

YOUREX

FORMERLY EXPRESS MAGAZINE

HOTTEST
PICS FROM
WINTER
PRIDE



**ABBIE
CHATFIELD**

THE BISEXUAL
FEMINIST
STANDING UP
TO ONLINE HATE



**PRISCILLA
QUEEN OF
THE DESERT**

HEADLINES
AUCKLAND'S
PACKED
SEPTEMBER

**FINDING QUEER
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WHY LOCAL
BODY
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MATTER



**MEET PALMY
DRAG FEST
PIONEER
RHUBARB
ROUGE**

**RUGBY LEGEND
KEEGAN HIRST'S
RESILIENCE AFTER ROCK BOTTOM**

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FROM THE EDITOR



How do you take YOUR EX?

Whether you prefer it online or in print, YOUR EX is versatile!

As I type, we are about to send our September issue to print, and then head off to Karangahape Road to celebrate Family Bar's milestone 20th birthday! You will find the pictures from Family's birthday online first at our fabulous new-look website, yourex.co.nz.

Whether you are scrolling from your phone, tablet, or laptop, yourex.co.nz is perfectly formatted to give you the best experience, whichever way you like to check out YOUR EX.

This issue we begin our series of interviews with one of the world's most iconic queer celebrities — and who better to start off with than the gorgeous and inspirational Rugby League god, Keegan Hirst.

Talking exclusively to YOUR EX, Keegan humbly shares his story of hitting rock bottom and forcing himself to live authentically after realising he had nothing left to lose. It is inspirational how he turned his life around and now coaches others to do the same.

And it doesn't end with Keegan. Some believe Australia's hottest podcaster, Abbie Chatfield, helped swing the Australian election in Anthony Albanese's favour. She talks about treading the tricky tightrope of being a bi role model in a straight relationship as part of this jam-packed September issue.

Olly & Matt



COVER | RUGBY LEAGUE'S FIRST OPENLY GAY PLAYER, KEEGAN HIRST

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YOUR EX's TALENTS



ANGUS MCDUGALL

Angus is a *New Zealand Fashion Week* ambassador and *Fashion in the Field* judge, who channels his love for the fashion and beauty industries into crafting recommendations that celebrate inclusivity, individuality, and self-expression.



MICHAEL STEVENS

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AUCKLAND IN SPRING: SEQUINS, SIPS AND SWEET ESCAPES



From sequinned drag shows to gothic theatre, wine festivals, art takeovers, and boutique escapes—Auckland's spring season promises culture, cocktails, and chic staycations.

Spring in Tāmaki Makaurau doesn't ease in quietly. It arrives in sequins, humming a show tune, with a glass of pinot in hand and a taste for the dramatic. Suddenly the nights are longer, the harbour sparkles just that little bit brighter, and the city is buzzing with reasons to head out. One evening you'll be under The Civic's starlit ceiling as Anita Wig'it belts her heart out in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*. The next, you're swirling Syrah at Winetopia, or leaning forward in your seat as you watch *Mary: The Birth of Frankenstein* cast gothic shadows across the ASB Waterfront Theatre. Throw in the All Blacks, chocolate and coffee indulgence, edgy art at Eden Park, and hotel rooms that beg for a weekend staycation, and you've got a season that insists on a little glamour.

A TASTE OF DRAMA

The Viaduct is made for theatre and wine in equal measure. On 3-4 October, Winetopia takes over the Viaduct Events Centre. This is New Zealand's largest wine celebration, where



Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour.

you can sip your way through hundreds of varietals, join cheeky masterclasses, and discover a winemaker or two who will absolutely convince you to switch allegiances.

Just down the road at the ASB Waterfront Theatre, on now to 7 September, gothic shadows take over the stage. *Mary: The Birth of Frankenstein* reimagines the night Mary Shelley first conceived her monster – get ready for thunder, lightning, and a whole lot of candlelit imagination.



ASB Waterfront Theatre.

This pairing is perfectly anchored by the Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, a sleek hotel perched right on the water. From here, everything is walkable. Before curtain time, wander to Baduzzi on North Wharf for handmade pasta and Italian soul food. Or slide into a table at Bivacco at Viaduct Harbour, where glossy interiors and a killer cocktail list are matched only by marina views that twinkle as evening sets in.

Choose your Auckland evening: the drama of Mary's imagination, or the swirl of wine glasses at Winetopia. Either way, the Viaduct serves it with style.

DISCOVER AUCKLAND × YOUR EX



PHOTO | SONNA STUDIOS

The Grill.

GLITTER AND GRIT

From 12 September to 4 October, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* camps it up at The Civic. With drag star Anita Wig'it at the wheel, sequins shimmer, pop anthems soar, and a story of love and self-expression unfolds under The Civic's starry ceiling. It's spectacle, sass and sentiment in one outrageous package.

Base yourself at the Horizon by SkyCity, just a short stroll away. Here, five-star rooms spill you directly into the buzz of the central city, and SkyCity's dining precinct is on your doorstep. Pre-show, slide into a booth at Fed St Deli, where elevated comfort classics hit the spot, or lean into The Grill, one of Auckland's most polished steakhouse experiences.

When the curtain drops, the night doesn't have to end. A short wander will land you at Caretaker, Auckland's most revered cocktail bar. Behind an unmarked door, bartenders mix bespoke drinks based on your mood, your taste, or even your wildest whim. It's the perfect way to keep the glamour alive a little longer. Save a little energy for the morning though, and dive into Wētā Workshop Unleashed at SkyCity, a cinematic playground of fantasy creatures and film sets that offer a gritty, surreal counterpoint to Priscilla's glitz.

CHIC CORNERS

Not all weekends need centre-stage drama. Some are about finding the city's stylish corners and letting them reveal themselves one boutique and one plate at a time.

The Hotel Britomart, with its five Green Star sustainability creds and design-forward details, is the ultimate base for a boutique escape. Step outside and you're in the middle of cobbled Britomart, a precinct buzzing with independent boutiques, galleries and dining.

Spend the day browsing Fabric, a fashion insider's favourite with international and local labels curated like a gallery. As evening sets in, you're spoilt for dining choices. Kingi, inside the hotel, celebrates sustainable seafood with inventive flair, while just steps away, Ghost Street beckons underground with bold Chinese flavours in a dramatic subterranean space.

The beauty of this pocket of Auckland is that it's both intimate and connected. From here, you're minutes from the ferry terminal, the Viaduct,



Hotel Britomart.



Kingi at Hotel Britomart.

and the city's cultural heart. But you may just decide to stay tucked into this chic quarter and make Britomart your entire night out.

BIG STAGES, BIGGER ENERGY

Sometimes you need your culture loud, vast and unapologetic. Eden Park obliges.

From 18–21 September, the stadium is reimagined for Art in the Park, where some of New Zealand's top artists take over the concourses and stands, turning sport's cathedral into an open-air gallery. Wander, browse, and maybe even buy, all in the charged atmosphere of a venue more used to roars than whispers.

A week later, on 27 September, those roars return. The All Blacks face Australia in one of rugby's fiercest rivalries, filling Eden Park with energy that's impossible to replicate anywhere else. High stakes, high drama, and a crowd united by anticipation — it's Auckland at its loudest.

For something sweeter, head to the Viaduct Events Centre for the Chocolate and Coffee Festival, on 27–28 September. Here, artisan roasters and chocolatiers gather to tempt, caffeinate and delight. It's the perfect palate cleanser after the intensity of the rugby or the boldness of the art.

Choose your Auckland day: canvases, tackles, or truffles. All three deliver drama, just in different flavours.

MAKE IT A SEASON

Spring in Auckland is less a calendar and more a mood. It's a swirl of sequins under The Civic's ceiling, a glass raised at Winetopia, a fashion find in Britomart, and the sound of Eden Park erupting as the All Blacks cross the line. It's indulgent plates by the harbour, a hotel room you won't want to leave, and a nightcap at Caretaker that feels like it could go on forever. Mornings begin with either a flat white or a fantastical monster at Wētā Workshop Unleashed, because why not?

Whatever combination you choose — Sofitel Viaduct Harbour with Baduzzi and Mary, Horizon by SkyCity with steak and Priscilla, or Hotel Britomart with Ghost Street and boutiques — Auckland this spring is a city that insists on being experienced, not just visited.

Discover more and start planning at aucklandnz.com



The All Blacks play at Eden Park.



