

An LGBT Guide to Vancouver, Canada's Most Gay-Friendly City

Written by Lawrence Ferber · July 03, 2015



Courtesy of OPUS
Opus Hotel

Canada's Pacific Northwest jewel is a mecca for foodies, cocktail and coffee enthusiasts, outdoor fitness and biking fans—and LGBTs. Caleb Donszelmann, openly gay concierge for [Opus Hotel Vancouver](#), offers up some musts.

Vancouver, British Columbia is one of Canada's hottest destinations, seeing record-breaking numbers of visitors. You can put that down to its breathtaking sights, extensive bicycle paths and nature, and easygoing LGBT-friendly populace: in fact, this summer the country celebrates ten years of marriage equality.

Located just down the street from the city's "gayborhood" of Davie Village, the chic Opus Hotel Vancouver is a hot pick for LGBT travelers, offering easy proximity to gay bars and clubs (plus free rides in the hotel's car), ideal accommodations for those celebrating LGBT weddings and honeymoons, and support for Pride and other community events. One of Opus's team members is openly gay concierge Caleb Donszelmann, who juggles everything from check-ins to providing guests with use of complimentary bicycles and driving guests to their downtown destinations.

Originally from Alberta, Donszelman moved to Vancouver in 2006 and quickly immersed himself. "We're called Hollywood North because that industry is booming here," he shares, "but we're also known as Canada's San Francisco because there are so many gay people! You can walk anywhere downtown and see people holding hands."

A passionate foodie who savors his city and keeps tabs on its evolution, from arts to cocktail culture to nightlife, Donzelman joined Opus just prior to Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympics and has been able to put his extensive knowledge of the city to good use. "Opus has always supported gay pride events," he says. "As an employer they encourage individualism and personality. A guest said that staying at the Opus is like your cool friend giving you the keys to their apartment in the city."

Here, Donzelman shares the keys to his Vancouver musts.

LITTLE SISTERS

This gay bookstore is an institution and has been open since 1983. They've trailblazed not only with their efforts for same sex-marriage rights, but also censorship in Canada. They've continually been to Canada's Supreme Court to ensure freedom for different kinds of literature. Today they stock books, local art, and sex toys and DVDs. It's one of the hearts of Davie Village for sure.

WRECK BEACH

This is our nude beach. There's a gay section, but Wreck Beach attracts nudists from all walks of life. Getting there is a bit of a trek, and you can only access it by climbing down like 200 or 300 stairs. Because of that, it's very secluded. It's by far one of the best beaches in Vancouver, and gets all this sun, and not a lot of tourists go. It's big with locals.

PARLIAMENT

This is a really great home store in Gastown, and similar to a CB2 in the U.S. It's part gay-owned. There's a fantastic section at the back with plants and "living art" installations by a firm called Kermodi. They really turn plants into art.

EXILE BISTRO

In the heart of the gay village, this is a small, beautifully decorated restaurant that's just over a year old. It's all about what they can find in the woods; they physically go out and gather. They have a game fondue with elk. The woman who owns it, Vanessa Bourget, is a holistic nutritionist and previously was head bartender at Nuba, so her cocktails are incredible. They're the most purely medicinal cocktails, so you can't feel bad about drinking them at all. That's what I tell myself.

ELBOW ROOM CAFÉ

This longtime, gay-owned favorite is known for its sassy, abusive service, where you can playfully banter with the wait staff. We tell guests in advance, "this is what it's known for, so don't be surprised." Great breakfast and lunch diner-style food with some fun names for the dishes, like they have an omelet called the Hilary Swank. Tongue-in-cheek, but good.

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