

# THE OUT TRAVELER

THE STANDARD OF GAY TRAVEL

Fall 2008

5<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Fall 2008  
Circulation: 180,000

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Welcome to the friendliest, most artistic city in New England—which happens to have its own gay mayor.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE GRAND CANYON

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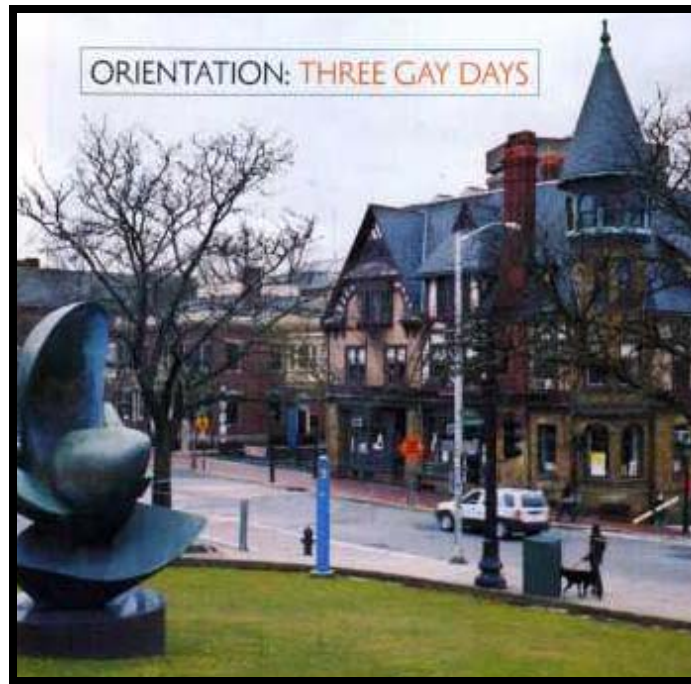
**VOODOO WEDDINGS**  
**THE REAL GAY ASIA**  
**CARSON KRESSLEY TAKES PARIS**

A SUPPLEMENT TO LPI MEDIA

Providence's historic image—downtrodden, corrupt, and desolate—radically shifted in 2003. That was the year Mayor David Cicilline took office, and that he was openly gay didn't stop him from getting 84% of the vote, making Providence the first U.S. state capital and at that time the largest American city to have an out mayor (Portland, Ore. has since taken that title). Cicilline soon transformed the debt-ridden city of 185,000 into a gleaming, prosperous enclave. Nearly \$3 billion of investment has been pumped through Providence's veins in the last five years, and luxury condos, revamped hotels, and chic shops now line the immaculate, historic streets. The crime rate is the lowest in 30 years, tax credits are given to restore landmark buildings, and a future relocation of the Interstate 95-Interstate 195 interchange will open 19.5 acres of waterfront redevelopment. The city's dramatic turnabout recently led *The Wall Street Journal* to name Providence one of the world's top 10 up-and-coming travel destinations (the only U.S. city to make the list). It's no wonder the mayor's thriving popularity has him considering a run in 2010 as the nation's first out governor.

Providence has been a refuge of tolerance ever since 1636, when the defiant Roger Williams set up a colony there that espoused religious freedom and liberty. The city has also long been a major arts and intellectual capital, home to the academic powerhouses of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, alma mater of gay filmmaker Gus Van Sant. Providence's relatively small size might lead you to think it doesn't have much gay life, but the city has over two dozen gay bars, clubs, and other venues and a sizable lesbian scene; its pride festival in June dominates the entire downtown. Many gays in New England choose to reside in Providence because of its inexpensive prices, friendliness, and gay tolerance. And as fall approaches, it's a great time to visit, with the leaves turning, the air crisp, and the universities bustling.





## ORIENTATION: THREE GAY DAYS

### GETTING THERE

Providence is located between New York City and Boston on Interstate 95. The **T. F. Green/Providence Airport** (401-737-8222) is serviced by several major airlines and is just south of the city in the suburb of Warwick. Better yet, grab one of the frequent **Amtrak** trains (800-USA-RAIL); the surprisingly modern station is right in town. The train ride is under 45 minutes from Boston, and under three hours from NYC.