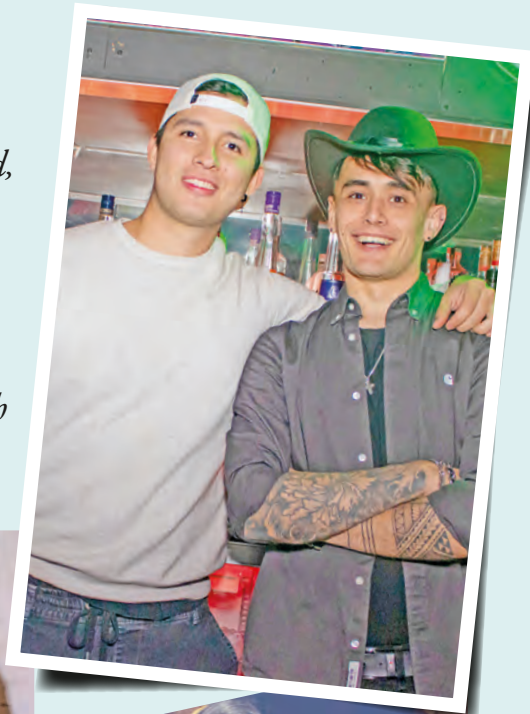
Ghost Street.

PHOTO | ANNA KIDMAN

FAMILY BAR SHINES ON

*New Zealand's largest gay nightclub, Family Bar, has just marked a major milestone—celebrating 20 fabulous years in the heart of K Road, just days after **YOUR EX** went to print.*

A key reason for the venue's enduring popularity? Their high-energy drag shows, lighting up the stage every Friday and Saturday at 1am, featuring beloved drag royalty including Miss Ribena, Kola Gin, Kita Mean, and a rotating line-up of performers. Every show is packed with charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent—and best of all, there's no cover charge.



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PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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COACH



RUGBY, RESILIENCE, AND REINVENTION:

KEEGAN HIRST'S LIFE AFTER ROCK BOTTOM

Rugby league's first openly gay player, Keegan Hirst, talks to Oliver Hall about coming out, coaching gay men, and confronting heart failure.

We speak in early August over Zoom from Keegan Hirst's home in Devon, a perfect spot for Britain's hot summer. The former professional rugby league player grins as he pans his laptop camera toward the window. "It's nice," he confirms, "very green and near the sea."

For nearly two decades, Keegan's life was defined by the bruising collisions of rugby league. Yet his story is more than tackles, tries, and trophies. It's about survival, coming out under intense scrutiny, rebuilding after personal crisis, and most recently, facing a diagnosis that would shake even the toughest of athletes.

"I WAS AT ROCK BOTTOM"

Back in 2015, Keegan made headlines around the world when he became Britain's first openly gay professional rugby league player. But behind that landmark moment was a story of deep struggle.

"To put it bluntly, I was at rock bottom," he recalls. "My marriage had ended because I was drinking a lot, taking drugs, and I wasn't in a good place at all because I was closeted... I'd hoped that my being gay, my sexuality, would change, go away, or that I'd be able to get over it."

The pressure of hiding who he was pushed him to self-destruction. "I tried everything I could to be straight. I got married when I was 23. My daughter was born when I was 20, my son at 24. I was desperate not to be gay and really struggled with that, numbing myself with booze and drugs. That obviously had a massive impact on my relationship with my ex-wife, my children, my teammates.

"It got to the point where both of us agreed that this was not what we wanted our kids growing up thinking was a relationship. So we broke up. Just before that, I had been suicidal. I didn't think coming out was an option, but I didn't want to leave my kids. If I had committed

suicide, no one would have known why because I hadn't spoken to anybody about it, people would have blamed themselves, and I didn't want that."

After the separation, Keegan finally confronted his truth. "I got a bit of distance and perspective. I was able to sit and evaluate things, accept that I was gay, probably subconsciously I'd known for a long time, but I was desperate for it not to be true. I thought, What do I do with this information? Do I live in the closet? Do I tell people? Because I was at rock bottom, I just thought, What's the worst that can happen? I'd love to tell you it was because I was brave and wanted to be a trailblazer, but it wasn't, I just thought it couldn't get any worse."

The coming-out process began quietly. "I came out personally to my ex-wife first, then my mum, friends, teammates, and a few months later it became public."

GOING PUBLIC

When the story did break, it wasn't by his choice. "Word had filtered out among rugby teams," he explains. "My coach at the time, John Kear, did a lot with the media and had been really supportive of me. I was captain at the time, so we spoke a lot anyway. He said the media had got hold of it and were going to run a story. His advice was to get out in front of it."

In the middle of a divorce and raising two young kids, Keegan had to decide quickly. "The Sunday Mirror and The Sun both wanted to do it, I picked the Sunday Mirror because I thought it would be less salacious of the two."

ADVICE FOR YOUNG QUEER ATHLETES

To young LGBTQ+ athletes in New Zealand who might be struggling in traditionally masculine sports, Keegan advises, "Don't do what I did, don't bottle it up thinking it will go away.

"As with all challenges, it's best to deal with them head on rather than sticking your head in the sand and hoping they disappear. Speak to somebody about it, someone you know, someone you can confide in, a family member, maybe even a coach. If you feel you don't have those people around you, there are always helplines you can reach out to."

Bottling it up, he says, poisoned his mental health. "We all catastrophise and think of the worst possible outcomes... None of that happened to me. In fact, my life is infinitely

better now than it was when I was living inauthentically. It's usually not as bad as we fear."

FREEDOM ON THE FIELD

Coming out didn't just transform Keegan's personal life, it improved his professional game as well.

"I played a hell of a lot better after I came out, Batley had our highest ever finish in the league. I think me coming out helped foster an environment where people felt they could be open and share things, we had players going through divorces, with drinking problems, gambling problems, and it brought us closer together. On paper, we weren't a very good team, but that openness helped us play really well."

The team's success saw Keegan signed to play Super League, an achievement that highlighted his professional growth as a player.

BECOMING A RELUCTANT ROLE MODEL

For many, his decision to come out made him a trailblazer. But Keegan resists the label of "role model."

"When people called me a role model after I came out, I thought, I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. Coming out doesn't mean you've got everything figured out, you still have internalised homophobia, shame, guilt, and other things to work through.

"There's this idea that role models have everything sorted, are aspirational and inspirational, and never make mistakes, that's not me. I wouldn't feel comfortable pretending to be that. All I try to do is act in a way where I can look in the mirror and like the person I see."

ONE LAST RUN

Though he officially retired from professional rugby league in 2020, Keegan returned for a season in 2023. "When COVID happened, my coaching business took off, and I started thinking maybe I didn't need to get beaten up for a living," he laughs, but one international news story left him feeling that he had unfinished business with rugby.

In 2022, seven Manly Sea Eagles players refused to wear rainbow-striped jerseys. The backlash reminded Keegan why visibility still matters.

"Sport mirrors society," he says. "We've seen a huge backlash against trans people, and I worry that it won't stop there and rights could be rolled back."

So he returned to his hometown team, Batley.

"A couple of other teams had offered, but I only wanted to play for Batley. We got to the final at Wembley, which was a really nice way to finish my career."

His time there and at Super League team Wakefield left him feeling hopeful for the next generation of players.

CONTINUED...

... CONTINUED

"I'd go on a night out and say, 'I'm going to the gay bar,' and the younger lads would want to come along. They were confident in their sexuality and didn't see it as a threat to their masculinity," he tells us, recalling how quickly attitudes shifted once teammates knew someone gay in their midst.

"Before I came out, I used to hear homophobic language in the changing rooms, but it wasn't aimed at anyone, it was just poor vocabulary and a lack of education. Once I came out, I told people not to say it, and they'd apologise immediately. People were accommodating and accepting when faced with a real-life situation.

"So I hope that for younger athletes, they won't have to wait until after their careers to come out, they'll just come through as openly gay athletes, and it won't be a big deal."

PARENTING OPENLY

As an openly gay parent, Keegan's greatest joy has been raising his kids in an environment of honesty. "My kids were 7 and 3 when I came out. I explained, 'Daddy might have a girlfriend or a boyfriend,' and that was that.

"My daughter understood straight away. My son took a bit longer, I've had to come out to him a few times over the years, but he gets it now. We have an incredible relationship. I've always been as honest as possible with what's appropriate to share, and we talk openly about challenges. My son has dealt with homophobic bullying at school, but it hasn't hindered our relationship at all, if anything, it's strengthened it."

COACHING, PODCASTS, AND PURPOSE

Today, much of Keegan's work focuses on helping others. Alongside his partner, YouTuber Joel Wood, he co-hosts the *Happy Healthy Homo* podcast, now in its fifth season. The show explores representation, challenges assumptions about the gay community, and invites guests and listeners into conversations about living happier, healthier lives.

Keegan has also founded *Gay Men's Coaching*, a holistic online coaching platform with clients from around the world, including a few based in Aotearoa. What started as personal training has grown into a full wellbeing service that combines nutrition, training, mindset work, and professional therapeutic support.

Working as a personal trainer with a lot of gay clients, Keegan started noticing patterns. "People trying to make themselves smaller, overly people-pleasing, tying their productivity and output to their worth."

In *Gay Men's Coaching*, Keegan wanted to offer the support he had needed when he was struggling, and the programme has seen remarkable results, from weight loss to career growth, from men coming out to finding partners and getting married.



