

T R A V E L

BRIGHT LIGHTS BIG CITY

A gay and lesbian guide to New York,
the city that never sleeps

B Y G E R A R D R A Y M O N D

THE MOMENT you set eyes on Manhattan's distinctive skyline, New York casts its spell on you. The "city of spires," as the poet, Walt Whitman described it, seems so familiar, and yet it holds the promise of an excitement that is hard to match anywhere else in the world. Magic and romance, sex and sophistication, culture and art, high finance and fashion, crowds and noise, you'll find it all in the 24-hour metropolis the jazz musicians of the '20s

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dubbed the Big Apple. There are no half-measures about New York—you'll either love it or hate it.

Although it is the smallest of New York City's five boroughs, the 13-mile island of Manhattan is the city's focus. Most of the famous landmarks are here—the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, Central Park. And of course, gay history was made here on Christopher Street, the spiritual homeland of gay America. Even though a gay rights bill is stalled in the state legislature, New York City is one of the most gay-friendly places in the world. Of the city's 7 million residents, an estimated 1 million are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Countless New Yorkers have come here from the rest of the country, and indeed

from all over the world, for the freedom to lead lives of their own choosing.

Walk through the city's varied neighborhoods and you'll experience the full flavor of its architectural, cultural, and ethnic diversity: Not quite the proverbial melting pot, New York nevertheless is made up of several different worlds, each following its own orbit with miraculously little collision.

"I go into cruise mode the minute I leave the house," a friend once told me, acknowledging the endless possibilities in the city's streets. Contrary to rumors, the natives are usually friendly; a little brusque perhaps, and direct to the point of seeming aggressive, but helpful. And rest assured, it is no more dangerous to walk around in the heart of this city than anywhere else. Just keep your wits about you and don't flash large wads of money.

It's easy to get intimidated by the size and scope of New York, so don't bite off more of the Big Apple than you can chew. You can never "do" it all on a





single trip, but the city's vibrant personality and energy is intoxicating and you'll be back before long.

THE BIG PICTURE

THE BEST WAY to orient yourself to Manhattan is to take a ferry ride. Try the three-hour Circle Line tour around the island from the 42nd Street pier or the more gay-friendly Spirit of New York cruise, which may be booked through the Gay and Lesbian Visitors Center (800-395-2315 or 212-463-9030). A special ferry takes you to the Statue of Liberty from Battery Park in lower Manhattan, and you can walk right up to the crown. But one of the best deals in New York is a trip on the Staten Island Ferry. It brings you close to the Statue and costs only 50 cents for the round-trip.

You can't beat the view from the observation deck on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center, the tallest building in New York. The city's second-highest skyscraper, the Empire State

Building, also offers a breathtaking view. Inspired by *An Affair to Remember* and *Sleepless in Seattle*, couples love to rendezvous at the top, and gay New Yorkers take great pride in the fact that the city's world-famous art-deco symbol is lit up in lavender yearly, to mark Lesbian and Gay Pride Weekend.

Just as you will find every conceivable nationality represented in New York, you can sample virtually any type of cuisine in this city. Choices of where to eat range from Bouley, one of four four-star French restaurants in the city, to the trendy but inexpensive restaurants and coffeehouses in the East Village, the row of Indian restaurants on East 6th Street, the crowded dim-sum parlors of Chinatown, the trattorias of Little Italy, and any number of Thai, West Indian, or Ukrainian restaurants scattered throughout the city.

If you are in New York to shop, you will find both the absurdly overpriced and the unbelievably cheap. A stroll along Fifth Avenue will introduce you

to some of the most elegant and most exclusive stores in the world. Some will swear that a trip to the original Chelsea branch of Barneys famous clothing store is almost a religious experience. The trendy galleries and boutiques of SoHo are also well worth a visit. Promenade down Christopher Street for *the* gay shopping experience; you'll discover stores selling everything—skinky beachwear, jewelry, leather jockstraps, cheeky T-shirts, erotic cards, and novelty items.