### DAY 1

**A.M.** Start your exploration of Providence at the dramatic **Rhode Island State House** (82 Smith St.; 401-277-2357; call to join guided tours on weekday mornings), a neoclassical Georgian marble structure that dominates the city from its hilltop perch. Completed in 1904, the edifice boasts one of the largest self-supported domes in the world, topped by the statue *Independent Man*, the symbol of the state's forward thinking. Head east to Benefit Street; it's one of the oldest neighborhoods in America and filled with vintage wooden homes. From mid June through mid October, the **Rhode Island Historical Society** (401-273-7507 ext. 62) hosts guided walking tours of the area. Duck into the **Providence Athenaeum** (251 Benefit St.; 401-421-6970), a library that has occupied the same stunning Greek Revival building since 1838. Waltz up the hill to the grand entrance of **Brown University** (45 Prospect St.; 401-863-1000) and explore the majestic John Carter Brown Library (with over 45,000 rare books printed before 1825). Just a few blocks north of Brown is the **Rhode Island School of Design** (2 College St.; 401-454-6100). Peruse the top-notch jewelry and photography produced by students at the **Woods-Gerry Gallery** (62 Prospect St.; 401-454-6142), housed in a brick mansion. Then relax at the



Left: RISD campus area; right: Annmary Brown Memorial

RISD landmark **Carr House Coffee Shop** (210 Benefit St.), a funky, casual café run by undergraduates in an old residential building, which serves gourmet coffees, pastries, and sandwiches. A must-stop is the labyrinthine **RISD Museum** (224 Benefit St.; 401-454-6500), with its diverse multicultural collection including Roman sculpture, Japanese watercolors, and Turkish textiles. Opening in late September 2008 is the museum's adjoining steel-and-glass Chace Center, with an exhibition by celebrated gay glass sculptor Dale Chihuly (an RISD alumnus).

**P.M.** To be as cool as the RISD art students, hang out at **AS220** (115 Empire St.; 401-831-9327), with its Edward Hopper-like diner and adjoining crisp white contemporary art gallery. Or partake of Rhode Island-grown fare like littleneck clams and grilled quail at the swank new wood-paneled **Local 121** (121 Washington St.; 401-274-2121). Then catch a performance at the nearby Tony award-winning **Trinity Repertory Company** (201 Washington St.; 401-351-4242), run by out director Curt Columbus, formerly of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, who debuted his gay-themed musical *Paris by Night* here in 2008.

## DAY 2

**A.M.** Start your day with brunch at the gayest eatery in town, the newly reopened **DownCity** restaurant (50 Weybosset St.; 401-331-9217), which serves up treats like Portuguese sweetbread French toast amid the funky splendor of chandeliers, orange walls, and groovy tunes. Then get down to shopping at the 1828 Greek Revival **Arcade** (65 Weybosset St.; 401-598-1199). Inside, student chefs from Johnson & Wales University's culinary arts program whip up concoctions like crème de menthe chocolate cake at **Johansson's Bakery Café** (401-598-2253). On the far side of the Arcade is **Westminster Street**, the fashionable center of the downtown's revival. **OOP!** (220 Westminster St.; 401-270-4366) sells startlingly funky products like stick furniture, wall masks, ceramics, lampshades, and mirrors, many handmade by local artisans. Across the street, **Homestyle** (229 Westminster St.; 401-277-1159) is a gallerylike store with mid-century sofas, Impressionist paintings, and vintage Asian trunks. Then have a leisurely lunch of flatiron steak sandwiches or black Angus burgers at **WaterPlace Restaurant and Lounge** (1 Finance Way; 401-272-1040), an upscale indoor/outdoor



Top: RISD; bottom: CAV Restaurant

## STAYING THERE

Your first choice of accommodations should be the new, gay-marketed **Renaissance Providence Hotel** (5 Avenue of the Arts; 800-468-3571). Originally built in 1929 as a Masonic temple, the spectacularly stately granite façade hides a lush interior with 272 huge neoclassical-style rooms. The mod Temple bar and nightclub downstairs is the city's current hot ticket. In the Italian neighborhood of Federal Hill, gay-friendly **Dolce Villa** (63 DePasquale Square; 401-383-7031) is a renovated Miami-style boutique property on a pedestrian café-lined plaza. Dolce Villa offers a choice of elegant, white-on-white one- or two-bedroom suites. The **Providence Biltmore** (11 Dorrance St.; 800-294-7709) dates back to 1922 and is the grand dame downtown, having recently received \$10 million worth of renovations. The likes of Richard Gere and Queen Latifah have stayed in its graceful Old World-style rooms. The 80-room, AAA, four-diamond **Hotel Providence** (311 Westminster St.; 401-861-8000) has turn-of-the-century New England decor with poster beds and maple-wood armoires.

