep – from the Pacific Ocean to Oregon's mountainous landscape – the city's food scene is thriving.

Whether you're enjoying hot dogs while watching basketball in the Moda Center sports stadium or visiting the weekly farmers' market in downtown's South Park Blocks, you won't go hungry here. Unsurprisingly, James Beard – the late chef, whose name is given to one of America's most prestigious culinary awards – was a local. Standout drinks and dining venues include the Diva Drag Brunch at Swan Dive and the Sports Bra, the only bar exclusively dedicated to women's sports.

Helping me appreciate all that's on offer, I set off on a walking tour with Portland by Mouth, led by owner Sherri Brown, followed by a cycling tour with Sarah Gilbert of Around Portland Tours. ➤

DESTINATIONS

LGBTQ+ TRAVEL | PORTLAND



PORTLAND ATTRACTIONS

Powell's City of Books is a haven for bibliophiles. It occupies four storeys across an entire city block, making it the world's largest independent bookstore.
powells.com

Portland Art Museum is home to Claude Monet's most famous work, *Water Lilies*.
portlandartmuseum.org

Pittock Mansion tells the story of Portland's transformation from a pioneer town to a modern city. The grounds offer stunning views of the region, with snowcapped Mount Hood looming large in the distance.
pittockmansion.org

Explore the waterfalls of **Columbia River Gorge** on a day trip outside the city with First Nature Tours, owned by gay couple Kieron and Camron Wilde.
firstnaturetours.com

One of Portland's monikers is **City of Roses**, and there are opportunities to see flowers of all varieties in bloom here. Visit the Japanese Gardens (pictured), Rose Test Gardens and Lan Su Gardens.
japanesegarden.org
lansugarden.org



fast fact

Travel Portland has trade resources and information at travelportland.com/about-us/information-for-travel-professionals

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Downtown Portland; Hopscotch artwork; flying the flag for the LGBTQ+ community **PICTURES:** Travel Portland/Diego G Diaz, David Alvarado; Domhnall O'Donoghue



Central to Portland's culinary success, they say, are the hundreds of food carts on street corners or organised in 'pods' that allow chefs to gauge the appetite for their culinary creations without the high set-up costs of opening bricks-and-mortar premises.

One such pod is Lil' America, a collection of carts owned by the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour. Los Plebes tacos stand co-founder Eddie Garcia was born in Mexico but grew up in Portland. His favourite aspect of Lil' America is the pod's wonderful sense of community. "We want to see each other succeed," he enthuses. "We have a good relationship and help each other in emergencies."

IN VINO VERITAS

No meal in Portland is complete without local wine. Although most American production is concentrated in California, Oregon is proudly the country's fourth-largest wine-producing state, and a day trip to a vineyard is a must for all city stays.

One example is Ponzi Vineyards in Willamette Valley, which has won international acclaim for producing some of the world's finest pinot noir, pinot gris, pinot blanc, chardonnay and white riesling. As a testament to its high standing in the country, its Ponzi Arneis was served at President Obama's inauguration.

Another option closer to Portland comes from Vivianne Kennedy, a transgender woman who, along with fellow winemaker Cristina Gonzales, owns Community Wine Bar PDX on SW Dakota Street. "I aim to remove the pretentiousness from wine drinking and reduce the barriers to enjoying it. But, most importantly, I want to create a safe space for my trans family," she says.

Vivianne tells me that winemaking allows her to combine a love of both art and science. Her journey into the industry coincided with a journey of "coming into the light" as her true self.

Today, Community Wine Bar has incorporated many elements to make the premises accessible. It offers tastings in English, Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL) and regularly donates proceeds to non-profit organisations, including Q Center – an LGBTQ+ community space and the largest of its kind in the Pacific Northwest.

Vivianne adds: "It's always challenging for all small business owners, however the locals are incredibly supportive. And Oregonians have a creative spirit – this is a city of makers." **TW**

BOOK IT

Virgin Voyages offers an 11-night package combining a seven-night Alaskan Glacier Blues & Coastal Views round-trip sailing from Seattle with a four-night pre-cruise stay in Portland. The price starts at £2,729 including return BA flights from Heathrow to Seattle, five days' car hire, four nights' room-only at Hotel Lucia in Portland and a week-long sailing in an Insider cabin on *Brilliant Lady*, for an August 23, 2026, departure.
virginvoyages.com

America As You Like It offers a city break to Portland, with BA flights from Heathrow and four nights' room-only at the Jupiter Next, from £949. A nine-night fly-drive, Oregon's All American Road Trip starts from £1,380, with flights, eight days' car hire and room-only accommodation including two nights at the Sentinel Hotel in Portland.
americaasyoulikeit.com