For the literary-minded visitor, New York is paradise. You might make a new friend while browsing at the gay and lesbian bookstores downtown: A Different Light in Chelsea and, in the West Village, Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop. Also of interest are the women's shop, Judith's Room, and cozy Three Lives, in the same neighborhood. A visit to Rizzoli's in SoHo or Midtown is as rewarding an experience as the elegant art books they publish, and you can often discover unexpected secondhand treasures by rummaging around the stacks at the Strand in the East Village.

CULTURE VULTURES

GIVEN MANHATTAN'S unique concentration of world-famous art museums, music, theater, and dance, it's not without reason that New Yorkers regard their city as the cultural capital of the world. With its magnificent collections of antiquities, primitive art, and Old Masters, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is the crown jewel of museums in the United States. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) has the world's best collection of 20th-century

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN ATKIN

art, and the Whitney Museum is considered a prime showcase for 20th-century American art. Frank Lloyd Wright's design for the uptown Guggenheim Museum—newly face-lifted—is a work of art in its own right.

New York is also without doubt the theater capital of America, although these days many of the Broadway houses along the Great White Way are dark. Tony Kushner's award-winning epic, *Angels in America*, hailed as both *the American play* and *the gay play* of the decade, is a must. Stephen Sondheim's new musical, *Passion*, recently opened on Broadway, and *Carousel* and *She Loves Me* are currently enjoying successful revivals. Or try Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman show-stopper, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, now moved uptown from the Joseph Papp Public Theater. (Order ahead—most of these sell out well in advance.)

Many of the country's prominent gay and lesbian playwrights are now regularly produced in the mainstream theater. But you can also find gay- and lesbian-themed work at some of the smaller downtown theaters. Lesbian and feminist issues get a theatrical workout at WOW Cafe, a women's collective, and cutting-edge gay or lesbian performance artists frequently perform at Dixon Place and P.S. 122. The Ridiculous Theatrical Company is famous for its unique brand of camp theater, and drag divas like Charles Busch and the fabulous Lypsinka command loyal followings when in town. You can catch a well-known cabaret personality or discover a rising star at The Ballroom, Eighty Eight's, and several other night spots in the city.

A visit to either the Metropolitan Opera or the New York City Opera, both housed at Lincoln Center, is a must on

the opera lover's itinerary. You'll see dykes turn up in large numbers at the Met whenever Frederica von Stade plays a "trouser role." The companies of the New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theater (who also perform at Lincoln Center) are rated among the best in the country. And sooner or later every major modern dance company visits City Center or the Joyce Theater. You could also attend a classical music concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall. Check to see if the New York City Gay Men's Chorus is giving a concert at the world-famous Carnegie Hall.

UPTOWN, DOWNTOWN

DON'T LET EXAGGERATED RUMORS of crime deter you from visiting Harlem. The Harlem Visitors and Convention Association will advise you on where to go. You can sample soul food, listen to a gospel choir, and tour

BIG CITY BOYS

FOR WEEKLY UPDATES on the ever-changing gay male scene, pick up free copies of *HomoXtra*, *Next*, or *Stonewall News*, distributed at *The Center* and at most gay bars and stores. Most bars fill up around happy hour (between 5 and 8 p.m.) and then again around 11:30 p.m.; in general, they close at 4 a.m. Most dance clubs get going after midnight and wind down by 4 a.m. After-hours clubs get active around 5 a.m.

BARS

The Bar. East Village artists, activists, and NYU students. 68 Second Ave.

Boy Bar. See the Boy Bar Beauties perform. Thursday nights only. 15 St. Mark's Place.

The Break. Lines form on Thursdays, dollar-margarita night. 232 Eighth Ave.

Club 58. The city's preeminent Asian bar and dance club. 40 East 58th St.

Crowbar. The quintessential no-frills East Village bar. Dancing Wednesdays and Fridays, cruisy always. 339 East 10th St.

Hangar Bar. Relatively new water-hole on "gay main street." 115 Christopher St.

