

GAY & LESBIAN MEXICO CITY

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In a land where macho attitudes rule and traditional family values remain strong, it should come as no surprise that little tolerance is shown for alternative orientations. Notwithstanding the prominence of such openly gay luminaries as singer/composer Juan Gabriel, artist Juan Soriano and essayist Carlos Monsivais, until recently gay life was safely closeted and officially unmentionable in the media. The ascendancy of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), a right-of-center political party with close ties to the Catholic church, suggests a continuation of these long-prevailing attitudes.

But as in many other areas, the capital diverges from the mainstream. Dominated by the socially progressive PRD, which is nothing short of antagonistic toward the PAN presidency, the city assembly recently passed an initiative sanctioning same-sex partnerships by granting such unions the same legal advantages enjoyed by traditional married couples. While falling short of an actual legalization of gay marriage, the move seemed like a bold assertion of the capital's well-known tolerance for gays and lesbians.

Mexico City is a magnet for the first generation of Mexicans able to openly express their sexuality. This new openness has created a special energy in the capital. Gays and lesbians can now choose from a wide variety of venues appealing to different age groups and social classes.

The growing sense of tolerance means public displays of affection are no big deal anymore, at least in the capital's more cosmopolitan zones. To be sure, it's OK to hold hands in the Zona Rosa, but it won't raise any eyebrows in Colonia Condesa, Roma, Polanco or Del Valle either.

EATING

While gourmands of all persuasions gather in Condesa and Polanco for their dining experiences, the following places also function as gay social venues.

12:30 Map pp74-5

☎ 5514-5971; Amberes 13; **M** Insurgentes
Located at the heart of the gay nightlife district, 12:30 is good for sandwiches, salads and other 'munchis'. In fact, the relaxed, social atmosphere may appeal to exhausted clubbers – the electronica soundtrack is usually low enough for actual conversation. Go upstairs to dine on a terrace overlooking Amberes. Service can be a challenge.

EL GENERALITO Map pp48-9

☎ 5518-3711; Filomena Mata 18G; comida corrida M\$50; **M** Allende
A longtime queer hangout in the Centro, this cozy restaurant opens on pedestrian lane Filomena Mata. Paintings by owner Juan Carlos cover the walls. There's a reasonably priced *comida corrida* and draft beer.

DRINKING

BGAY BPROUD CAFÉ MÉXICO Map pp74-5

☎ 5208-2547; Amberes 12B; ☎ 11am-11pm; **M** Insurgentes

A good place to start your explorations, this casual café functions as a sort of nerve center for DF gay life, particularly amongst the younger crowd.

BLACK OUT Map pp74-5

☎ 5511-9973; www.black-out.com; Amberes 11; ☎ 5pm-2am; **M** Insurgentes

The new kid on the Zona Rosa's hottest block is mostly male but frequented by buff clubbers of every persuasion. Designed by *Frida* art director Felipe Fernández del Paso to evoke the cosmopolitan New York theater world, the high narrow space is draped in black velvet, with a sky-high bar of status liquors.

EL VIENA Map pp48-9

☎ 5512-0929; República de Cuba 2E; **M** Bellas Artes

The city's only gay cantina is a friendly if nondescript place, attracting a varied crowd (from truck drivers to journalists) and the jukebox is terrific. Most patrons move over to the next-door Oasis disco at some point in the evening.

PRIDE

☎ 5516-2368; Alfonso Reyes 281; ☎ 6pm-2am Tue-Sat; **M** Chilpancingo

On the southeast corner of Condesa, Pride is a relaxed gathering place for a youthful,

CINEMA GAY

If movies hold up a mirror to society and serve as a gauge to what's considered appropriate behavior, the portrayal of gays and lesbians in Mexican film demonstrates a sea change in attitudes. In the past, if gay characters appeared at all, they were objects of scorn and ridicule, but recent films from Mexico feature frank portrayals of gay sexuality.

