

Richmond Virginia is the best new getaway for NJ LGBT

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The stereotype of Richmond, VA to us Yankees is that it was the capital of the confederacy, unsafe for the LGBT traveler, and all together backwards. It's easy to have stereotypes about places you've never been, but it doesn't make them true. For example, thanks to the hit TV show Jersey Shore, the rest of the nation, and even parts of Europe, assume all people from New Jersey behave in a similar fashion.

Of course, we proud New Jersey queers know the truth, and the same is correct for Richmond. It is actually, a smart, sophisticated, beautiful, fun, entertaining, queer-friendly city, which has much in store for the LGBT traveler.

I know you must be wondering how the Hell you are going to get on down to Virginia. Flying is so expensive, long, crowded, and unpleasant. The answer is Amtrak. Amtrak has launched a project within Virginia's borders to open up more stations in the state. As a result, my partner and I took the wonderful train ride down from New Jersey's own Trenton station. The train was quiet, well-organized, comfortable and fast. We reached Richmond in about five hours, which when you consider the time it takes to get to the airport, go through security, wait at your gate, board your plane, etc, is about the same time as flying, without the hassle of airport security. The staff was pleasant and helpful and the dining car had lots of good stuff to eat and drink. I'd recommend Amtrak over flying any day, unless you're going somewhere like London.

Once reaching the city, we were met by two wonderfully charming representatives of the Richmond Visitors Bureau, who acted as our den mothers during our stay in Richmond. Although I won't name names, these two ladies were such a breath of fresh air. They were fun, smart, responsible and professional. Anything they didn't



Lesbian couple shopping in LGBT friendly

understand, they just asked. For example, "What's a twink?" These ladies were the best guides a gay could ask for.

[Carytown area of Richmond VA. All photos are courtesy of the Metropolitan Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau.](#)

You must be wondering where one could stay in Richmond. The city has several gay-friendly and TAG-certified options for LGBT travelers, including the Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown, Embassy Suites Richmond, Hilton Garden Inn Downtown, Holiday Inn Koger Conference Center and Sheraton Richmond Park South Hotel. First though, try the Linden Row Inn, another TAG-certified choice. This is a true Southern hotel. Made from old Victorian row houses, the Linden Row is a place of history as well as comfort. Huge, tall, open rooms, with wonderful wood furniture make the Linden Row feel quite different than the new hotels of today.



[Richmond VA Skyline view.](#)

A TV is hidden within a huge cabinet. I liked this touch because it allowed me to not be dominated by technology and enjoy the old Southern feel of the room. A large window held a great view, and a mock fireplace, stood to give the room major charm. An interesting historical note, the Linden Row Inn claims great American writer Edgar Allen Poe played in the courtyard of the hotel when he was a child. If you don't like big hotels, Richmond has wonderful bed & breakfasts, including one that is LGBT-owned. Maury Place at Monument Bed & Breakfast is owned by a delightful gay couple who take hospitality seriously. The home is lovely and is filled to the brim with beautiful things to look at. It is a great place to honeymoon, due to the privacy a fine B&B offers as

opposed to a hotel.

Beginning to talk about the wonders of this fair city is a daunting task, but I can't help remembering the food first. The city has a treasure trove of great eateries of all price ranges and styles. For lunch, try LGBT-owned Chez Foushee. An elegant restaurant, with a real Southern feel, Chez Foushee was as delicious as it was pretty. I'm limiting myself to writing about only one or two dishes per establishment and if I have to pick from Chez Foushee it would be the lemon butter cake. It melted in my mouth and was sweet and tart. The perfect combination of crust and filling made this little desert pack a major punch. However, Chez Foushee was not the only place we ate by a long shot. Before seeing Cat On a Hot Tin Roof (more on that later), we had the most wonderful meal at The Empress. This amazing restaurant is owned and run by a lesbian couple. One is front of house, the other is the chef. They as a couple are as beautiful as their establishment, which served fantastic wine and delicious food. I had a piece of sirloin that was to die for as well as elegant appetizers. While at dinner at The Empress we learned about Richmond's own LGBT media source, GayRVA.

