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A New Look at Queer Atlanta

LGBTQ | PAUL HENEY | MARCH 02, 2022



Atlanta rainbow crosswalks at 10th and Piedmont in Midtown. (Photo by Paul Heney)

I attended college in downtown Atlanta a few decades ago, while I was a closeted gay teen. When gay life was discussed at my very conservative college, it was occasional snippets of information, vague assertions that a certain building might contain a gay bar or whispers about specific people’s inclinations.

So it’s pretty stunning every time I return to the city, now as an openly gay man myself, because Atlanta seems open in ways it wasn’t back then. My husband and I recently stayed at the Hyatt Centric Midtown Atlanta, perfectly located in one of the city’s most bustling (and queer!) neighborhoods.

We had a lovely corner suite that gave us a view of Atlanta’s ever-growing skyline. The hotel has a modern feel, with an off-white palette and light wood furniture. The bathroom was spacious with plenty of counter space, even with two people’s expansive toiletry bags unloaded.

A block away from the hotel are the iconic rainbow crosswalks at 10th and Piedmont, encompassing all four pedestrian crossings. It’s hard to find a building here that doesn’t have a Pride flag flying above it. We chose Flying

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Room at the Hyatt Centric Midtown Atlanta. (Photo by Paul Heney)

quite filling. The customers here were a 50/50 split between straight and queer couples, and in some of the other nearby [restaurants](#) like 10th & Piedmont and Joe's on Juniper, the mix can be even more heavily weighted to the queer crowd.

We weren't looking for a club- and bar-heavy trip, and instead decided to focus on three of Atlanta's signature attractions. All were doable in a few hours and are highly recommended for LGBTQ visitors.

The [National Center for Civil and Human Rights](#), the newest of these attractions, is located near the city's Olympic Park, which has turned into a museum district of sorts. The center, currently open Thursdays through Sundays, looks at both the history of civil rights struggles as well as what events are happening today in the world. Different exhibits examine individual human rights champions, an art installation on the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and major events in the U.S. Civil Rights movement.

Visitors can sit at a mockup of one of the lunch counter sit-ins, to see and hear what it felt like for the protestors. The center is active in partnering with local [LGBTQ](#) institutions to further discussions on today's fights for queer rights—and how our rights are being impacted by various proposed legislation in different places.

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main tank is the center’s signature piece and contains whale sharks, perhaps the main draw here. It is also one of only four aquariums in the world that hosts manta rays. In 2020, the “Sharks! Predators of the Deep” exhibit was added, which contains a dive cage, where you can (for an extra fee) be submerged in the tank.

The aquarium prides itself on a variety of animal encounters that can be booked, with a goal of educating the public about conservation. These encounters include beluga whales, dolphins, harbor seals, sharks and rays, sharks, penguins and even the famed whale sharks. There’s even a sleepover program, ideal for LGBTQ families, in which you can spend the whole night in the aquarium, to discover what happens at night with all the aquatic residents.



Whale shark at the Georgia Aquarium. (Photo by Paul Heney)

Another nearby attraction, the [World of](#)

[Coca-Cola](#), has had a couple of iterations in the city; this latest one chronicles the well-known soft drink’s origins in Atlanta, its history and some of the company’s iconic advertisements from over the decades.

There’s a new “scent discovery” area, where you can learn more about the anatomy of smell and determine your own aroma preferences. But maybe the most popular (and my personal favorite) area is the “Taste It!” exhibit, a massive room where you can sample fountain beverages from all over the world. Some are delightful, fruity combinations, and others are perplexing tastes that make you wonder how different cultures could have such different taste preferences.



Interior of the Delta Flight Museum in Atlanta. (Photo by Paul Heney)

Lastly, travel fans will really

love the [Delta Flight Museum](#), located not far from Atlanta’s massive [Hartfield-Jackson International Airport](#) on the city’s southwest side. Housed in a couple of large aircraft hangers, visitors are able to see interactive exhibits, a section on the future of aviation and, of course, airplanes! There’s a historic Boeing 767, the very first 747-400 ever built, a Douglas DC-3 and more.

Plus, you can fly the only 737 flight simulator in the country that’s open to the public. There’s also a great gift shop where you can purchase some unique aviation souvenirs. And one of our favorite things was the extensive aircraft model room, with an incredible array of scale models of commercial aircraft. The museum does host frequent private events, so make sure to check the website for current operating hours.



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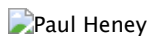
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