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- TRAVEL
- VIDEO
- PRINT ISSUE
- RESOURCES & FEEDBACK

[PRINT](#) [BACK](#)

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Gayest Cities in America

Intrepid amateur sociologist Mike Albo searches for America's 15 gayest burgs—based on a finely tuned (if totally arbitrary) calculus.

By Mike Albo



Long ago, gay people settled in our nation's largest cities. There they spruced up all the property, created every art and fashion movement, and taught entire populations how to dance. They created gayborhoods like WeHo, Chelsea, South Beach—and pretty much queered all of San Francisco until even Laundromats had rainbow flag decals in their windows. About 10 years ago everyone else moved back into these nicely gentrified metropolises, and the lavender diaspora began. Now a slew of secondary cities are becoming gay epicenters.

This admittedly subjective search reveals spots that are much more pink than you might think. Determined by a completely unscientific but accurate statistical equation, these gayest cities may surprise you. Iowa City, Austin, and Asheville have more gays per capita than the biggies. These cities where everyday gays live—towns and boroughs with a mix of baby carriages, gay bars, and B&Bs—signal the continuing movement of gay people into mainstream American life, which in turn also signals an eventual end to lists like this. In 10 years or so every Main Street USA will probably be too gay to measure. Won't that be nice?

The point system:



Same-sex couple households per capita

15 points for top-rated city, 14 points for second place, etc., based on HRC and U.S. Census data. (There is no reliable statistical data on the sexual orientation of single-person households by metropolitan statistical areas.)



Statewide marriage equality

Full marriage equality: +4; recognizes out-of-state marriages: +3; statewide civil unions or domestic partnerships: +2; some statewide benefits: +1; no marriage laws: 0; legal ban: -1; constitutional ban: -2



Gay elected officials

U.S. representatives: +1; U.S. senators: +2; governors: +2; city officials: +3 (to reflect the city's politics)



Gay dating and hookup profiles per single male population

U.S. Census data of single men in each city over the age of 15 (census data does not break it down by 18+) divided by the total number of profiles for that city or metropolitan area. Added points (15-1) based on rank.



Gay bars per capita

Total adult population divided by number of gay bars. Added points (15-1) based on rank.



Cruising spots per capita

Total adult population divided by the number of cruising spots listed online. Added points (15-1) based on rank.



Gay films in Netflix favorites

Netflix ranks the most popular videos for every major city. For every gay movie in the top 25, we assigned one point.

7 0 0 10

1 5 0



12. Asheville, N.C.

With its thriving art scene and adorable homes, Asheville is a prime example of the new gay South. And it's only getting gayer: Newly elected city councilman Gordon Smith says extending domestic-partner benefits to LGBT city employees will be among the council's top priorities this year.



11. Gainesville, Fla.

Anchored by the University of Florida, Gainesville is a surprisingly hospitable area for gay and lesbian Floridians who have no desire to work for Disney or deal with all that Miami nonsense. Queer college kids mix well with aging gays here. The city was also named by now-defunct *Blender* magazine in 2008 as the best place to start a band.



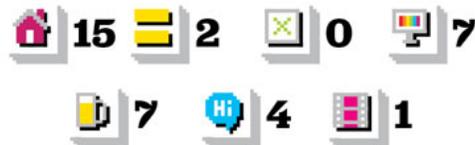
10. Seattle

The birthplace of grunge and upscale coffee, and home to numerous cute bois and dykes with piercings, Seattle has a gay scene that's as comfortably inescapable as the Space Needle. Even as luxury condos and pricey wine bars sprout up, alternative venues like the newly renovated Pony in Cap Hill are keeping it real.



9. Austin

This countercultural lefty Shangri-la in the middle of Texas has been going through a growth spurt. But no matter how cosmopolitan their home gets, gay and lesbian residents will always take their barbeque, two-stepping, and live music culture seriously. Many visitors say that this city's sophisticated, lively lesbian social scene rivals those of New York and Los Angeles. And the clothing-optional swimming area Hippie Hollow attracts thousands of au naturel gays for the semiannual Splash Weekends.



8. Portland, Maine

Maine may have lost its marriage law (for now, while it retains domestic partnerships) but the independent Maine mentality is alive and well in this picturesque city. It's sweet, romantic, and too small for bitchy queens and their toxic attitudes. Energetic young businesses like fermented-honey booze-maker Maine Mead Works and the popular men's clothing label Rogues Gallery have established it as a harbor for creativity as well as tolerance.



This forward-thinking college town is a magnet city for gays in the Grain Belt. It's also home to Indiana University, where Miss Gay IU—said to be the first student-sponsored drag competition held on any campus—is in its 20th year. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction is also here, inspiring the entire town to be heteroflexible.



3. Iowa City

The no-nonsense swing state city is infused with intellectual curiosity. The state supreme court ruling in favor of marriage equality is but one moment in a long history of progressive decisions. Home of the famous Iowa Writers' Workshop and a thriving arts community, this is where *Brokeback Mountain's* Ennis and Jack would have bought a house and adopted kids, in the alternate ending of that romance.



2. Burlington, Vt.

Vermont's largest city may seem deceptively sleepy (Vermonters tend to be quiet about their beliefs), but it's the epicenter of the state's equality efforts. There are several out members in the state legislature (if not on the city council), and nearby Ben & Jerry's renamed its Chubby Hubby flavor "Hubby Hubby" to celebrate the state's marriage equality law.



1. Atlanta

Georgia isn't the most gay-friendly state, but Atlanta is undoubtedly our gayest city—with 29 gay bars here, there's a reason it's dubbed Hotlanta. Atlanta's several queer events include one of the nation's largest Prides in October (returning to Piedmont Park this year), and MondoHomo, a May event celebrating art, drag, burlesque, film, and BBQ. The gay epicenter is Midtown, anchored by Outwrite Books, a giant gay bookstore bucking the national trend—by staying in business! Atlanta guys are hunky, the ladies are gracious, the gay sports leagues are seriously well organized, and its housewives (and their gay BFFs, complete with handbags and heels) are now camp icons. And who doesn't love the sweet lilt of a Georgia accent on a knockout guy or gal?

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