This is a top notch media outlet, that makes us at Out In Jersey proud. A fully interactive website, GayRVA has all the news, features, and events to keep the LGBT resident and traveler happy while in Richmond. Breakfast the next morning was pancakes at Feathernesters. Feathernesters was unique because it was a shop as well as a place to eat. It was filled with all sorts of fun stuff to buy, and you couldn't help but be in a good mood after eating those fluffy cakes. However, the most tantalizing place we went for lunch that afternoon at Tex-Mex eatery Nacho Mama's. Owned by Raul Cantu, Nacho Mama's has Mexican food that is

as good as what you find in San Antonio, Texas. I should know after all, seeing as how I grew up there. I had enchiladas the size of my face, and don't even get me started on the margaritas. I began to suspect that the people of Richmond were trying to get me drunk! The last place of pure eat-and-drink was the Capital Ale House, a good bar with over 250 kinds of beer. The place also had great wings, which is important to the Jersey diner crowd.

Richmond is more than a city of pure food. Although I'm sure by now you're all hungry, focus until the end of the article. History, and art are always huge travel points for me. Why is a city important? How did it come to be what it is today? Richmond is a city full of history and art. Take a drive down Monument Avenue and you'll find statues of old Civil War veterans as well as black tennis player Arthur Ashe, a Richmond native, who died of AIDS. We were lucky enough to given a tour of the city by a wonderful woman named Beth Marschak, who's been a part of Richmond's LGBT community for longer than I've been alive. After the tour, we ended up at the Virginia Historical Society, and saw documents and flyers from LGBT groups that had met all throughout history. After seeing the rare book room (I drooled), we went on a tour of the Society's exhibition *An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia*. This exhibit was in honor of the 150 year anniversary of the Civil War. It was filled with great pieces of Virginia's past. The thing I liked most about the museum was the fact that Virginia did not try to hide away questionable aspects of its past. A figure of the KKK stood right beside a figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. Virginia knows where it came from and hopes very much to change people's minds about it. Another site of historical note was the Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. This place was more than just flowers. It was a tale of Richmond's own LGBT history. Lewis Ginter was a great philanthropist to the City of Richmond, responsible for helping rebuild the city after the Civil War, including the famous Jefferson Hotel. He left his property to his niece Grace Arents who put in her will that she wanted the property turned into botanical gardens in honor of her uncle. This is exactly what was done and the results are extraordinary. The rose garden in particular stuck out as a masterpiece of botany. Both Ginter and Arents had same sex lovers, so the city's history was already quite LGBT. A book has been written about Lewis Ginter called *Richmond's Gilded Age Icon* by Brian Burns of Richmond's LGBT radio show "The Rainbow Minute." This show serves to highlight LGBT heroes throughout history. One final place of culture was the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. It's a rather large place, and is filled with everything from paintings to sculptures. We were fortunate enough to be there during the Faberge Russian Imperial Eggs Exhibit. It was breathtaking.

The theater in Richmond is also very good. The city has a surprisingly high number of theater groups including an LGBT one, The Triangle Players. The theme of the month we were there was Tennessee Williams, and so we saw the Firehouse Theater Project do William's classic work, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*. I've seen the play many times, and I can say under no pressure that it was the best production of the show I ever saw. The acting of every cast member was as good or better than anybody on Broadway. It was a small, intimate production that evoked every emotion alive from the audience and left us in both laughter and tears. It was extraordinary.

But enough history and culture, you guys and girls want to have fun. Don't worry, Richmond has you covered there, too. We were actually in the city during its gay pride celebration. The crowd was big and full of fun, attractive men and women. Drag queens galore strolled and caused trouble, and the performances were fantastic, including Martha Wash of the hit group "The Weather Girls." Now let's bar hop. First things first, go to Carytown. This fun little section of Richmond has exciting shops, fantastic places to eat, and a young energetic crowd.

We'll start right here with the lesbian bar, Babes of Carytown. This is a great bar, with a huge dance floor, and an amazing patio section. The bar also has a volleyball court for the athletic girls, and even though it's a

lesbian bar, gay men were still hanging around, which gave the bar a great feeling of community. Next was Barcode a fun bar that had a similar feel to the New Jersey Bar, Feathers. Lastly was Godfrey's. This was my favorite stop on the pride bus. It had great music and awesome drinks. The next morning, we went to a drag brunch at Godfrey's that featured several hilarious drag queens all working for tips. However, when we were partying there, our den mothers turned us over to some hot, happening gay men for the nightlife tour and boy, were we entertained! (What happens in Richmond stays in Richmond.)

After the drag brunch, it was time to go home. I sadly said goodbye to the lovely ladies we'd educated about the world of being gay. Richmond showed us Jersey boys some true Southern hospitality. It breaks all negative stereotypes and is fun for the old and the young. So cancel your trip to NYC and book a room at the Linden Row Inn. Richmond is calling your name. I know it's calling me to come back.

For more information on Richmond's attractions, visit www.rainbowoverrichmond.com.