Prior to the 1970s, the 'marica' was a stock character in Mexican comedies, a limp-wristed, rouged figure who was invariably disparaged by the other cast members. Such an exaggeratedly effeminate role appeared as far back as 1938 in the Mexican film *La Casa del Ogro* (The Ogre's House) and continued to pop up in any number of B-movies for cheap comic relief. The first sympathetic portrayal of a gay character awaited *El Lugar Sin Límites* (The Place Without Limits), a 1978 drama directed by Arturo Ripstein. Played by Roberto Cobo, who had made an indelible impression on audiences as a street derelict in Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), the character of 'La Manuela' emerges as a tragic figure who is at once desired and victimized by the typically macho characters in a Mexican village. Less than a decade later, *Doña Herlinda y Su Hijo* (Doña Herlinda and Her Son; 1984) was probably the first portrayal in Mexican cinema of a same-sex couple in love and struggling with familial pressures to conform to an image of normalcy. By the 1990s, gay issues were being dealt with more openly and two internationally successful films, *El Callejón de los Milagros* (Midaq Alley; 1995) and *Y Tu Mamá También* (And Your Mother Too; 2001), explored the power of societal taboos and the psychological impact they have on Mexicans. A somewhat lighter look at the theme turned up in the 2004 film *Temporada de Patos* (Duck Season), in which an adolescent boy discovers his budding homosexuality.

The more recent emergence of a genuinely gay cinema in Mexico perhaps reflects a growing tolerance for non-heterosexual life, at least in the capital. The films *Mil Nubes de Paz Cercan el Cielo*, *Jamás Acabarás de Ser Amor* (A Thousand Clouds of Peace, 2003) and *El Cielo Dividido* (Broken Sky, 2006), both critically acclaimed works by the director Julián Hernández, allow viewers to observe relationships through the lens of gay desire.

To see current Latin American and international films dealing with gay themes, check what's playing at **Contempo Cinema** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 5208-4044; www.contempocinema.com; Londres 161, Zona Rosa; admission M\$40; ☎ 6:30-11:30pm; **M** Insurgentes). Located inside the Zona Rosa's Plaza del Ángel shopping center, the Contempo screens contemporary Mexican and international films, with an emphasis on gay and erotic themes, as well as staging occasional theater and cabaret productions.

upscale LGBT crowd. Friends gather round the bar or head upstairs to lounge on sofas. It's conveniently nearby the popular taco joint, El Califa.

SANBORNS CAFÉ Map pp74-5

☎ 5207-9760; Londres 149; ☎ 24 hr; **M** Insurgentes

During the day, Chilangos customarily meet at Sanborns Café for a business breakfast or lunch (see p142). After hours, this round-the-clock coffee shop makes a convenient port-of-call between clubs. It's also considered a prime cruising locale, particularly the book-browsing section at the front.

NIGHTLIFE

The long-time core of gay nightlife is the Zona Rosa, with Calle Amberes rivaling San Francisco's Castro Street for bars, discos, night-clubs, restaurants and cafés. Other pockets of *de ambiente* activity exist in Colonia Roma and the Centro Histórico.

DANCE CLUBS

BOY BAR Map pp74-5

☎ 5511-3915; www.boybarclub.com; Amberes 14; admission incl one drink M\$130; ☎ from 10pm Thu-Sat; **M** Insurgentes

Steamiest of the clubs on the Amberes strip, this multi-level disco has won notoriety for its chiseled go-go dancers, not to mention a 'hot room' for advanced groping. If it gets too hot, catch a breeze up on the sandy terrace overlooking the street action.

BAR OASIS Map pp48-9

☎ 5521-9740; República de Cuba 2G, Centro; ☎ 3pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat; **M** Bellas Artes
Next door to El Viena, this packed *antro* cuts across class lines, with both cowboys and businessmen dancing before a day-glo cityscape. Stick around past midnight for shows featuring lip-synching trannies.

