

OUTLOOKS

CANADA'S GLBT MAGAZINE

February 2010

prorogation
leaves
Parliament
IN A FOG

SLAPSHOTOLUS
standing watch over the
Olympic PRIDE House

**5-STAR
GYMS**
pumping
it up

Canada's
sexy singing
sensation

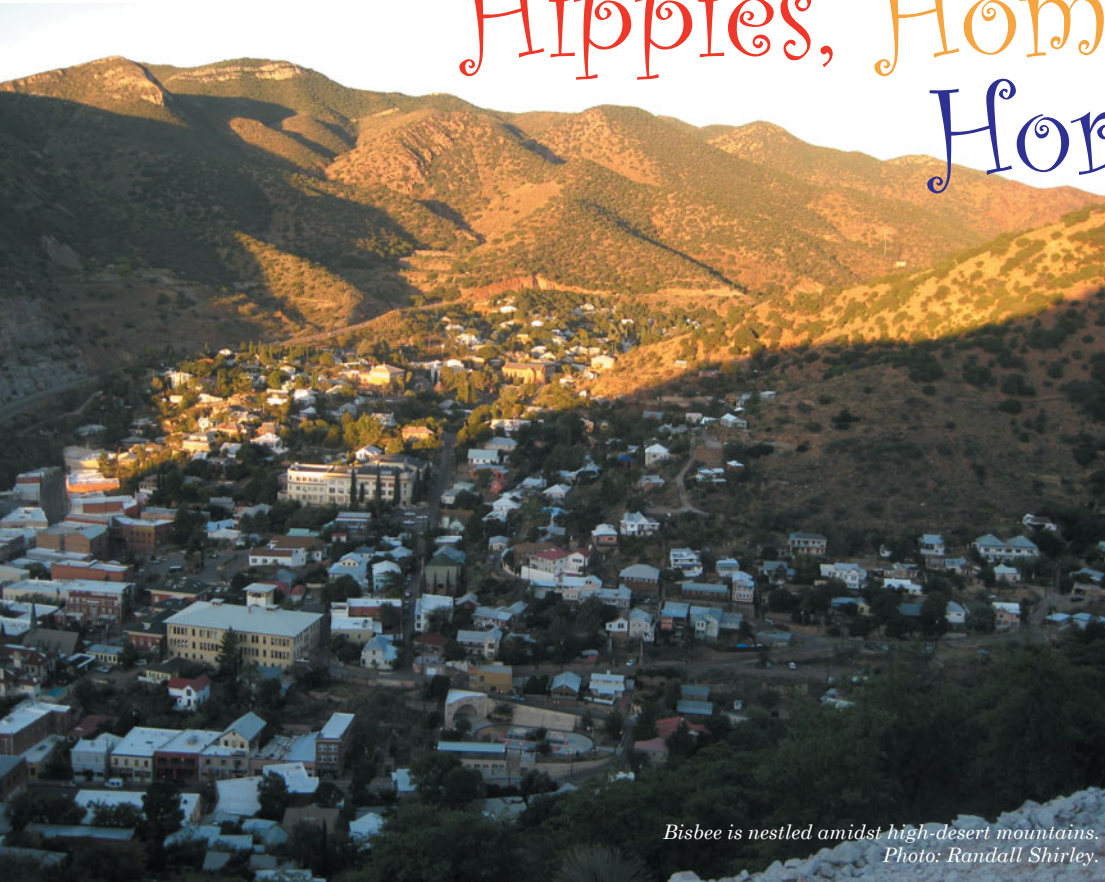
**MATT
DUSK**

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Hippies, Homos, and Horoscopes



*Bisbee is nestled amidst high-desert mountains.
Photo: Randall Shirley.*

*Travel Editor
Randall Shirley
went in search
of Bisbee, Arizona
sunshine, only to
discover there's
gay magic in
the hills.*

"You've got a beautiful, long lifeline. Hmm, no kids in your future, no offense, but you're probably gay."

Thus begins my session with psychic Donna Amalong, who then reads my Tarot and discusses my horoscope; the experience is amazingly powerful, fully worth her \$15/15-minute price tag. There's a bohemian magic in Bisbee's mountain-desert air, and Donna decidedly belongs to it.