"Change doesn't have to be bad, I decided to see what I could do and how I could adapt. Feeling sorry for myself wouldn't change anything."

For readers curious about joining, Keegan suggests starting with a message on Instagram or Facebook. He talks to every new client first, ensuring they're a good fit for the community. From there, they receive one-on-one coaching, group calls, daily WhatsApp contact, and opportunities to join in-person events across the globe.

LIVING WITH HEART FAILURE

But just as life was settling into a new rhythm, in late 2024 Keegan was hit with a diagnosis that forced him to reassess everything.

After struggling during what should have been a routine jog, doctors discovered Keegan had dilated cardiomyopathy and heart failure. His

heart's ejection fraction had plummeted to just 20%, a fraction of the normal 60–80%.

"At first, I panicked," he admits. "I made sure everything was sorted for the kids in case I died. Once that was done, I struggled with the loss of training, socialising, and a big part of my identity."

It would have been easy to succumb to despair. But Keegan refused. "After a few months, I decided I didn't want to be defined by the diagnosis. You have two options, curl up in a ball and let life happen to you, or take control where you can. I'd love to say I switched to that mindset straight away, but I didn't. I had to work through it.

"Change doesn't have to be bad, I decided to see what I could do and how I could adapt. Feeling sorry for myself wouldn't change anything."

From coming-out to his final match at Wembley, from podcasting to coaching gay men across the world, Keegan Hirst's journey has always been about defying expectations, even his own. Now, his story is a reminder that even when life delivers blows heavier than any rugby tackle, it's possible to stand back up.

GIVEAWAYS

Priscilla Queen of the Desert – 5 x Double Passes

We've got 5 x double passes to give away for **Wednesday 17 September** to the fabulously feel-good *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* at The Civic! Based on the iconic film, this glittering musical bursts with outrageous costumes, friendship, and a hit parade of bangers like *"I Will Survive"* and *"Hot Stuff"*. It's a heartwarming, high-camp joyride that'll leave you dancing out the door. On now 'til 4 October!

aucklandlive.co.nz



Silo Theatre's D.R.A.G – 2 x Double Passes



We've got 2 x double passes to the preview of *D.R.A.G (Dressed Resembling A God)* at Q Theatre on **Thursday 13 November**. Created by longtime Silo designer Daniel Williams and starring Hugo Grrrl, Adena Delights and special guests, this bold new show spills the tea and celebrates the art of drag. Don't miss this riotous night of joy, music and rebellion.

silotheatre.co.nz

Heartbreak Hotel – 3 x Double Passes

Fresh from London, the award-winning *Heartbreak Hotel* hits Aotearoa! We've got a double pass for Circa Theatre (WLG), Nelson Arts Festival, and Tauranga Arts Festival. This science-meets-synth sensation unpacks love, loss and the messy magic in between. Brutally funny and painfully real—this one hits right in the feels.

heartbreakhotel.co.nz



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INFLUENCE

ABBIE CHATFIELD:

AUSTRALIA'S BOLD, BISEXUAL, UNFILTERED FEMINIST FOR A NEW GENERATION

Abbie Chatfield talks to Oliver Hall about bi-erasure, online trolling, feminism, and a career built on always saying what she really thinks.



There's a raw intimacy in seeing Abbie Chatfield sitting alone, framed by rows of empty crimson seats. It's a striking image that reflects the essence of her public life: defiant, vulnerable, and unapologetically herself. Owning her space and inviting others to share it.

The podcaster has never shied away from honesty in her public life and is frank about the complexities of her sexuality.

"AN UNFINISHED PART OF MY LIFE"

"I get offered a lot of 'queer' jobs, like hosting Mardi Gras, but being in a straight-presenting relationship, I always decline, because I don't feel it's right to take opportunities from people who are more marginalised than I am," she says.

She names the paradox, she's openly bisexual but in a relationship with musician Adam Hyde, who is straight. For Abbie, it means acknowledging straight privilege while still holding onto her identity. "I am bisexual, but I don't want to take up too much space in queer media as a white, cis woman dating a cis, straight man."

Her personal journey has been marked by frustration. Growing up in Brisbane, she says back then queer culture was scarce. "If you were queer, you moved away. There was one mega club, The Beat, which, as a 'baby bi' trying to explore, was intimidating."

Moving to Sydney should have offered new opportunities, but lockdowns interrupted. Then came the sting of rejection online. "Now I'm banned from dating apps because people recognise my picture and report my profile as fake. So circumstances have limited how much I could explore that side of myself, and it still feels like an unfinished part of my life."

And then there's the sting of bi-erasure. "I've been told I'm 'queer-baiting' because I haven't had a relationship with a woman," she says. While Abbie believes conversations about representation are important, she also warns against letting them be weaponised. "The bigger threat is from patriarchal, heteronormative society, and how it can capitalise on perceived infighting (within LGBTQ+ communities). Right now, with global conservative pushback, we need unity."

COMEDY, CATHARSIS, AND THE TRAUMA DUMP TOUR

On tour, Abbie transforms vulnerability into humour. *The Trauma Dump Tour* is a two-hour solo show featuring a PowerPoint, no script, and plenty of improvisation, an approach that works with her ADHD rather than against it.

The show revolves around three of her worst dating disasters. One story is funny, another

absurd, and one deeply heavy, with a trigger warning for abuse. "I hope people walk away learning from my mistakes," she tells us.

"Now I'm in a very happy relationship with Adam, I've added more lessons of encouragement to notice red flags earlier, but still mainly comedy, kooky, funny, heartfelt stories that I haven't told anywhere else, mainly to avoid being sued!"

THE WEIGHT OF THE "FEMINIST" LABEL

Public discourse has painted Abbie as a feminist figurehead, something she resists. "Sometimes people call me a feminist, then get mad at me for 'thinking' I am one. I've never claimed it, I'm just speaking my opinions."

The harder part, she explains, is how conservative outlets weaponise the label. "Right-wing media use 'feminist' to generate hate clicks. People suggest I should just stop talking politics. I'm not trying to be controversial, I just share my thoughts."

The disparity is sharp when compared to men in the same space. "Adam can post something as basic as 'men shouldn't hit women' and be hailed as a feminist god. I love that he says it, but it's frustrating to see the praise he gets while women saying the same, or less, get death threats."

SURVIVING SOCIAL MEDIA

Abbie has taken breaks from social media for her mental health, and she encourages others to do the same. "People say, 'Don't worry, they're not real people,' but it's hard to believe that when you're reading 'shame, shame, shame' in your DMs."

TikTok, she says, is especially draining. "I took a month off and dreaded going back. Instagram feels slower, but TikTok's constant heightened state can't be good for mental health."

Even short breaks help. "If you go viral, which is awful unless you're used to attention, remember it's all contained within your phone. Put it away for a week and you can reset your nervous system."

Rather than isolating when she's struggling, she now makes an effort to connect with friends. "After COVID, it became too easy to call isolation 'self-care' when it often just makes things worse. Going for a walk with a friend or hearing about their bad date is better than sitting alone with your thoughts."

FIGHTING IDEAS, NOT INDIVIDUALS

When it comes to figures like Andrew Tate, Abbie admits she wavers between ignoring and responding. "At first, I thought we should ignore him to avoid giving him oxygen. But progressives are the minority, and there's a

"Attack the argument, not the individual."

global right-wing movement happening. Right now, I think it's important to call things out, but focus on the ideas, not just the person."

Her mantra is simple: "Attack the argument, not the individual."

THE ALBANESE INTERVIEW

A career milestone came in 2022 when Abbie interviewed Anthony Albanese ahead of the Australian election. It was one of his first interviews of the year, and she describes it as nerve-wracking. "There are policies of his I don't agree with, but I wanted him to win over Peter Dutton. At the time, the Liberals were polling ahead, and there were no formal policies yet, just a swell of right-wing support."

She wanted to hold him accountable while not damaging his chances. The gamble paid off. "I got thousands of DMs from people who had never voted before saying they learned something. My favourite feedback was from a friend's dad, a lifelong Liberal voter in Queensland, who voted Labor because of that interview."

REALITY TV SLUT-SHAMING AND BUILDING A CAREER FROM IT

Abbie first entered the public eye on *The Bachelor*, where she was given what she calls a "villain edit." Her "crime" was being open about sex at 23. "The producers never made me mean, just confident and horny. But it was a culture shock. It made me realise how conservative Australia can be."

Her edit was framed negatively, with "mean sexy" tones and even snake sound effects. Yet a year later, another contestant was given a fun, flirty edit for similar behaviour.

"That contrast made me more media savvy and less afraid to speak my mind," she tells us. "People already hated me for things I didn't think were wrong, so I figured I may as well say what I actually think."