BUTTERGOLD Map pp48-9

☎ 5761-1861; Izazaga 9; cover incl 2 drinks M\$100; ☎ 9pm-4am Tue-Sun; **M** Salto del Agua

Buttergold (aka Butterflies, aka El Butter), across the street from metro Salto del Agua, is an airplane-hangar-sized space that still manages to get densely packed. The funhouse features five bars, a snack bar and a big stage for elaborately choreographed drag shows. It's fun for straights, too, as long as you don't mind crowds, thick smoke and loud, loud music.

EL ALMACÉN/EL TALLER Map pp74-5

www.eltaller-elalmacen.com.mx; **Florencia 37**;

6pm-2am Tue-Sun; admission M\$50;

Insurgentes

Among the first in the Pink Zone to fly the rainbow flag, this perennially popular nightspot has two distinct levels. Upstairs, El Almacén (the warehouse) is a narrow low-lit bar featuring weekly cabaret programs. Downstairs, the men-only El Taller (the workshop) is a dark, industrially themed space with a crowded dance floor and continuous heavy breathing videos.

LA PERLA Map pp48-9

1997-7695; **República de Cuba 44**; cover M\$120;

shows 11:30pm & 1:30am Fri & Sat;

Bellas Artes

Once a red-light venue, this small cabaret has been reborn in the age of irony as a cradle of kitsch, with hilarious drag shows featuring traditional Mexican songstresses. It attracts a mixed crowd, perhaps more straight than gay, in the mood to slum it. Be sure to arrive by 10:30pm to get in.

LIPSTICK Map pp74-5

5514-4920; www.lipstickbar.com; **Amberes 1**;

cover **Wed & Thu M\$100, Fri & Sat M\$140**;

Wed-Sat; **Insurgentes**

At this large (capacity 950) club for an upscale 18-to-35 set, the fun goes on in three different settings: a subdued lower lounge for chilling out with friends; a video bar with adjacent dark room for close encounters; and an excellent upper terrace for all-out revelry. Thursday is girls' night.

LIVING Map pp74-5

5286-0671; www.living.com.mx; **Paseo de la**

Reforma 483; cover **\$150-170**; **10pm-4am Fri & Sat**; **Sevilla**

Housed in a magnificent Italianate mansion near the Torre Mayor, Living is a temple of ecstatic nightlife for the 20-something set, both gay and straight. On the enormous

FURTHER RESOURCES

Homópolis magazine, available free in some clubs, provides a rundown of gay cultural venues and events; *Tiempo Libre* also has good coverage. If you read Spanish, the following websites will also clue you in.

- www.zonagayonline.com.mx
- www.sergay.com.mx
- www.anodis.com

main dance floor, world-class DJs cook up high-volume house sessions as sculpted performance artists/exotic dancers gyrate. Other scenes unfold in other lounges.

TOM'S LEATHER BAR Map p88

5564-0728; **Insurgentes Sur 357**; www.toms

mexico.com; cover **M\$120**; **9pm-4am Tue-Sun**;

Metrobus Sonora

For those who would dare to get medieval, Tom's provides the props, with heraldic shields, crossed swords and candelabras highlighting a decidedly decadent decor. When you hear the fat lady sing, the show's about to begin.

SLEEPING

6M9 GUEST HOUSE Map pp74-5

5208-8347; www.purple.roofs.com/6m9-mx

.html; **Marsella 69, Colonia Juárez**; s/d **M\$640/950**;

Insurgentes;

Oriented toward a gay male clientele, the 6M9 occupies a pretty Porfiriano-era building within walking distance of Pink Zone bars. The fun-filled facilities include a small pool, sun deck and tiled steam room, and guests can help themselves to complimentary beverages at the bar. There are nine spacious, well-maintained rooms (reservations by internet only).

HOTEL MARCO POLO Map pp74-5

5080-1445; www.marcopolo.com.mx; **Amberes**

27, Zona Rosa; s/d **US\$168/188**; **Insurgentes**;

Not a gay hotel per se, this small, modern hotel near Paseo de la Reforma is in the heart of the gay nightlife district and is often identified as the best option nearby. The 59 bright rooms are done up in earthy tones, with plush beds and windows overlooking tree-lined Amberes. Rates are about 50% lower if booked online.

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