

Learn the Queer History of These Southern Landmarks

From historic gay bars to queer churches, we're celebrating these historic LGBTQ+ sites in the South.

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Photos courtesy of Oilcan

Harry's, Atlanta Eagle, and Cafe Lafitte in Exile

Welcome to [We're Out Here](#), your year-round hub for LGBTQ+ travel and experiences! Here, you'll find everything you need to plan your next great gaycation, including queer-centric travel stories, nightlife guides, profiles, pride event roundups, and ways to give back to local queer communities.

[NYC's Stonewall](#), [The Black Cat in Los Angeles](#), the world's first official [transgender district in San Francisco](#)—these are the pillars of LGBTQ+ history that most recognize. But a little further south, members of the queer community have been making waves and pushing for social progress for generations as well. Many people might not know that the South is home to some of the [oldest gay bars in the country](#) and the largest LGBTQ+ museum in the US, but these sites are important reminders of how far we've come and all the work that's left to do.

So on your next trip to the southern part of the country, add some LGBTQ+ history to your itinerary. Historic queer spaces in the South run the gamut—from out-and-proud fetishware bars in Atlanta to churches that are devoted to serving LGBTQ+ patrons in Dallas—and are must-visit spots to understand just how queer the region can be.

[Atlanta Eagle](#)

Atlanta, Georgia

This legendary leather bar was [officially declared](#) a landmark in 2020, becoming the first queer space in the Southeast with a historic designation. Then another wave of COVID hit. The Atlanta Eagle has long been a gathering place for exploring leather culture and other fetishware in a rough-around-the-edges dive bar atmosphere. So locals eagerly waited for a reopening announcement after the pandemic-fueled closure. Instead, after two years, the Atlanta Eagle announced it'd be moving to a new space in the Midtown neighborhood. The bar has transported its inclusive and laid-back vibe to its new digs, and it remains a safe space for Atlanta's LGBTQ+ community to come together without judgment. It has the same bumpin' dance floor, drag performances, and karaoke nights that made the spot a local favorite for decades. Oh, and of course there's a steady swath of bears outfitted in harnesses, straps, and all things leather that also draw a crowd. —*Liz Provencher*



Photo by Zack Smith

[Cafe Lafitte in Exile](#)

New Orleans, Louisiana

Open since 1933, Cafe Lafitte in Exile is the oldest continuously operating gay bar in the US (or so it says, a few other bars make the same claim). Regardless of whether it's in the number one spot, this 90-year-old watering hole is steeped in history and has hosted the likes of Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote over its several decade run. The iconic bar is located in a corner lot off New Orleans' Bourbon Street and has inhabited its comfortable, two-story spot since 1953. Prior to that, it was housed in Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, a weathered 18th-century

landmark just a few houses down, where it was simply named Cafe Lafitte—the “in Exile” suffix came later when it was forced to move down the street. These days, the historic bar is open 24/7, welcoming LGBTQ+ revelers to the laid-back first floor, where you can shoot pool and hang out, and the second story, with upbeat music and a balcony where you can let your hair down until curfew. —*Thuc Doan Nguyen*

Cathedral of Hope

Dallas, Texas

The queer community and religious organizations rarely make headlines for their adoring relationship with one another—especially in Texas, where lawmakers laugh at the constitutional concept of separation of church and state. Yet the largest LGBTQ+-welcoming congregation in the nation is in Dallas. Cathedral of Hope, established in the Oak Lawn neighborhood in 1970, shines as an example of acceptance and love in the Christian religion. A congregation of the United Church of Christ, Cathedral of Hope proudly welcomes worshippers of all races, ethnic backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations, and gender identities to celebrate the spirit of faith in both English and Spanish. Another highlight: the architecturally magnificent Interfaith Peace Chapel, designed by award-winning gay architect Philip Johnson. The sacred space provides the backdrop for many of the church’s small groups, as well as weddings, memorial services, and other special events. —*Steven Lindsey*



Photo courtesy of Oilcan Harry's

Oilcan Harry's

Austin, Texas

In the early 1990s, Austin didn't have a weird reputation. As Texas's capital, it was anything but offbeat. And it didn't loudly embrace its LGBTQ+ folk quite yet. So Fourth Street became a place where the then-humble-sized queer community could gather, and where bars like Oilcan Harry's offered a safe shelter for them to mix and mingle. Over time the watering hole evolved, outlasting its neighbors thanks to an inclusive ethos. While many gay bars host drag shows,

Oilcan Harry's invests the most in the art form. That's why it's where stars are born—and where *RuPaul's Drag Race* alumni know they must stop on tour. After 33 years of jubilee and joy, Oilcan Harry's will temporarily move while Fourth Street is remodeled as part of Austin's whiplash-fast growth. But this isn't the end for the city's longest-running gay bar. It will return, under a new lease, in the exact same spot, where queens, queers, and allies can gather once again. —*James Wong*

Seahorse Inn

Port Aransas, TX

Beachside hotels dot a long sandy spit of land in between Corpus Christi Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Among them was the Seahorse Inn (now [Belles Sea Inn](#)), which presided atop a sand dune in Port Aransas for decades. The boutique hotel was built by Jack Cobb in 1956, and through the '90s this smartly designed space, [with its mid-century aesthetic](#), served as a hidden retreat for people to relax—in more ways than one. It was a place where those who lived on the fringes came to be themselves. Gay men and women, Democrats, and allies would have parties that went from the hotel to the beach, where some would sunbathe in the nude. As much as this getaway was created for recreation and leisure, it doubled as a hotspot for activism and art, politics and pride, campaigns and community—it all intertwined at the Seahorse Inn once upon a time. Today, you can still bask in the original architecture and hear stories of yore from the current owners who plan to bring back the retro pool bar and other moments from the inn's rich past. —*Rosin Saez*

[World AIDS Museum](#)

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

As Florida's shade of red seems to deepen by the day, LGBTQ+ havens in the state become even more important. None more so than Wilton Manors, a surprisingly queer mecca, and its neighboring city of Fort Lauderdale. Wilton Manors one of the most welcoming, open-minded communities in the country. It was the first municipality in Florida to elect an entirely LGBTQ+ commission and is home to countless Pride Month celebrations, queer-owned businesses, and historic sites. Most notably, the city is close to the world's foremost museums dedicated to queer history, including the World AIDS Museum. It's the first-ever institution dedicated to the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and aims to mitigate the persisting stigma by sharing first-person accounts and ongoing educational programming. The museum regularly updates its exhibitions, but highlights include an educational look at the history of AIDS and a 55-ton AIDS Memorial Quilt, constructed of more than 48,000 tribute panels to those who have passed. It's so massive that it is rarely displayed in its entirety. —*LP*