The Spike. Leathermen on one side, clean-cut hunks on the other. 120 Eleventh Ave.

Splash. Rather homogeneous, but currently the most popular bar in town.

Ogle the go-go boys as they take real showers in glass enclosures. 50 West 17th St.

The Townhouse. Elegant faux English decor and a piano player. Older gentlemen and young professionals. 236 East 58th St.

Two Potato. One of the main hangouts for the city's gay black and Latino population. 143 Christopher St.

The Works. From gay yuppies to Columbia University students. 428 Columbus Ave.

Uncle Charlie's. Not as trendy as it used to be, but still a diverse crowd. 56 Greenwich Ave.

DANCE CLUBS

SATURDAY IS THE BIGGEST homo night out in the city, but you can go dancing on any night of the week somewhere in Manhattan, which no doubt gives rise to the myth that gay men don't have regular jobs.

Jackie 60. A delightfully quirky underground happening. Tuesdays. 432 West 14th St.

HOT: *Crowds at USA.*

Limelight. The once-notorious church-turned-disco is still a popular gay haunt on Wednesdays and Fridays. West 20th St., between Fifth and Sixth Aves. (use the 20th Street entrance).

Meat. Aptly titled for its location in New York's meat-packing district and for its raunchy atmosphere. 432 West 14th St.

Nocturnal. In the former Tunnel, a prime Saturday night attraction. 220 Twelfth Ave.

Percussion. With live drumming. 239 Eleventh Ave.

Roxy. New York's hottest men, from gym queens to drag queens, gather here on Saturdays. Roller-skating on Tuesdays. 515 West 18th St.

Sound Factory Bar. A predominantly black and Latino house party, on Thursdays and Fridays. 12 West 21st St.

Sound Factory. The quintessential gay Manhattan party experience in the wee hours of Sunday morning. 530 West 27th St.

USA. Flexing gym boys and club kids dressed in glitter flock on Sunday to Bump! night. 218 West 47th St.

Zone DK. More a sex club than a dance club, a fantasy-land for the leather crowd. Fridays. 540 West 21st St.—G.R.



SKID

COSMOPOLITAN GIRLS

IT SHOULD COME as no great surprise that lesbians have fewer choices of venue when compared with the multitude on offer for the boys. But then again, meeting the girl of your dreams happens much faster this way. Sappho's Isle lists the hot spots and current events of interest to dykes.

Clit Club. For the adventurous dyke. A popular Friday night dance party for women, complete with go-go dancers and pool-playing facilities, in the meat-packing district. 432 West 14th St.

Henrietta Hudson (formerly the Cubby Hole) and the adjoining restaurant, *Feed and Grain Company*. A congenial hangout for West Village dykes and lesbian-friendly gay boys. 438 Hudson St.

Crazy Nanny's. One of the most popular lesbian bars in town, with a pool table; dancing every night. 21 Seventh Ave. South.

D.T.'s Fat Cat. A women's bar where everyone is welcome. 281 West 12th St.

Julie's. A chic East Side piano bar for professional women. 204 East 58th St.

Orbit. Trendy lesbian-owned restaurant and bar that attracts both fags and dykes. 46 Bedford St.

Wonder Bar. Intimate space where East Village girls hang with the boys. 505 East 6th St.—G.R.

SPOT: *Cozy at Clit Club.*



T.L.L. LITTI/IMPACT VISUALS

the elegant brownstones and impressive churches of the neighborhood. The Studio Museum in Harlem houses a sizeable collection of art from black America and the African diaspora. You can trace the history of black design at the Black Fashion Museum or attend the legendary Wednesday amateur night at the Apollo Theatre, where Bessie Smith and Billie Holliday once performed.