That defiant philosophy has become a career built on raw candour, sharp humour, and a refusal to be silenced. For Abbie, being unfiltered is no longer just survival, it's her signature.

The Trauma Dump Tour plays Christchurch's James Hay Theatre on Wednesday 10, Wellington's Opera House on Friday 12, and Auckland's Bruce Mason Centre on Saturday 13 September. Tickets from [ticketmaster.co.nz](https://www.ticketmaster.co.nz)



PRISCILLA HITS THE CIVIC:

THREE STARS, THREE STORIES, ONE GLITTER-FUELLED ROAD TRIP

*When the bus rolls into Auckland's Civic Theatre this month, it won't just be carrying frocks, feathers, and Kylie anthems — it'll be stacked with three of Aotearoa's most dazzling talents, ready to serve **Priscilla Queen of the Desert: The Musical** with all the camp, heart, and sequins it can handle.*

From the elegance of Bernadette to the chaos of Felicia and the heart of Tick, the show's three core roles are in the hands of Anita Wigl'it (Nick Hall), Jason Parker, and Andrew Allemora. Each has their own story of how *Priscilla* shaped them, and how they plan to make this Kiwi staging one to remember.

ANITA WIGL'IT — LIVING THE BERNADETTE DREAM

Before Anita Wigl'it became one of Aotearoa's most recognisable drag queens, Nick Hall was an usher at The Civic in 2008, working the original international touring production of *Priscilla*



"It was the first big musical I'd ever ushered," Anita recalls. "The first time I'd really seen drag performers. I was so inspired, especially by Bernadette, played so brilliantly by Tony Sheldon. This fabulous musical is the whole reason why I started drag!"

Seventeen years later, Anita is stepping into Bernadette's heels — a role she calls her "ultimate dream". "Bernadette is a former showgirl, now an older woman escaping heartbreak. She's never found true love, hasn't had the family she yearns for, but she's full of heart, hilarious lines, and love for her fellow characters. I see so much of her inside myself."

MUSICAL

Playing a trans woman as a male-identifying actor is something Anita approached with care. “There are some opinions that male-identifying actors (like myself) shouldn’t play trans characters, and I absolutely see this argument. In a perfect world, I think that ideally a trans woman would play Bernadette, and James (our fabulous Director) approached trans friends of mine when the search began. I ended up with the role, and I therefore think it is my duty to tell a trans story with as much authenticity and love as possible. When I told my trans friends about being cast (including the Australian icon and former Les Girl, Vonni), they were absolutely delighted for me and gave me their blessings. I told them that I want to do Bernadette justice and use this opportunity to show an audience how wonderful a trans role is. To do this, in the programme I have dedicated my run to the trans community — people who, like Bernadette, put so much joy into the world but who can receive so much hate. I did this in the hope that audience members will read this and think about their own thoughts towards the trans community, and how this wonderful group should be cherished.”

Anita hopes the show inspires queer and trans audience members just as it did for her in 2008. “I dream that it affects people the same way it affected me — that they see themselves in the characters and feel amazing.”

JASON PARKER — FELICIA WITH SEQUINS (AND ABS)

For singer-songwriter Jason Parker, seeing *Priscilla* was a glittering permission slip to be himself.

“I was living in Sydney, deep in my ‘baby gay’ era,” he says. “Binge-watching *Drag Race*, going to the gay bars, and then I saw *Priscilla*. Seeing effeminate queer people being celebrated for

their campiness warmed me right up. It felt like someone had just handed me a glitter-covered permission slip to be myself.”

Jason plays Adam (Felicia) — “the attention-seeking class clown with a big mouth and even bigger dreams”. The character’s unfiltered flamboyance is a perfect match for Jason’s own stage energy. “Honestly... she reminds me of someone I know very well.”

Making the leap from the NZ music scene into musical theatre has been a joy. “The highlight? Being surrounded by such insanely talented divas who made me feel instantly at home. The challenge? Resisting the urge to sneak the costumes home — I’m a sucker for silver-sequinned abs on a catsuit.”

Jason’s own career has been full of queer creativity, from his *Rolling Stone*-praised EP *Fairy Bread* to founding Little Gay In, a showcase uplifting queer artists and music lovers nationwide. “Felicia would absolutely approve,” he laughs. “I hope young queer audiences leave *Priscilla* feeling inspired to experiment with their creativity. Colour outside the lines. Express yourself. As everyone knows, when a queer person puts on their first wig, an angel gets its wings.”

ANDREW ALLEMORA — TICK’S BIG HEART

Andrew Allemora’s first viewing of *Priscilla* was a crash course in queer culture courtesy of his first boyfriend. “I could name every book of the Bible but not a single drag queen,” he laughs. “Watching *Priscilla* was one of the first times I understood that campiness can be a pure source of joy. It helped me hate that part of myself a little less.”

Andrew plays Tick (Mitzi) — the character whose story sets the iconic drag road trip in

motion. “It’s a juicy part,” he says. “This is actually my second time playing Tick. The first was a much smaller production a few years ago, and I couldn’t resist doing it again at my favourite theatre in the world — The Civic.”

His CV spans reality TV (*The Traitors*), standout turns in shows like *Hairspray*, *Avenue Q*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, plus five years in New York City working on Broadway, marketing for shows like *Mean Girls*. “Being surrounded by all that camp helped me become more comfortable in my skin — and it elevated my definition of a great show.”

Andrew hopes Gen Z audiences see *Priscilla* as a celebration of queer joy. “It was rebellious and shocking in its time — one of the first mainstream stories centring unapologetic LGBT characters — and it focused more on joy than trauma. Revisiting it now is a way to respect the old-school queerdos who paved the way for *Drag Race* to be normalised.”

THE MUSICAL MAGIC

For anyone who’s only seen the 1994 film, all three stars promise the stage show takes everything you love and dials it up.

“Think of it like the film but turned up to eleven,” says Jason. “The ‘wildlife’ is played by some of Auckland’s best dancers, and Dame Edna is alive, well, and still holding court in the outback.”

Anita adds: “The dance numbers are dazzling, the costumes are insane, and the heart is even bigger than you remember.”

Andrew sums it up: “It’s a bloody hoot! You’ll laugh your tits off, you’ll know every song... it’s non-stop gay joy.”

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

In a climate where queer art can still face hostility, all three actors see *Priscilla* as a love letter to resilience and visibility.

“By being a drag performer, I still experience homophobia and transphobia weekly,” Anita says. “This story of characters who rise above prejudice is still so relevant.”

Andrew agrees: “Supporting rainbow art at the box office matters — especially when the world is getting more hostile towards queer people in general.”

Jason hopes the show’s unapologetic energy gives audiences permission to take up space. “It’s part fantasy, part homecoming,” he says. “And it’s a reminder that you can be exactly who you are, no matter where you come from.”

Priscilla Queen of the Desert: The Musical plays Auckland’s The Civic from 12 September to 4 October. Tickets from [ticketmaster.co.nz](https://www.ticketmaster.co.nz)

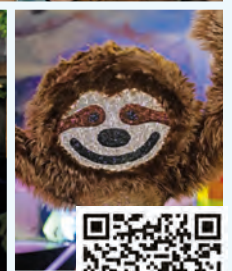
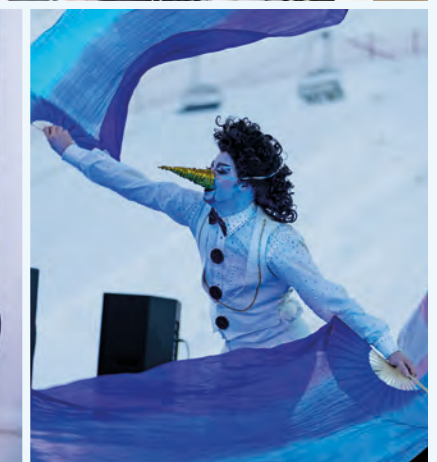


BEST OF THE WINTER PRIDE FESTIVAL 2025

Queenstown lit up once again for Winter Pride, bringing colour, connection, and unapologetic joy to the mountains. Festival organiser Sam Coulthard described the event as “a fantastic celebration of diversity and identity,” and our pictorial captures exactly that. From the wild energy of Aussie Outback and Fierce Farmyard, to the sultry seduction of She Skyn, the fiery spectacle of Hell, and the chill vibes of Lavender Lounge, every party sparkled with queer pride. Here are our favourite moments from an unforgettable week in Queenstown.



OUT & ABOUT



Winter Pride Festival
PHOTOS | ALEX RYAN
@alexryanphoto



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OUT & ABOUT

WINTER PRIDE'S WILD FUN FINALE PARTY

Winter Pride 2025 went out with a bang at the wedding-themed Finale Party, "Love Out Loud." With big beats, queer joy, and safe spaces for all, organiser Sam Coulthard summed it up: "Lots of fun...but time to recover!"



