



# PROGRESSIVE PRAGUE

From the Mezipatra Film Festival to absurdist art, the Czech capital proudly paves its own path.

BY KELS Y CHAUVIN



Prague's Old Town

Prague is a picturesque city whose worn cobblestones only hint at its long, rich history. With its Gothic spires and brooding medieval architecture, it could be mistaken for a metropolis lost in the past. In reality, however, the Czech capital is a thoroughly modern destination that, yes, prizes its time-tested landmarks, but also puts forth the face of the future.

From the Žižkov TV Tower to the eye-catching public art adorning the cityscape, Prague has a certain stylistic audacity befitting the home of the Velvet Revolution. Back in 1989, the Czech Republic was ready for a new dawn. Twenty-six years later, the Czech people command artistic sensibilities that express both irreverence and tolerance.

Naturally, the LGBT community fits beautifully into that bold spirit, and the Mezipatra Queer Film Festival ([mezipatra.cz/en](http://mezipatra.cz/en)) is at its heart. A decade before the

first Prague Pride, this festival was bravely screening gay-centric films. Mezipatra was launched in 2000 in Brno, the second-largest Czech city, and still takes place both there and in Prague every November.

The festival has grown steadily since the early days: In 2014, about 12,000 enthusiastic attendees viewed both documentaries and narrative fiction, both short and feature films. Filmmakers often attend, telling their communities' diverse stories from places like Russia, Brazil, South Korea, Australia, Venezuela, and beyond. (FYI, all films are screened with English translations.)

Larisa Blichová, the festival's publicity director, says 2014 brought a welcome wave of special guests and perspectives.

"We tried—as we do every year—to have more lesbian and transgender films. It is hard to find enough of them," says Blichová. "Our international guests were very special in 2014. A highlight was hosting writer Eli Levén and transgender actress Saga

Becker, who brought their movie *Something Must Break*. The film won our main prize, and Becker [went on to win the Best Actress Award at the Guldbagge ceremony, Sweden's Oscars]. We were very happy we met them and that our jury honored this





special film. We think it's a great moment for transgender actors."

The film screenings are just part of what makes Mezipatra stand out among all the great LGBT events across Europe.

"It's also about socializing, meeting new people, meeting authors, and perhaps learning new things, while attending discussions and other events," says Blichová. "We have a nice 'off' program—with chill outs, parties with international music, brunches, filmmaker conversations."

Prague of course offers plenty of year-round queer events, along with its fair share of cool, friendly bars, restaurants, and cafés.

Lucia Kajankova, Mezipatra's program director, recommends her favorite watering holes: "The hidden gems in Old Town are two queer café-bars, Q Café ([q-cafe.cz/en/](http://q-cafe.cz/en/)) and Erra ([cafeerra.cz/](http://cafeerra.cz/))," she says. "Or you can travel 15 minutes outside the city center to hip Vinohrady and visit Piano (Milesovska 10) or the new lesbian bar Sapfo ([sapfo.cz/](http://sapfo.cz/)). If you're a lesbian who likes beer, take a tour of the Staropramen Brewery ([pivovary-staropramen.cz/](http://pivovary-staropramen.cz/)), or try the country's best at the legendary U Zlatého Tygra beer hall ([uzlatehotygra.cz/en/](http://uzlatehotygra.cz/en/)).

Old Town ("Staré Město" in Czech) is the main tourist area, as well as the place to immerse yourself in the centuries-old

atmosphere of romantic Prague. There you'll find world-famous landmarks like the Charles Bridge (circa 1357), the Astronomical Clock (1410), the Powder Gate (1475), and the gorgeous 1905 Art-Nouveau/Art-Deco Municipal House ([obecnidum.cz/en/](http://obecnidum.cz/en/)).

A walking tour with the boys from Prague4Gay ([prague4gay.com](http://prague4gay.com)) is a great way to take it all in—along with some great LGBT history. Partners Petr Prokopíček and Trevor Sage offer group and individual tours that offer both popular and less famous tales of the city. If you're lucky, they'll take you to one of Old Town's coolest gay spots, Café Café ([cafe-cafe.cz/](http://cafe-cafe.cz/)), where you can recharge on coffee and baked treats.

Prague4Gay's website serves as a great resource for queer gatherings, like the monthly lesbian Freedom party ([facebook.com/freedomnight.cz](http://facebook.com/freedomnight.cz)), usually held at the thumping P.M. Club ([pmclub.net](http://pmclub.net)). The lez-centric dive JampaDampa ([jampadampa1.webnode.cz](http://jampadampa1.webnode.cz)) is a versatile club hosting burlesque, karaoke, and theme nights.

And then there's Pride ([praguepride.cz/en/](http://praguepride.cz/en/)). This year, the festivities will take over Prague from August 10 to 16, celebrating the great strides made toward global LGBT equality and gay rights.

Prague Pride is "a touch of punk, a touch of professionalism, all-around inspiration," proclaims its website. The organization goes on to express the spirit of this courageous community in what could be the universal LGBT maxim for the people: "So our youth is not afraid and the majority just get used to it."



Mezipatra Queer Film Festival