Whenever possible, in fact, try not to confine yourself to Manhattan. Take a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge, one of New York's most impressive and awe-inspiring landmarks, and visit the adjoining borough of Brooklyn. The famous Brooklyn Heights Promenade, which overlooks the upper New York Harbor, is one of the most picturesque spots in New York, and cruisy as well; the views of Lower Manhattan from here are simply spectacular. You could spend a day at Brooklyn's Coney Island beach, which, although a little rundown, still boasts the Cyclone, one of the world's most thrilling roller-coasters, and Famous Nathan's hot dogs.

Finally, for the romantically inclined, there's Central Park. It's quite safe to wander about before sundown and there is plenty to do in this entirely man-made, 840-acre patch of green known as the "lungs of the city." You can skate at Wollman Rink; go horseback-riding from the Claremont Stables; go boating on the lake; amble through Strawberry Fields, Yoko Ono's memorial to John Lennon; or visit the formal Conservatory Garden, a hidden gem near 105th Street and Fifth Avenue. If you have raunchier ideas, walk through the Ramble, the Park's prime bird-watching area, which is also one of the city's principal cruising grounds.

If you aren't fazed by the high prices or worried about the attention you might receive, you could take your sweetheart to the spectacular Rainbow Room at the top of Rockefeller Center. But I'd recommend a visit to the Cloisters. Located in Fort Tryon Park, near the northern tip of Manhattan, the Cloisters houses the Medieval collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The serene surroundings and the magnificent views of the Hudson River make this an ideal New York experience.

A GAY OLD TOWN

TO GET A HANDLE ON queer New York, a good place to begin is the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center (popularly referred to as

The Center, 212-620-7310), located at 208 West 13th Street in Greenwich Village and home to over 400 organizations, from ACT UP and the Lesbian Avengers to Gay Male S/M Activists (GMSMA) and the Sirens Motorcycle Club. The Center will operate a special Welcome Center through July 10 to help first-time visitors find their bearings in the city. For travel information and an introduction to New York's gay business world, also visit the Gay and Lesbian Visitors Center in Chelsea, which offers a series of gay-themed walking and bus tours in and around New York.

WHERE TO PUMP UP

IF YOU are a muscle maven who suffers withdrawal symptoms when you miss a day at the gym, don't despair. Most of the popular workout spots offer day memberships that range from \$8 to \$15.

American Fitness Center. Latest addition to the plethora of Chelsea gyms. Men and women. 128 Eighth Ave.; 627-0065.

Better Bodies (a.k.a. "Bitter Beauties"). Mixed, but with high percentage of gay men. 22 West 19th St.; 929-6789.

Chelsea Gym. Exclusively male, mostly gay, very popular. 267 West 17th St.; 255-1150.

David Barton Gym. Tres chic; the man or woman grunting next to you may be a New York celebrity. 552 Sixth Ave.; 727-0004.

Equinox Fitness Club. Mixed crowd, men and women, not cruisy. 897 Broadway; 780-9300

Spa 227. Men only. You don't have to be shy about your creatively trimmed body hair here. 227 East 56th St.; 754-0227.

World Gym. Very popular, with athletic-minded lesbians and gay men of the city. Branches at 404 Lafayette St.; 260-2534. 1926 Broadway; 874-0942.

YMCA. Gym and pool facilities free if you stay here. Day memberships at two branches: West Side, 5 West 63rd St.; 787-4400. Vanderbilt, 224 East 47th St.; 756-9600.—G.R.



ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

TOO MUCH BIG-CITY LIVING may send you running for the hills, or at least the beaches, which is why tough winter storms and recession pocketbooks haven't managed to make a dent in the popularity of two classically gay New York State summer getaways, Fire Island and the Hamptons.

FANTASY ISLAND

FIRE ISLAND is a 32-mile spit of land parallel to the southern coast of Long Island. An isolated nature preserve where automobiles are banned and deer may block your path on elevated wooden walkways, Fire Island consists of 17 communities, and is reachable from

Steve Weinstein, a features writer for the International Herald Tribune, is researching a history of the Grove and the Pines.

the mainland only by boat or seaplane. Two of those communities, Cherry Grove and Fire Island Pines, have become the best-known gay resorts in the world.