Winter Pride Festival
Queenstown Memorial Hall
PHOTOS | ALEX RYAN @alexryanphoto



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DREAM IN BLOOM

FAIRYTALE

PHOTOGRAPHY | **GASTON BARRIOS**
@GASTONBARRIOS

Spring arrives with no apology,
spilling colour across the dark,
a garden rising through sleep,
florals pressing soft against skin.

The body becomes meadow,
muscle stitched with blossoms,
lace that trembles like petals
at the edge of a breeze.

Shadows leap on the wall—
rabbits, clouds, half-remembered myths—
reminding us that desire is a fairytale
we write in the language of bloom.

A mirror hums with sky,
smoke parts like curtains,
and suddenly there is only this:
the ache of becoming,
the charge of possibility.

These garments are more than fabric.
They are invitations:
to soften, to risk, to revel,
to wear tenderness as strength,
to step through the doorway
into something lush, surreal,
unapologetically alive.

The season has turned.
The garden is open.
Enter, and let yourself flower.



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BARRIER REPAIR AND BEYOND

Why ceramides and stunning scents are Angus McDougall's September reset.



@angusmcdougallnz

Fresh off the whirlwind of New Zealand Fashion Week, my skin is telling me it needs a breather. Late nights, full glam, and back-to-back shows take their toll, so September feels like the perfect time to reset. Over the next few months, I'll be spotlighting specific skincare heroes – the ingredients and innovations that make a real difference. This month, it's all about ceramides: the quiet achievers that help my tired skin bounce back.

These naturally occurring lipids are like the glue that holds our skin barrier together, sealing in moisture and protecting against environmental stressors. Think of them as the brick-and-mortar of your complexion – without them, skin can feel dry, sensitive, or prone to irritation.

Ceramides are especially helpful if you've over-exfoliated, been through seasonal changes, or undergone treatments that compromise the barrier, like peels or lasers. They work by restoring that essential layer of defence, bringing back balance and hydration. What I love most is how versatile they are – you'll find them in creams, serums, and even body products, making them easy to slot into your routine.

Here are a few ceramide heroes I personally love and recommend:

Skinsmiths B12 Ceramide Cream

\$90, available at Caci clinics or caci.co.nz

This ultra-rich cream is my go-to for soothing, hydrating, and restoring my skin barrier. I use it all the time, but it really shines after my CO₂ laser treatments at Caci, when my skin needs extra comfort and repair. It's the perfect security blanket for stressed skin.

Elizabeth Arden Advanced Light Ceramide Capsules (60pc)

\$180, available at Mecca

These tiny capsules are genius. Each night after toning, I twist one open and smooth the serum across my face and neck before layering my retinol treatment. One little capsule covers everything. The formula nourishes, refines, and strengthens my skin so effortlessly – it's barrier fortification in its chicest form.

While ceramides are my focus this month, I've also been enjoying some new-release fragrances – stimulating scents that have me skipping into spring.

Jo Malone London Raspberry Ripple Cologne

\$296, available at Farmers

I wasn't expecting to fall for a sweet fragrance, but Raspberry Ripple completely got me. It's playful and light, with that creamy raspberry note that instantly puts me in a good mood. It smells like summer holidays, ice cream cones and sunshine, but still feels grown-up thanks to the soft musk underneath.



Versace Eros Najim

\$263, available at Farmers

There's something about Eros Najim that feels like golden hour bottled. Inspired by the glow of Middle Eastern dunes, it opens with a zesty hit of yellow mandarin before settling into a hypnotic blend of oud, incense, caramel and cardamom. It's warm, powerful, and utterly transportive – like wrapping yourself in silk after sunset.

Versace Eau Fraîche Extreme

\$212, available at Life Pharmacy

Fresh, but make it extrême. Nearly 20 years after the original Eau Fraîche redefined crisp sophistication, Versace returns with a bolder take. Think zingy lemon, pepper and lavender softened by musk and Ambrox – like a sea breeze laced with spice. It's sharp, modern, and made for men who own every room they walk into.

KAREN WALKER:

Cool, Clever, Iconic



Karen Walker at one of her favourite places, Kingi.

PROUD & POLISHED



Angus McDougall reflects on Karen Walker's impact on the industry as she reimagines her iconic Runaway Pearls 25 years on.

There are very few designers who have shaped the way I see fashion quite like Karen Walker. From the moment I first pulled on one of her T-shirts back in 2000, I knew this was more than just a label – it was a language. A way of saying something bold, cheeky, and utterly stylish without even opening your mouth.

Karen is a trailblazer in New Zealand fashion. Her designs have always had that unmistakable wink – instantly recognisable, unapologetically hers. Who doesn't know the Runaway Girl? That little figure with her bangle slung over her shoulder has walked across earrings, T-shirts, sweatshirts, and straight into our cultural memory. Her icons are more than logos – they're badges of identity, wearable pieces of art that say, "I belong to this world, but on my own terms."

What I've always admired most about Karen, though, isn't just her design genius – it's her personal style. She has that rare quality of being effortlessly cool. There's



Angus in the original Karen Walker Pearls T-Shirt.



no try-hard, no overthinking. It's chic, it's intelligent, and it sparkles with the same wit that runs through her brand. To me, Karen Walker the woman and

Karen Walker the label are inseparable – both endlessly inspiring. Even stepping into her stores feels like entering her world. Every detail is considered, every moment is part of a journey that's modern, clever, and unmistakably chic.

Personally, Karen's designs have been with me through so many chapters

of my life. I've worn them for years, and they've always felt right because they transcend binaries. My own style leans androgynous, and her pieces play beautifully in that space. Whether it's a crisp oversized shirt, a sharply cut jacket, or one of her cult accessories, they all carry that balance between masculine and feminine that I find endlessly wearable.

That's why I'm especially excited about the re-release of one of my all-time favourites – the Runaway Pearls. The original design came out in the *Etiquette* collection of 2000, and I still remember how much I loved wearing that T-shirt with the broken pearls cascading across the front. Twenty-five years later, seeing it come back feels like a full-circle moment.

This time, the pearls spill across silk crêpe-de-Chine blouses with chic pussy bows, sleeveless cowl tops, and her much-loved oversized Walker shirt. They loop across a satin bomber jacket that brings a sporty edge, and onto everyday staples like T-shirts and sweatshirts in organic cotton. The accessories are equally irresistible – silk scarves, a scrunchie with a dangling pearl, socks, and even a Blunt umbrella dressed in pearls. It's clever, playful, and unmistakably Karen.

Karen Walker has always been more than a brand to me. She's proof that fashion can be iconic and personal all at once – and 25 years on, her pearls still shine just as brightly.

Runaway Pearls Bomber Jacket \$395

Blunt x Karen Walker Runaway Pearls Umbrella \$149

Broken Pearls T-Shirt \$140

Available at karenwalker.com

DAZZLE & DESIRE:

THE LAST SHOWGIRL AND QUEER SHINE ON RIALTO CHANNEL THIS SEPTEMBER

September on Rialto Channel is set to dazzle with the arrival of two exceptional independent films that couldn't be more different in setting, but share a fearless commitment to telling deeply human stories. From the glittering yet precarious world of Las Vegas showgirls to the smoky expat bars of 1950s Mexico City, *The Last Showgirl* and *Queer* prove exactly why Rialto remains New Zealand's ultimate home for quality arthouse cinema.

THE LAST SHOWGIRL – PAMELA ANDERSON LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE

For three decades, Shelly (Pamela Anderson) has been the heart and soul of "Le Razzle Dazzle," a lavish Las Vegas floor show. But when her stage manager (Dave Bautista) announces that the production is closing, her life of sequins, feathers, and high-kick routines comes to an abrupt halt. In her fifties, facing an uncertain future, Shelly is forced to reckon with her identity, her past choices, and her strained relationship with her daughter (Billie Lourd).

Directed by Gia Coppola (*Palo Alto*, *Mainstream*), the film is a richly textured love letter to the city that never sleeps — or slows down. Coppola was fascinated by Las Vegas's blend of "consumerism and magic," and by the women who devote their lives to maintaining its shimmering illusions. Screenwriter Kate Gersten drew inspiration from "Jubilee!" the last of the great Vegas revue shows, and from interviews with real showgirls who lived through its twilight years.

Coppola's search for Shelly ended when she watched the revealing 2023 Netflix documentary *Pamela, A Love Story*. Struck by Anderson's vulnerability, optimism, and sharp intellect, Coppola knew she'd found her lead. Anderson, in turn, embraced the role with fearless honesty, saying she was "so interested in Shelly's intentions and her optimism and her confusion: 'how could this possibly end? This is so important to the world.'" She compared



Shelly's journey to that of an athlete — driven by passion, knowing there's only so long to perform at the highest level before the rest of life looms large. "It hits her all at once," Anderson says, "and she has to decide who she's going to be next."

