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LGBT Travel Guide: Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona

BY LAWRENCE FERBER | Updated 02/25/20



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Courtesy of Visit Phoenix

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The sun-kissed, neighboring cities of Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona are oases when it comes to LGBTQ friendliness and comforts these days. Phoenix, the USA's fifth-largest city, is connected to [Scottsdale](#)—a fabulous resort destination with more than 300 days of sunshine per year and [attractions that include but go far beyond spas, sunning, and golf](#)—by the Arizona Canals and its path. One can settle down at a Scottsdale resort, which include all-male, clothing-optional resorts and five-star luxury spa properties; attend gay pride in Phoenix and enjoy the city's LGBTQ club scene; or mix things up with a bit of fun in each destination.

[Ion Arizona](#) magazine and website is your bible to all things LGBTQ in Arizona: you can download PDF copies of the publication, while the site features up to the minute updates of what's going on. Phoenix's official tourism office, Visit Phoenix, also hosts a [robust LGBTQ+ section on its website](#) with plenty of information about the local scene, events, and nightlife calendar.

Phoenix has two annual LGBTQ pride festivals: Spring's [Phoenix Pride Festival](#) and Fall's [Rainbows Festival](#). Movie lovers should check out the [Desperado LGBTQ Film Festival](#) as well, while Phoenix's Melrose neighborhood is the city's pulsing gay heart with a thriving social scene and nightlife.

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Courtesy of Musical Instrument Museum

Best Things to Do

Culture vultures and music lovers have a unique gem to mine in Phoenix's [Musical Instrument Museum](#), which houses about 7,000 instruments from around the world, including those used by high-profile artists and bands. Visitors are welcome to try their hands at playing a few instruments in the Experience Gallery. Bonus: the CMA Awards display features Dolly Parton, while MIM hosts live concerts as well! The more than 1,200-item [Phoenix Art Museum](#) is also a must, with both classic and contemporary work including a Western American section.

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[The Churchill](#) is a very cool community urban market concept with 10 local businesses represented, and you can take in all the public art and murals around downtown's [Roosevelt Row Arts District](#) and while taking the [Valley Metro Rail transport system](#).

For some prime Scottsdale spa action, make appointments at [The Phoenician Spa](#), which opened in 2019 and has over 20 treatment rooms; the 22,000-square-foot [Civana Wellness Resort & Spa](#), which overlooks the desert and mountains and features a water wellness circuit; and [Well & Being Spa](#), with separate men's and women's wings, at the Fairmont.

Located in Phoenix's Melrose district, [Off Chute Too](#) is a gay everything shop. Of course, since boys will be boys, and get your gay sauna action on at [The Chute](#).

Best (And Gayest!) Bars & Clubs

Much of the area's gay nightlife is concentrated in Phoenix's Melrose district, starting with the aptly named [Stacy's @ Melrose](#). Featured in Anthony Bawn's locally-produced 2019 gay feature film, "[As I Am](#)", about a young, awkward, gay black man finding his way, Stacy's is a "come one, come all" venue ("people's mothers come along, and it's very PG-13," a local notes). There's a happy hour drag show on Sundays from 7 to 9 p.m., and plenty of special events including carnivals and reunions for beloved albeit defunct Phoenix-area clubs and parties.

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Local drag queen Barbra Seville is one to watch, and hosts Saturday night shows at [The Rock](#), which also includes karaoke and dancing in its weekly events line-up. "Karaoke is king" five nights a week at the recently relocated and remodeled [Kobalt](#), which also hosts weekly drag bingo and drag revue events and, according to locals, is a must-visit after work Fridays. Expect some comparatively "out there" drag and go-go action at deliciously divey Plazma, while camp, booger, and monster drag are the house specialties at [Cruisin' 7th](#). Fridays tend to be most popular with bachelorette and birthday party crowds.

A Phoenix institution, country Western-themed [Charlie's](#) also features drag shows throughout the week, mixing in plenty of Latin music and men, free line dancing lessons on Thursdays and Saturdays at 7 p.m., go-go boys (a.k.a. The Sinful Studs), the fabulous Sunday Funday on their patio, and a taco truck provides late night chow. It's worth noting that you won't find many cisgender women here due to strict rules against carrying purses and a \$5 cover charge for female guests.