Bisbee, Arizona, is one of those places that attracts people like Donna to set up shop. It's a place where real hippies scooped up depressed real estate in the 70s when the copper mine closed the first time. Today they are old hippies, who alongside old miners and newcomers run galleries stuffed with affordable art, antique shops full of surprising finds, and restaurants with innovative cuisine. Many historic homes have become B&Bs, and Bisbee boasts one of the most unique motels on earth (see sidebar page 32).

Bisbee's laid-back style, fresh mountain air and historic character attracts a large gay following—both as travellers and as residents—even boasting a substantial gay Pride festival weekend pulling in visitors from nearby Tucson and Phoenix.

Historic Bisbee is beautifully set, snuggled into the round-topped, rusty-red mountains that run along Arizona's border with Mexico—just seven miles away. The whole

town is a national historic district. The history is rooted in mining, and the massive Lavender Pit Mine, planned to reopen next year, is almost as dominant a feature as the surrounding hills. Main streets run along the bottoms of two intersecting canyons, and most homes are literally perched on the steep hillsides; many are only reachable by climbing a substantial set of stairs.

Bisbee's stairways are legendary, and almost all are considered public sidewalks or streets. I climb 75 stairs to meet Bob Klein and his partner Jeff Trujillo, owners of the Doublejack Guesthouse, where I'm lucky enough to stay two nights. It's worth the climb, every time I do it.

The Doublejack is a stand-alone, one-bedroom historic house originally built as a miner's shack (the owners live next door). I, of course, fantasize about hot miners who used to live there.

The luxurious Doublejack is far above "shack" status—including a living room, kitchen, clawfoot bath, and king bed, plus a huge private deck with views of the city and "B" Mountain on the other side of the valley. Bird feeders lure hummingbirds and cardinals to join me on the deck during morning coffee. Clever touch: my mug coaster is an old Levi jeans pocket.

Bob and Jeff love Bisbee, and know everyone in town. They join me for dinner at

Bella Roma Pizza—where I'm practically treated like an old friend by owners Rita Shipley and Oliver Searchfield who create surprises like a classic Rueben pizza, or even Thanksgiving turkey pizza. We chat with a lesbian couple who are dining in the window seat; everyone's comfy and friendly.

It's hard to not feel comfortable in Bisbee. Everyone talks to you. One night I meet a guy on the street who strikes up a conversation about his own writing project: a book about a phone booth.

I wander into Art Herman's sculpture studio—one of many studios and galleries in town—thinking I'll just take a quick look. 30 minutes later I've heard Art's stories about creating racks for wealthy Texas oilmen's cowboy hats, and of his only visit to Vancouver: with the U.S. Navy in 1957. I've been wowed by his gorgeous sculpture of Icarus flying into the sun that hangs overhead. Unfinished, he tells me.

At Belleza Gallery I get engrossed in conversation about homelessness with Lou Anne Sterbick-Nelson, a former lawyer who created Bisbee's women's shelter, and opened the gallery to help support it. In addition to a stunning selection of artists, the gallery sells Adirondack furniture made by shelter residents. In order to improve their lives, Lou Anne tells me, people *must* to have something to live for.

When I buy a *local* pomegranate at the tiny, pink-painted Mimosa Market, I get into conversation with the shop clerk. Pomegranates grow wild all around Bisbee, but she groans they're just so hard to peel. *Au contraire*, I tell her. Then the gay Canadian tells the straight American how to peel a pomegranate in under a minute. She's noticeably shocked.

And so it goes. Bisbee is as much about friendly encounters as beautiful scenery. I ask them about them. They ask me about me. They ask about life in Canada. I tell them gay people can get married in Canada. They tell me anything goes in Bisbee. But not gay marriage; Arizona's not yet that liberal.

One person every traveller should meet is Renee Gardner. She and I spend an evening walking through dark streets. She teaches me about Bisbee's history by introducing me to the town's ghosts. Renee runs ghost tours almost every night of the year, and she *knows* her ghosts. Her stories aren't spooky, they're just downright believable. Enough guests at

the Bisbee Inn have *experienced* the ghost cat in room 23 to validate its existence. Inside the magnificent old Copper Queen Hotel (host hotel for Bisbee Pride), said to have 16 ghosts, Renee and I go to visit her favourite ghost outside room 409, a black-cloaked man who she has seen on multiple occasions. I hope he'll appear to flirt with me. Alas, we don't see him, but the energy in the hallway is decidedly unique and the hair stands up on the back of my neck.