The supporting cast includes Jamie Lee Curtis as Annette, Shelly's hard-living best friend, who signed on immediately after winning her Academy Award. Curtis describes the film as a meditation on ageing, resilience, and the sacrifices women make to survive in the arts.

The Last Showgirl is as much about endings as it is about reinvention — and about holding on to the things that give life sparkle, even when the lights fade.

Premiere: Saturday 20 September, 8:30pm on Rialto Channel.

QUEER – LUCA GUADAGNINO'S LYRICAL ADAPTATION OF BURROUGHS

If *The Last Showgirl* is a bright neon fever dream, *Queer* is a slow-burning poem — a lush, haunting romance set in 1950s Mexico City and across South America. Based on William

S. Burroughs' long-unpublished second novel, the film follows William Lee (Daniel Craig), a middle-aged American expat drifting through life until he meets Eugene Allerton (Drew Starkey), a magnetic young student.

For Guadagnino (*Call Me by Your Name*, *Bones and All*), the project was a chance to respond to the melancholy question Burroughs posed late in life: "How can a man who sees and feels be other than sad?" Working with writer Justin Kuritzkes, Guadagnino imagined a third act for the unfinished novel — one that transforms what could have been a tale of unrequited longing into a universal story about mutual love, missed timings, and emotional courage.

Craig delivers a performance of remarkable vulnerability, peeling back layers of stoicism to reveal a man learning to connect. Starkey, cast with Craig's input, is equally compelling as Allerton, his youthful curiosity masking his own uncertainties.

The result is a film that captures the spirit of the Beat Generation while speaking directly to modern audiences — a story about intimacy, identity, and the bittersweet beauty of fleeting connections.



Premiere: Saturday 27 September, 8:30pm on Rialto Channel.

WHY RIALTO CHANNEL IS THE HOME FOR FILMS LIKE THESE

While global streaming giants chase algorithms, Rialto Channel curates. Every title is hand-picked for its craft, originality, and emotional depth. These are not films you stumble across by accident — they're experiences you seek out. With *The Last Showgirl* and *Queer*, Rialto once again proves its commitment to championing distinctive, risk-taking cinema that might otherwise slip under the radar in New Zealand.

Whether it's Coppola's empathetic portrait of women navigating life after the spotlight, or Guadagnino's tender

exploration of *queer* love in a conservative era, these are films that invite conversation — and linger long after the credits roll.

Rialto Channel's September line-up isn't just entertainment; it's a reminder of what cinema can do when it's made without compromise. And in an age of disposable content, that's worth celebrating.

How to Watch

Rialto Channel is available on Sky Channel 39 and via Sky Go, with every film screening uncut and commercial-free. Schedules, trailers, and behind-the-scenes content are at rialtochannel.co.nz.

This September, skip the algorithm and embrace the art.



WINTER melts into **SPRING**
New Season Premieres on Rialto Channel

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QUEER VOICES, LOCAL CHOICES:

WHY YOUR VOTE MATTERS IN THE 2025 LOCAL BODY ELECTIONS

When voting closes in our local elections next month, we'll be shaping the future of our neighbourhoods in ways that ripple far beyond potholes and playgrounds. The 2025 local elections will determine who sits on our councils, community boards, and other key decision-making bodies for the next three years. Ballot papers will be sent to enrolled voters from 20 September, and voting closes at 12 noon on 12 October.

Local government decisions affect everything from public transport to green spaces to the cultural events that define our cities. They also decide whether our public spaces feel safe, inclusive, and welcoming for all.

This year, queer representation is on the ballot in wards and boards across the motu. The six candidates interviewed here are only some of the LGBTQ+ New Zealanders standing in 2025, but together they paint a picture of why representation matters — and why your vote does too.



JACK MOULD:
SAFE SPACES IN ŌTAUTAHĪ

Running for the Heathcote Community Board in Christchurch, Jack Mould has spent years volunteering in both conservation and rainbow causes. For him, standing for office is about “building a future we are proud to hand over to the next generation”.

In Ōtautahi, Jack says the biggest issue for queer locals is the lack of safe spaces. “There is one gay bar in the city, but for most of the community it’s not realistically a safe space. We need to support local organisations to host queer-friendly events and have a rainbow presence year-round — not just during Pride month.”

Jack has already pushed for safer public transport as chair of Christchurch Rainbow Labour and wants to see more gender-neutral facilities. “Everyone should have the ability to go to the bathroom and feel safe when doing so.”



CHRISTINA ROBERTSON:
STANDING FIRM IN ALBERT-EDEN

For Christina Robertson, serving on the Albert-Eden Local Board has shown that climate action and inclusivity go hand in hand.

“As a queer person, I know public discourse often focuses on the majority. I’ll always speak up for an inclusive city where everyone can flourish.”

She recalls how Auckland’s rainbow communities rallied after members of Destiny Church disrupted a rainbow storytime at Te Atatū Library earlier this year. “It’s crucial to continue funding and hosting events where rainbow communities are celebrated, and to make sure council facilities are safe and welcoming.”

Christina says local boards can only be inclusive if they actively engage with rainbow voices. “We have to keep showing up to events, reaching out to community groups, and supporting other LGBTQ+ people to run for local office.”



MICHELLE THORP:
GROWING COMMUNITY, BUILDING
UNDERSTANDING

Also running in Albert-Eden, Michelle Thorp sees her candidacy as “another way to get a voice in the room” against inequality, discrimination, and division.

“I have deep empathy for people whose views are different to mine, because I had to grow from a conservative mindset to an inclusive one when I came out,” she says. “That’s important in a place like Epsom.”

Michelle wants to see local government actively supporting rainbow-inclusive events, accessible gender-neutral bathrooms, and queer families at community gatherings. “It’s about education, advocacy, and follow-up. We can’t just talk to LGBTQ+ people — we need to get the organisations already doing the work into the room with decision-makers.”

SCOTT MACARTHUR:
DESIGNING FOR INCLUSION IN
DEVONPORT-TAKAPUNA

POLITICS



Town planner Scott Macarthur is running for the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board because “local government works best when it reflects the diversity of the people it serves”.

He sees persistent gaps in inclusive spaces and representation. “We can have real impact if we engage with the right people — whether that’s ensuring parks are welcoming to all or making public facilities safe for every gender and sexuality.”

Scott is especially focused on night-time safety. “We need to think purposefully about bus stop design, lighting, and walking routes. Consultation has to reach rainbow communities so we get it right.”



THEO VAN DE KLUNDERT: FIGHTING FOR THE HEART OF WAITEMATĀ

For Theo van de Klundert, standing in Auckland’s Waitematā ward is about “progressive leadership that reflects real-world challenges”.

Theo cites rising violence against queer people and increased far-right agitation as urgent issues. “Over the last year there’s been an alarming spike in attacks on community members, as well as anti-social protests targeting rainbow spaces.”

As a member of Auckland Council’s Rainbow Communities Advisory Panel, Theo has worked with police on inclusion guidelines and supported groups like Rainbow Youth. “Waitematā has the largest rainbow population of any ward in the country. We need people to turn out and vote so we can take back our ward for the community.”



LEWIS ROWE: PRIDE ON THE NORTH SHORE

Business owner Lewis Rowe is standing with the independent ‘A Fresh Approach’ team for Devonport-Takapuna Local Board. While he doesn’t define his politics by his sexuality, he says it shapes his commitment to safe, accessible spaces.

“I’d love to see an annual Pride parade on the North Shore. And I’m really passionate about engaging young people and helping them find their ‘tribe’ — whether that’s through arts, sports, or environmental work. When people find their community, mental health and wellbeing improve.”

For Lewis, a thriving future is one that’s “inclusive, accessible, happier, and healthier — with common-sense outcomes that are backed by data.”

WHY QUEER REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Representation isn’t about ticking diversity boxes — it’s about making sure decisions reflect the experiences of all residents.

When rainbow voices are at the decision-making table, they can:

- **Spot blind spots** — like the need for safe transport options late at night, or ensuring public spaces are genuinely welcoming.
- **Protect inclusive spaces** — such as libraries hosting drag storytime or councils flying Pride flags.
- **Inspire future leaders** — showing young LGBTQIA+ people that their voices belong in politics.

As Jack Mould puts it: “I have rights today because people fought for them. Standing up now is my way of showing thanks to those who came before me.”

HOW TO TAKE PART IN THE 2025 LOCAL ELECTIONS

- **Check your enrolment:** Go to vote.nz and make sure your details are correct. You must be enrolled to vote.
- **Vote early if you can:** You don’t have to wait — you can post your completed voting paper back right away.
- **Final deadline:** Voting closes 12 noon, Saturday 12 October 2025. Postal votes must be received by then.
- **Find out who’s standing:** Your local council website and vote.nz will list all candidates in your area.