The leather and Levi crowd converges at [Anvil Bar](#), while [Pat O's Bunkhouse Saloon](#) is where the bears—and cubs, otters, wolves, and admirers—are. LGBTQ Latinx folks from all over the state will make the trek to [Karamba Nightclub](#), which gets the crowd dancing to American and Latin top 40 hits, merengue, salsa, cumbia, and Spanish-language rock and pop, with a side order of go-go hunks and, on Mondays, karaoke. Predominantly lesbian but open to all, Boycott is unpretentious and down-to-earth while still being lively. As much a restaurant as a bar, [Bliss reBar](#) is gay-owned and hosts drag brunches on select Sundays.

Located on Phoenix's eastern outskirts, almost touching both Scottsdale and Tempe, [Nu Towne Saloon](#) has been open since 1971 and keeps things fantastically old school with round barstools, antique furnishings, pool tables, plenty of kitsch, and more than a little naughtiness.

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There's an LGBTQ bar in Scottsdale's Old Town as well. The two-floor [BS West](#)—which celebrates its 22nd year in 2020—features two bars, two patios, a dance floor, and special events during the week, including Thursday sexy male "After Dark" revues, Friday drag shows, and Sunday Drunk Karaoke.



Courtesy of Restaurant Progress

Best Places To Eat

Openly lesbian chef Silvana Salcido Esparza is one of Phoenix's culinary rockstars. A five-time James Beard nominee, she heads up the 18-year-old [Barrio Cafe](#) (which also boasts a location at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport), serving up brightly flavored, elevated takes on Mexican cuisine.

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In 2019, Scottsdale's Charleen Badman took home James Beard Best Chef: Southwest honors thanks to [FnB](#), where farm-to-table cuisine rules and there's a wine program emphasizing Arizona wines. Badman's emphasis on local terroir extends to her work with slow food education organization, [Blue Watermelon Project](#). Featuring art installations behind the bar by local artists and international comfort food fare, Scottsdale's [AZ88](#) is also popular with the gay community, and becomes clubby at night.

Two other LGBTQ go-tos include forward-thinking New American cuisine outpost [Restaurant Progress](#), in the heart of the Melrose Gayborhood, and way-gay [Los Diablos](#), where pub fare and brunch meets cocktails, kakis, events, and drag fun. The vegan and vegetarian-friendly [Bevy Uptown](#) also hosts drag brunch events; check their website for upcoming dates.

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Courtesy of Andaz Scottsdale Resort & Spa

Best Places to Stay

The Downtown Phoenix arts district's 104-room [FOUND:RE](#), which opened in late 2016 and is pronounced "foundry," is an arts-centric, upscale boutique property. You simply can't (and won't) want to miss the painting behind the front desk, by Phoenix artist Randy Slack, titled "That Was Then This is Now." The painting adds a Farrah Fawcett-style blonde 'do to a centerfold image of the Burt Reynolds in his undressed 1970s glory. Over two dozen area artists also contributed work to the FOUND:RE, which includes a six-story outdoor video installation. Rooms boast floor to ceiling windows and industrial-trendy decor, while other in-house perks include an outdoor pool and Match Restaurant & Lounge, serving modern comfort fare.

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Drawing its inspiration and design from Phoenix and its history, the 277-room nature-rific Biltmore neighborhood's [Camby Hotel](#) boasts views of Camelback Mountain, minimalist decor with splashes of color and contemporary art chic, pool, a tasty and boozy "Tippy Tea" on Saturdays, and weekly rooftop movie nights.

One is spoiled for choice among the world-class spa resort comforts, pampering, and gay-friendly clothing-optional policies in Scottsdale. The [Andaz Scottsdale Resort & Bungalows](#)—situated on a sprawling, private 23 acres under the Camelback Mountain—entails 185 bungalows and suites decked out in midcentury style and color schemes. The Sonoran Desert and seasonal local ingredients inform dishes at the Weft & Warp Art Bar + Kitchen, and the Palo Verde Spa & Apothecary is heavenly.

The 230-room [W Scottsdale](#) is also among the most LGBTQ-friendly options in the state, June 2019 saw it host Queer Me Out, an LGBTQ speaker series. 2020 sees a reveal of a major refresh (the work began in May 2019), sure to include a mix of clubby-gone-Southwest aesthetics. The AWAY spa includes a rooftop pool with bottle service and DJ tunes, while spa suites bring the pampering to you, and dining options include Sushi Roku.

Meanwhile, if an all-male, all-adult crowd is what you're after, the [Royal Villa Resort](#) is clothing optional, as is the [Arizona Sunburst](#). Let it all hang out!

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