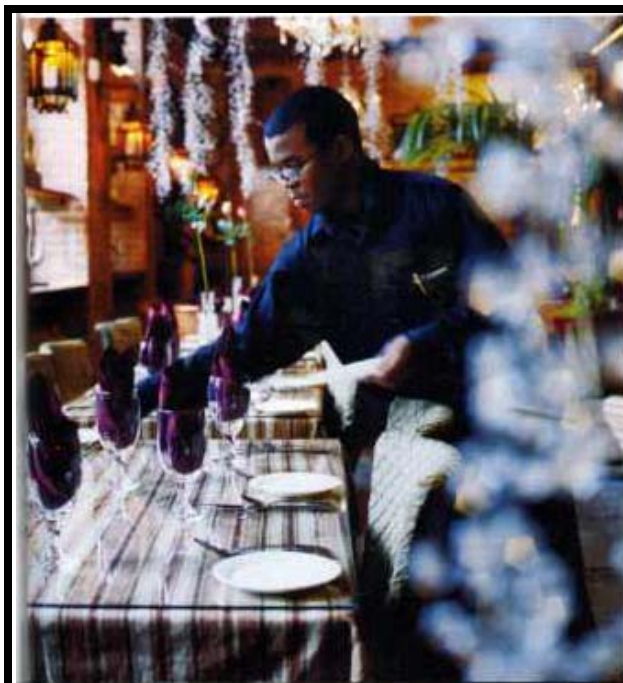


eatery with a veranda view over the city's downtown Riverwalk. The pedestrian Riverwalk is the site of the celebrated summertime **WaterFire** fest (401-272-3111), where bonfires burn in the middle of the Providence River's canals as music, boat rides, and events occur all around. From May through October (weather permitting), charter your own **private gondola** (401-421-8877), complete with Venetian-costumed gondolier. **P.M.** Foodies adore Providence's Little Italy on Federal Hill, west of downtown. The Food Network's Mario Batali has called it one of America's five best Little Italys. Gay-popular **Mediterraneo Caffé** (134 Atwells Ave.; 401-331-7760) serves authentic Italian multicourse meals in a local but upscale atmosphere that attracts celebs like Hillary Clinton and Alec Baldwin. After dinner, the place transforms into a nightclub. Or you can head back downtown to explore the gay bars, many of which are within walking distance of one another. **The Dark Lady** (124 Snow St.; 401-831-4297) is a crowded chandelier-lit space known for its drag shows—and you might find the mayor holding court there.

### DAY 3

**A.M.** The closest thing Providence has to a gayborhood is artsy **Wickenden Street**, located in the southern part of the city near the Providence River and brimming with antique shops and a leafy old New England vibe. For more local flavor, grab a slice of excellent thin-crust pizza at lesbian-owned **Fellini's Pizzeria** (166 Wickenden St.; 401-751-6737); its menu has pizzas with names like Go Ask Alice and Satyricon. Down the street, spend time unearthing treasures in the upscale, gay-owned **Curatorium** (197 Wickenden St.; 401-453-4080), which sells everything from actual framed bats to costume jewelry and elegant vases. Make your way up Wickenden as it climbs past galleries and tattoo parlors to the hilltop **Reflections Café** (468 Wickenden St.; 401-273-7278), a gay-owned, somewhat cruisy coffeehouse with sidewalk seating where it's easy to while away an afternoon over board games, home-baked goods, and wraps named after Greek gods. Further south (but worth the trek) is the massive **Johnson & Wales Culinary Arts Museum** (315 Harborside Blvd.; 401-598-2805). Anyone who likes eating will appreciate this 25,000-square-foot space filled with bizarre old-fashioned cooking implements, menus from White House dinners, and full-scale replicas of antique dining cars.

**P.M.** Now that you are properly appetized, head east to the Jewelry District and the hidden **CAV Restaurant** (call for directions; 401-751-9164), which is housed in a funky historic loft space filled with African and Asian artifacts, all of which are for sale. On the menu: health-conscious fare like carrot ginger soup and Block Island striped sea bass. For nighttime entertainment, grab a sofa at the **Cable Car Cinema** (204 S. Main St.; 401-272-3970) for art-house flicks and free popcorn refills, or head to the naughty area of Allens Avenue for the tasteful Montreal-style male strip joint **Trixx** (257 Allens Ave.; 401-432-7780). Not far is the multi-room **Club Gallery** (150 Point St.; 401-751-7166), a favorite of gay men every night except Saturday, when it becomes GirlsSpot, one of New England's biggest lesbian parties. □



Providence Web links on [OutTraveler.com](http://OutTraveler.com)

### READERS' TIPS

"Hundreds of people come from all over the place—even from New York City—for the ProviDance parties by **Chris Harris Presents** (401-831-3526), which have different themes like white party, Madonna madness, and the military ball. They happen on Sunday nights on most holiday weekends."

—Alexis M. Gorriarán, Providence, R.I.