Four nights in Bisbee is the perfect number. I've enjoyed lovely weather. I've met amazing people. I've learned about copper mining. I've found art and antique bargains. I've eaten sublime food. I've even been for dinner across the border in Naco, Mexico.

While many travel memories come home with me, the one that really stands out is this: How did Donna, the psychic, know I'm gay? Like everyone I met in Bisbee, to me, she's the real deal. And that, I believe, is why gays love Bisbee. **O**

Retro Perfection



Photo: Randall Shirley.

Ever dreamed of making love in a trailer park? Bisbee's Shady Dell Motel is the perfect place. The "motel" consists of 11 "Airstream" style trailers built during the heyday of the American trailer trip: post WWII-early 60s. For two nights, my trailer is a beautifully restored 1959 Boles Aero with ensuite bath! Everything works, including a B&W TV with Lucy & Desi movies. The bed is comfy, and I "read" myself to sleep fantasizing over photos of the hunks in Bisbee High School's 1959 yearbook—even the reading materials match my trailer's year. The property is perfect, and assistant manager Ken Grindell is a walking encyclopedia of vintage trailer information.

The Details

Get there:

- Most U.S. airlines have one-stop service from Canadian cities to Tucson, Bisbee's closest major airport. A rental car will be needed; the drive from Tucson to Bisbee is approximately 150kms through beautiful scenery. From Phoenix (nonstop air from Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, & Toronto) the drive is about 300kms.

Stay:

- Doublejack Guesthouse B&B, gay-owned, one room (max 2 guests), 520-559-6708 www.doublejackbisbee.com
- Shady Dell Trailer Motel, 1 Douglas Road, 520-432-3567, www.theshadydell.com

Eat:

- Bella Roma Pizza (whatever Oliver's special is, order it!) 9 Naco Road, 520-432-7662, www.bisbeepizza.com
- Santiago's Mexican Restaurant (try the Zacatecas Combo), 1 Lowell Ave., 520-432-1910
- Bisbee Breakfast Club, 75A Erie St., 520-432-5885
- Dot's Diner (at the Shady Dell), 520-432-1112
- High Desert Market & Café, (lunch, gourmet picnic items) 203 Tombstone Canyon, 520-432-6775, www.highdesertmarket.net
- Mimosa Market, picnic supplies, 215 Brewery Ave., 520-432-3256

Play:

- General visitor info: 866-224-7233, www.discoverbisbee.com
- Bisbee Gay Pride, June 18-20, 2010, www.bisbeepride.com
- Work on your glutes-stairways and hiking paths are everywhere, www.bisbee1000.org
- Psychic Readings, Donna Amalong - The Source Within, 28 Main St., 520-432-2000
- Art Herman Sculpture Studio, 74 Main St, 520-432-3516
- Belleza Gallery, 27 Main St., 520-432-5877, www.bellezagallery.org
- Sam Poe Gallery, whimsical sculpture, 24 Main St., 520-432-5338, www.sampoegallery.com
- Finders Keepers Antiques, Lesbian-owned, 81 Main St., 520-432-2900, www.fkeepers.com
- Lavender Jeep Tours-the only gay thing about it is the colour of the jeep, but the tours are excellent and informative, 520-732-7325, www.lavenderjeeptours.com
- Old Bisbee Ghost Tours, 520-432-3088, www.oldbisbeeghosttour.com
- Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, excellent history & mining info, a Smithsonian Affiliate Museum, No. 5 Copper Queen Plaza, 520-432-7071, www.bisbeemuseum.org
- Queen Mine Tour, includes demonstrations and underground experience, 866-432-2071, www.queenminetour.com



Funky artists and galleries are easy to find in Bisbee. Photo: Randall Shirley.



Doublejack Guesthouse is a stunning, renovated miner's "shack". Photo: Randall Shirley.