THE BALLOT IS BIGGER THAN YOU THINK

The six candidates featured here are part of a broader wave of queer leadership stepping forward in 2025. From small rural boards to major city councils, LGBTQIA+ New Zealanders are putting their names forward — and their lived experiences — to shape the places we live.

Their campaigns are diverse, but their message is shared: vote. Turnout for local elections is consistently lower than general elections, and when fewer people vote, fewer voices are represented.

As Christina Robertson says, “Local government can only be inclusive if it actively engages with rainbow voices — and that starts with those voices being at the table.”

So when your voting papers arrive this September, don’t leave them in the recycling pile. Read them in. Fill them in. Post them back. Because every local decision is shaped by the people you elect.

And this year, you’ve got the chance to help make those people as diverse as the communities they serve.

JEB MAIHI BROWN:

LEADING WITH MANA, LIVING WITH PRIDE

From coaching the first all-trans rugby match to becoming Mr Australasia Bear, Jeb Maihi Brown talks to Oliver Hall about a journey blends Māori heritage, sport, and queer pride.

When Jeb became the first Māori trans man crowned Mr Australasia Bear, it was more than just a pageant win. It was a milestone in a journey that's taken him from the rugby fields of Aotearoa and Australia to the heart of the bear community, from navigating his own transition to coaching a world-first all-trans rugby match.

"I've always loved performing and engaging with a crowd," Jeb says. "Culturally, Māori are extraordinary orators and I grew up listening to my nan, my parents, my aunties and uncles telling stories and passing on their knowledge, always with a laugh along the way."

That grounding in *kōrero* — the art of speaking with purpose and humour — has been a constant in his life. It's shaped how he approaches leadership, visibility, and connection in spaces where trans, Māori, and bear identities intersect.

OWNING THE PERMISSION SLIP

For many, self-acceptance can feel like something you have to be granted. For Jeb, that's a myth worth dismantling.

"The only permission you need is your own!"

It's a message he returns to often, especially for young trans or queer Māori men. He knows living authentically can be daunting, and offers

a practical way forward: find your people. "Surround yourself with those who lift you up, teach you, and walk alongside you until you find your confidence to be the person you were born to be. Everyone else will fall into line once you own who you are."

BREAKING GROUND IN SPORT

Rugby has always been part of Jeb's life. But in 2024, his role as coach of the inaugural all-trans rugby match at the **Bingham Cup** became one of his proudest achievements.

"To see over 60 trans people giving their absolute best over a single match was incredible," he recalls. "Regardless of where they were in their journey, or if they were only just starting to walk this path, each player came with their own 'tribe' — their family, their team, their club mates."

It wasn't just about winning or losing. "The talk around trans inclusion in sports often doesn't include us," Jeb says. "That match gave a lot of us hope and the self-belief that we are enough and we belong."

A TITLE FOR TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU

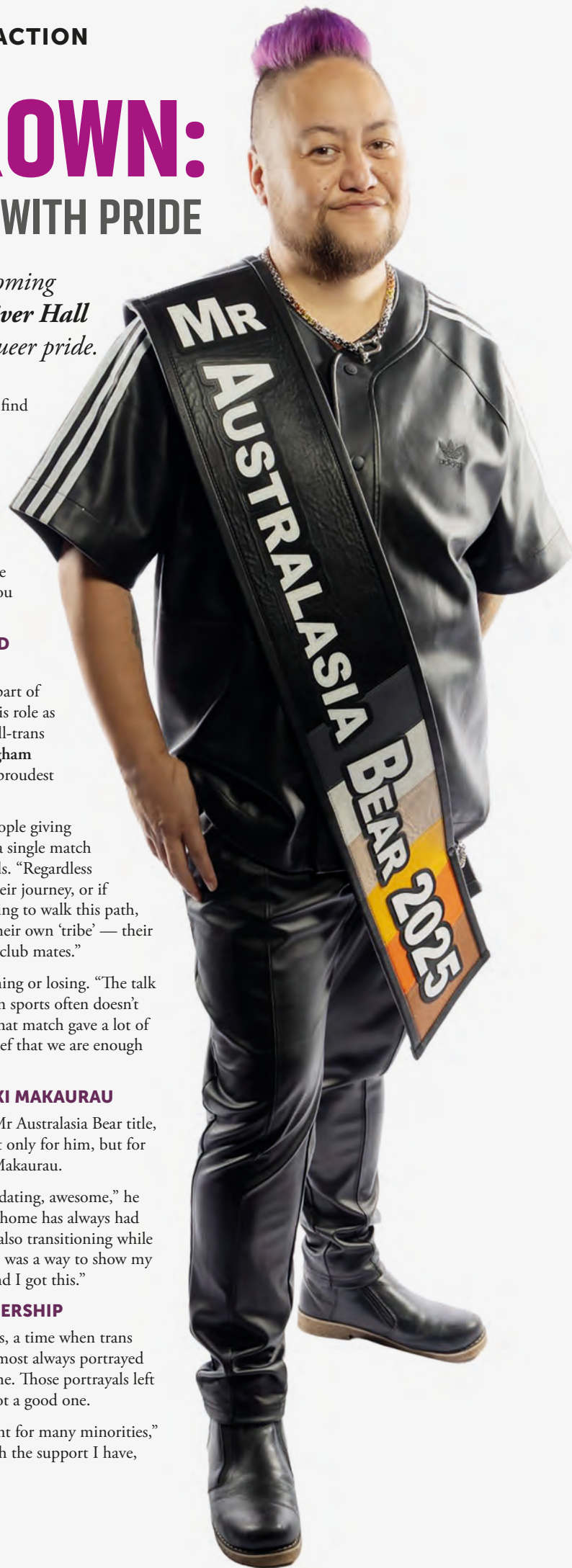
When Jeb claimed the Mr Australasia Bear title, it was an affirmation not only for him, but for his whānau in Tāmaki Makaurau.

"It was exhilarating, validating, awesome," he says. "Being so far from home has always had its challenges, and then also transitioning while away from home — this was a way to show my whānau that I'm OK, and I got this."

VISIBILITY AS LEADERSHIP

Jeb grew up in the 1990s, a time when trans people in media were almost always portrayed through ridicule or shame. Those portrayals left an impression — and not a good one.

"Visibility is so important for many minorities," he says. "I'm blessed with the support I have,



TRANSACTION



and it's given me a responsibility to be visible for the next generation of trans and Māori whānau in the bears."

The saying *you can't be what you can't see* resonates deeply for him. "I've found you can be that — though it can be a tough and lonely journey to get there. Hopefully, by putting myself out there it can remove some of the loneliness and isolation our whānau experience in the community."

THE INTERSECTION OF SPORT, CULTURE, AND NIGHTLIFE

Jeb's life moves fluidly between spaces that might seem worlds apart: the disciplined camaraderie of rugby teams, the flamboyant energy of drag shows, the close-knit warmth of bear gatherings.

"Every interaction I've had across our vibrant and diverse community has added to my cup," he says. "Growing up with team sports, especially rugby, showed me what it meant to be part of a team. The Queens and Kings I've worked with taught me how to have a backbone and use my sense of humour to educate people. The Bears taught me to be comfortable in my own skin. In turn, I hope I can pass these onto others as a proud product of these communities."

SHAPING A LEGACY WITH WHAKAPAPA

Titles and accolades are one thing, but Jeb is focused on what remains after his reign.

"I hope that anyone who has felt marginalised, overlooked, under-appreciated or just plain invisible — as many of our indigenous, POC, and trans people are taught to feel about themselves — knows they have a place here. They are deserving of titles and recognition and they make our community a more colourful and vibrant one to be a part of."

"I want my legacy to speak to our communities about togetherness and whakawhānau. I want my legacy to hold the door open for anyone living as their authentic self so they can step through and be embraced just like I have been."

MORE THAN A SASH

To some, the Mr Australasia Bear title is a sash, a crown, a weekend of fun. For Jeb, it's a platform — one that connects to his whakapapa, his passion for inclusion, and his commitment to making spaces where trans and Māori visibility isn't an exception, but the norm.

His reign stands as proof that identity doesn't have to be narrowed down to fit someone else's idea of belonging. It can be expansive, layered, and proudly yours — whether that's on a rugby field, a drag stage, or in the middle of a bear dancefloor.

"I've been blessed with so much support," he says. "If I can use that to make someone else's journey less lonely, then I've done something worthwhile."

Follow Jeb on social @
maihi_thomson

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WHAT HAPPENED AT OUTLINE?

Michael Stevens examines the charity's 24/25 financial year and hopes a brighter future is ahead for New Zealand's longest-running LGBTQ+ organisation.

Outline Aotearoa's history goes back over 50 years. Starting as "Gay Welfare" in 1972, it became "The Auckland Gay and Lesbian Welfare Group" in 1986, then "Outline" in 2007. Over the years, Outline has consistently supported thousands of people in our communities. It is truly a community taonga. Today, however, its future is uncertain, with serious financial challenges outlined in its latest annual report. So what went so wrong?