For some people Fire Island represents a refuge from the sounds, streets, and hassles of the city. For others it is a place to party, from the moment their Speedos are unpacked until the discos close at dawn. But for long-time resident Bill Hinckley, "This is a community of love, where people can

communicate together." Do be forewarned: Getting to the island isn't easy, and once you're there, finding accommodations can be difficult without prior arrangements.

The homes in Cherry Grove, the older community, are on smaller lots and there are more guest houses, which include Dune Point (516-597-6261) and Holly House (516-777-3628). The Belvedere (516-597-6448), in all its rococo splendor, is the Grove's premier hotel (regrettably, it does not welcome women). The Cherry Grove Beach Hotel (516-597-6600) does, however. In the Pines, where the homes are grander but less hospitable to first-time visitors, the only transient hotel is the Botel (516-597-6500), on the harbor. If you're planning to visit during any holiday or weekend, you should make reservations as close to May 1 as possible.

During the summer, ferries run frequently between both communities and Sayville, a Long Island town 80 minutes from New York City. The ferry ride takes about 30 minutes. To get to Sayville, take the Long Island Railroad from Penn Station to Babylon or Jamaica and catch a connecting train there. Buses to the Fire Island ferry meet the train at Sayville. Just follow the crowd. Islanders Club buses run Thursday through Monday at prearranged spots throughout

Manhattan. Call 212-633-8898 or 516-654-2622 for a reservation.

HAMPTONS HAVEN

THE HAMPTONS, on the eastern edge of Long Island, are a collection of towns better known for their artistic, literary, and theatrical colonies than as gay enclaves. But the villages of Sag Harbor, Southampton, Bridgehampton, and especially East Hampton have large lesbian and gay populations. Quieter than their Fire Island counterparts, gay residents tend to socialize among themselves and go to the beach less frequently. Nevertheless, there is an active nightlife scene, centered around the Swamp, a disco on the Montauk Highway.

The drive to East Hampton can take anywhere from two to nearly four hours from Manhattan, depending on traffic. The Long Island Railroad's Montauk branch stops in all of the Hampton communities except Sag Harbor. The Hampton Jitney's comfortable buses leave from Midtown Manhattan and the Upper East Side (212-936-0440).

There are several hotels and guest houses in the Hamptons, but only two cater to a gay clientele: Cozy Cabins in Wainscott (516-537-1160), and 132 North Main in East Hampton Village (516-324-2246).—STEVE WEINSTEIN

The West Village is the heart of gay and lesbian New York. It houses several gay institutions and landmarks, including Stonewall Place, the site of the original Stonewall Inn, where the historic events of 1969 occurred. Many trendy young gay professionals now live in the adjoining neighborhood of Chelsea, particularly in the area between 14th and 23rd streets on Seventh and Eighth avenues. The East Village is home to an eclectic mix of young gay men and lesbians, usually artists and activists, and you'll find a great number of gay men in the performing arts living on the Upper West Side, near Lincoln Center. A large concentration of New York lesbians live in the vicinity

of Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn's elegant Park Slope neighborhood, which is also the location of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the oldest and largest lesbian collection in the world.

WINDING DOWN

IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN hospitable to a friend from New York, call in the favor now, because accommodations could be the costliest part of your New York trip. (If you're planning a trip this busy June, you may already be in trouble.) Be prepared to spend at least \$100 a night at any decent hotel, and this excludes exorbitant state and city hotel taxes. But many hotels offer special deals for weekends, and the rate

is usually charged per room rather than per person.

If you are stuck for a place to stay, call the Gay and Lesbian Visitors Center of New York (800-395-2315 or 212-463-9030). The New York Bed & Breakfast Reservation Center (212-977-3512) offers hosted (gay or gay-friendly) or unhosted accommodations in the area of your choice within Manhattan.

But wherever you end up, it's not hard to make New York your kind of town. Almost anything your heart could desire—except peace and quiet—is here at your fingertips 24 hours a day. So don't overdo it, you can always come back. ♥