

q feature: NEW YORK NEW YORK

From the moment I landed at La Guardia to the second I flew out of JFK I loved every minute of my first time in New York. I was also fortunate (I believe) to have the best of both worlds by staying with Alan Reiff in Astoria (Queens) and commuting daily into Manhattan. I will be eternally grateful to Alan for allowing me to stay with him in his home. It is no longer a wonder to me why they refer to it as the “greatest city in the world”.

My first night started a bite to eat at a local diner with Sir Puffalot (Russell Murphy) and ended with “cocktails” at the Crescent Lounge in Astoria - near the corner of Broadway and Crescent Street. A beautiful little bar with extremely friendly staff and an open, casual ambience. The room is based around a bar with huge comfortable lounges spread throughout the rest of the space. A very pleasant local gay friendly bar in an equally pleasant neighbourhood. The following day was learning how to use the subway (thanks Russell for your tutoring - and friendship as always).

Having made it safely into Manhattan, I walked the couple of extra blocks from the station to NYC & Company where I had pre-arranged a meeting. They armed me with a media kit which included a city pass, a map, and media releases about the 40th anniversary of Stonewall. They also arranged a Gray Line Tour Bus pass for me. This was to be the best thing ever. That day though - armed with a map pointing out the gay areas of Hells Kitchen, Chelsea and down into Greenwich Village - I started walking (which is something I like doing when I am in a city for the first time). I eventually reached Christopher Street and stopped for a rest in the park opposite the Stonewall Inn (pictures to the right).

As a gay man, I felt a certain warmth and homeliness from this area - realising I was standing smack bang in the middle of history (the Stonewall riots in 1969 being the beginning of our modern day Pride movement). I spent the day wondering around (plus having a drink at Stonewall) but came back a few nights later and enjoyed a few drinks at local niteclubs including Julius, Gym Bar and Barracuda with Ben Widdicombe - who is an Australian journalist living in New York.

That evening Russell came and collected me and we walked across the city to Drom to see the fabulous Guy Sebastian - and he was on fire! A smallish club, Guy wowed the intimate crowd with songs from his various albums. He is singing so well and looking great. A truly amazing and talented ambassador for Australia and one we should be very proud of. Make sure you pick up his new album when it is released.

The following day was the beginning of my tourist adventures in the city that is so good, they named it twice (I had to get that line in somewhere). On top of one the Gray Line busses, I had a perfect view of the city I had admired for so long. The Empire State Building, M.O.M.A., the Statue of Liberty, Times Square, Broadway, Brooklyn, Queens - and the list goes on. New York is so full of history that to get a really good overview I recommend buying a ticket and get on one of these busses. They have various tours - uptown, downtown, night tours and Brooklyn. An excellent way to see the city's sites.



I spent the next few days exploring the city and having a ball. Although Alan was busy working, he did make some quality time for me by taking me to several local gay places: Lavish Lounge - first gay owned and operated bar in Astoria Queens; the Crescent Lounge - gay owned but not specifically gay (gay friendly & open to all) which I have previously mentioned; the Sanford Diner - family owned business recently renovated to a first class restaurant - and I have to say that the food was incredible and our Irish waitress was simply superb - make sure you experience it - it's open 24/7; and Crescent & Wine - wine, cheese, and beer bar in Astoria - really sweet place with a fabulous ambience.

One of the highlights of my trip to New York was a pedicab ride through Central Park - which in case you didn't know is TOTALLY MAN MADE! My young Russian "driver" spent an hour explaining the attributes of the park, how the city had cleaned it up and removed the drug / violence aspect, and some of the famous people who lived in the beautiful apartment buildings surrounding the park (particularly the East and West sides).

Another one was seeing Avenue Q on Broadway - something every theatre queen like myself has to do.

I had an incredibly fabulous time and seriously did not want to come home. New York is clean, friendly, welcoming, huge, vibrant, and everything I had hoped for multiplied by a million.

Alan explained it quite well that everywhere else you go in the USA you know you are in that country. In New York, you are in New York - it is almost a country on its own. I will certainly be back as often as I can and recommend it to you. Before you travel though, check out nycgo.com for all the information for your gay holiday in the Big Apple.

Pictures: top two are different views from the Empire State Building, bottom one is Central Park.

