

# Touring History

Commemorate Stonewall's 50th anniversary with a visit to the city where it all began

Photo courtesy of Walter Modarczyk/NYC & Company

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Claude Monet, Waterloo Bridge, Sunlight Effect (effect de soleil), 1903, oil on canvas. Denver Art Museum Collection; Funds from Helen Dill bequest, 1935.15

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By Rich Warren

As the legend goes, it all started when a black transgender activist named Marsha P. Johnson heaved a shot glass at a mirror and shouted "I got my civil rights!" Now referred to as "The Shot Glass Heard Around the World," that moment was the beginning of a spontaneous eruption of anger against a police raid on a hot June evening in 1969 at the Stonewall Inn, a down-at-the-heel gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village. The uprising that followed, with the assistance of hundreds of people who quickly gathered on the sidewalks outside, was the first of several days of impassioned protests.

This month marks the 50th anniversary of those uprisings, and New York City is having a huge month-long party to celebrate, with more than 3 million people are expected to attend. Here are a few ideas of places to let your own feet take you to experience the gay history imbued in the Big Apple.

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#### Where It Started

You might be shocked when you enter the current Stonewall Inn for the first time. With its drab wood paneling, a pool table in the middle of the room, and a network of pipes crisscrossing the ceiling, it feels more grandpa's basement rec room than legendary hotpost. The upstairs, where drag shows and other special events take place, is a bit more cheery with red chandeliers and faux leather couches. But by all accounts, the current establishment is a vast improvement over how it appeared in 1969. "The bar itself was a toilet," recalled one patron of those days on an "American Experience" PBS documentary.

Nowadays, in spite of its dull interior, Stonewall is a popular eclectic gathering place for both men and women, straight and gay, not to mention pilgrims from all over the world who stop in to see where history happened. Visit on weekends before 7 p.m., and you'll find a man who identifies himself as "Tree" behind the bar. Tree was on the premises the night the uprising got started, and recalls how the cops came in that night pushing and shoving. Even though he describes what happened as a "melee," he also remembers the spirited chanting taking place when he joined the crowd outside.

"We were having fun. The cops weren't," he remembers.

For those who'd like to do some bar hopping to some other legendary spots in Greenwich Village, The Duplex is just steps away from the Stonewall Inn and offers both an intimate piano bar and a cabaret theater. Across the street, The Monster has themed entertainment every night of the week ranging from go-go dancers to drag shows. Nearby, the Cubbyhole and Henrietta Hudson cater largely to women, while Julius' is another site important to gay history. Three years before the uprising at Stonewall, members of the Mattachine Society, an early gay rights organization, challenged a New York law that forbade bartenders to serve known homosexuals by belling up to the bar at Julius' to identify themselves as gay. The event, which came to be known as a "Sip In," led to a lawsuit overturning the discriminatory law.

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AIDS Memorial  
Photo courtesy of Brittany Petronella/NYC & Company



West Village  
Photo courtesy of Brittany Petronella/NYC & Company

#### Take an Organized Walk

The walking tours of Greenwich Village hosted by Oscar Wilde Tours are not to be missed. They're led by Andrew Lear, a retired professor of classics who grew up in New York and knows practically everyone associated with the gay rights movement since Stonewall.

As you walk through what's been a renowned "gayborhood" since the 19th century, Lear spins colorful stories of former "gay and gay adjacent" residents, stopping at places they once lived, like a townhouse Eleanor Roosevelt shared with her "friend," Lorena Hickok, during the years she was also living in the White House. You'll also see sites of former gay establishments, like Eve Adams' Tea Room, an early lesbian bar where a sign outside read, "Men admitted but not welcome."

One particularly ugly apartment building near Washington Square Park is still the home of Larry Kramer, but also was formerly the home of Edie Windsor, the plaintiff in the lawsuit that overturned the Defense of Marriage Act, and former NYC mayor Ed Koch, a person Larry Kramer particularly despised because of the mayor's inaction during the AIDS crisis.

#### Wander on Your Own

Walking around Greenwich Village, you will encounter many other gay highlights. Don't miss Christopher Park just across from the Stonewall Inn, a place that played a key role in the 1969 uprising and was designated as the Stonewall National Monument in 2016.

A walk up Greenwich Avenue will take you past the NYC AIDS Memorial, paying homage to the 100,000 residents of the city who've perished from the disease. And a stop at the busy LGBT Community Center on West 13th Street is worth it just to see the particularly risqué mural Keith Haring painted in the men's room.

For full details of the anniversary events taking place in NYC during the entire month of June, go to [2019-worldpride-stonewall50.nycpride.org](http://2019-worldpride-stonewall50.nycpride.org)

Ohio-based travel writer Rich Warren travels the country and the world looking for offbeat and off-the-beaten-path stories. He is a graduate of the Elf School of Reykjavik and can tell you what the Amish wear to the beach in Florida. Credits include the Chicago Tribune, Dallas Morning News, Cleveland Plain Dealer, National Geographic Traveler, AAA Home and Away, AAA Highroads, Ohio Magazine, Country Living, Long Weekends, American Way and others.

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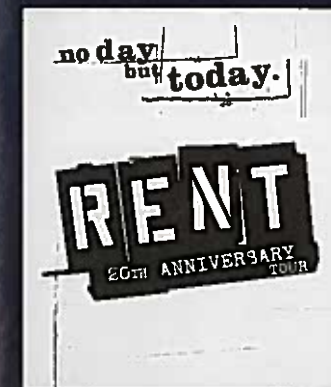
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