Following Outline's 2025 Annual Report and AGM, it's no secret that the charity is in crisis. The report records a \$186,000 deficit, and cash reserves are expected to be depleted by the end of this month.

Outline lost funding last year, one of many NGOs around the country to see core financial support vanish with little notice.

Leadership decisions during this period have drawn scrutiny. The previous CEO, Claire Black, was known for providing thorough monthly reports covering finances, calls taken, and other key information to assist the board in its role. Former board members say that under Black, the focus was on core counselling and community support services, seen as a prudent approach given political and financial uncertainty. When Black departed the organisation, Emmaline Pickering-Wilson was hired as Outline's new CEO.

During Pickering-Wilson's tenure — she resigned in May 2025 after 16 months in the role — staffing structures changed, with counsellors brought in-house as employees rather than contractors. According to sources familiar with board discussions, two board members resigned in 2024, citing concerns about financial transparency and governance.

The Annual Report outlines a number of factors contributing to the financial strain: \$100,000 in "un-provenanced credit card transactions", \$505,000 spent on wages, \$57,000 on koha, \$24,000 on national travel, \$15,500 on international travel — which sources allege

included multiple staff attending a conference in Fiji — and \$16,500 on professional development. It also notes an outstanding tax debt of between \$65,000 and \$80,000 to Inland Revenue, with a repayment agreement "not maintained".

Some former board members allege that during this period, proposals were made to donate substantial sums to external projects such as birthing units and dance troupes. They further allege that when certain board members opposed these ideas, they were told their concerns were interpreted as racially motivated by some in the organisation. These accounts have not been independently verified.

The board states that since June 2025, costs have fallen by 87%, largely due to reduced staffing levels and tighter controls. The report also points to "a lack of controls and policy" in financial management and notes that public fundraising efforts in late 2024 — though valuable — were initiated "without full Board oversight", revealing gaps in internal coordination.

Governance is a specialist skill, and the hope is that lessons have been learned. At the July AGM, three new board members were appointed, bringing governance experience, strong community ties, and a stated commitment to setting things right.

The Annual Report warns that Outline is "at risk of trading while insolvent", which would breach the Charities Act and Incorporated



PHOTO | X

Societies Act. Trading while insolvent is illegal, and the IRD can be unforgiving. The organisation's financial position will be further discussed at its upcoming Special General Meeting.

Outline is an organisation built on the backs of five decades of volunteers. While it has been a very rough time for the organisation, it is part thanks to the amazing job by those volunteers and the organisation's kaimahi that things have kept functioning, and communities have continued to be supported.

A couple of people have asked me, "Do we still really need Outline?" My answer is an emphatic yes.

Tens of thousands of volunteer hours and significant community fundraising have sustained Outline over the decades, providing a lifeline to those in need — whether a scared 16-year-old in the suburbs or an 80-year-old lesbian in a small town. Outline was there then, and it should still be there in the future. Let's hope it will be.

TEND × YOUR EX



Dr Mataroria Lyndon addresses your concerns.

ANSWERING YOUR HEALTH QUESTIONS

I HAVE RECENTLY LOST TRUST IN MY GP. WHAT SHOULD SOMEONE DO AFTER HAVING NEGATIVE OR DISCRIMINATORY EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR DOCTOR?

I'm really sorry to hear you've had this experience. Feeling dismissed or not taken seriously can be deeply upsetting, and it's important that you feel safe and respected in your care.

In Aotearoa, you have rights under the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights, including the right to be treated with respect and free from discrimination.

Here are some steps you can take:

- **Seek a second opinion:** You can book with a different GP at the same clinic, or enrol with a new practice altogether. It's okay to change providers if you're not feeling heard.
- **Prepare for appointments:** Writing down your symptoms, how long they've been occurring, and how they affect your daily life can help you communicate clearly.

■ **Access your health records:**

You have the right to see what's been documented about your health, which can help with continuity if you move practices.

■ **Make a complaint if needed:**

If you feel you've been discriminated against or unfairly treated, you can raise this directly with the clinic or contact the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). Free advocacy support is also available through the Health and Disability Advocacy Service.

You might also consider seeing a clinician or health service that aligns more closely with your values. Most importantly, please don't let this experience stop you from getting the care you need. You deserve to feel heard, respected, and supported in your healthcare journey.

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Got a health-related question? Email ask@gayexpress.co.nz

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FROM BRAZIL TO THE REGENT ON BROADWAY: RHUBARB ROUGE & THE GLITTERING RISE OF PALMY DRAG FEST

*We go behind the sequins with the mind behind New Zealand's biggest drag festival, who talks to **Oliver Hall** about the biggest challenges of making Palmerston North, New Zealand's drag capital.*

Henrique Beirao – better known in the drag world as the vivacious Rhubarb Rouge – is on a mission. For years, the performer and producer has been turning Palmerston North into a glitter-drenched epicentre of drag through Palmy Drag Fest. Now, with the 2025 festival promising the biggest line-up yet, Beirao is ready to cement the event's place as a jewel in Aotearoa's cultural calendar.

"This year, we are going BIGGER than ever before!" Rhubarb beams. "We're talking international drag royalty like Lawrence Chaney and Kween Kong, alongside Aotearoa's fiercest local talent. It's a full week of colour, camp, and charisma, all leading up to our iconic Saturday night spectacular at the Regent on Broadway. We've sold out every single year – so if you've been thinking about it, this is the year to stop thinking and start booking."

MORE THAN A MAIN EVENT

While the Saturday night show is the glittering crown jewel, the festival sprawls across the week with events ranging from Drag Bingo with RubyDax & friends to DJ Kita Mean's Musical Madness club night. For out-of-towners, Rhubarb insists Palmerston North has more to offer than people might expect.

"Oh, Palmy will keep you busy! We are a lot more fabulous than people give us credit for,"



PHOTO | CAMERON BAKER

PALMY DRAG FEST

she laughs. “In between the shows, you can wander through the Esplanade gardens, take a walk in the Manawātū Gorge, or lose a few hours poking around the vintage shops on George Street. We’ve got great food – Brew Union for a cheeky beer, and Tony’s Pizza – best I’ve had in NZ! And if you’re a museum person, Te Manawa and the Rugby Museum are both fantastic. Trust me – no one’s getting bored.”

RAINBOW MAGIC FOR ALL AGES

The festival’s inclusive spirit is most evident at the Rainbow Fair, a free, family-friendly day event at Fly Palmy Arena that precedes Saturday’s big Main Show. “Expect over 40 fabulous stalls from different community groups and shops, live performances, music, and a big splash of rainbow magic,” Rhubarb says. “It’s a celebration of diversity that’s open to everyone. We want people to feel welcome, seen, and proud – it’s the perfect warm-up to the big show, and it’s our way of giving back to the community.”

NAVIGATING FESTIVAL CHALLENGES

Like many large-scale events, Palmy Drag Fest has its share of behind-the-scenes challenges. Earlier this year, Drag Race Down Under winner Spankie Jackson shared publicly that she would not be involved in this year’s festival. Rhubarb addresses this with candour: “We did invite Spankie to be part of it, and we love her. Every line-up is different, and there are a lot of factors at play – budgets, schedules, creative direction, and making sure we’re offering something new. This year, things just didn’t align for the main show, but there’s no bad blood.”

Budget remains the trickiest balancing act. “Any proceeds from the festival are immediately reinvested into the next year’s event. We supplement with funding and sponsorship, but it’s tough out there. Drag isn’t just an art form – for many performers, it’s their job. We respect the right of artists to charge what they’re

worth, but sometimes that means we can’t afford everyone.”

That financial pressure could intensify with potential cuts to council funding under new government priorities. “Council support, funding, sponsorship, and our amazing volunteers keep ticket prices reasonable and the festival accessible,” Rhubarb explains. “If council funding were cut, we’d either have to scale back or raise prices – neither of which we want to do. This festival is about bringing

THE MAKING OF RHUBARB ROUGE

Rhubarb’s drag persona began in 2007, first under the name Lady Madonka – a tribute to Madonna – complete with an elaborate backstory performed in a solo show that toured New Zealand and Australia, even selling out the Sydney Opera House. Over the years, Rhubarb has evolved into a larger-than-life party girl with a flair for glamour and humour. “Think: the talent of Madonna, the glamour of Audrey Hepburn, and the body shape and humour of Melissa McCarthy – that’s Rhubarb Rouge,” she laughs.

BIGGER, BRIGHTER, AND ALWAYS FRESH

Asked if the festival gets better each year, Rhubarb doesn’t hesitate. “Absolutely! Every year we bring something new so the audience never feels like they’re watching the same show twice. One of my highlights is giving amazing Kiwi drag artists the chance to shine on a big stage.”

There’s also a pre-show ritual: “Right before the show starts, we play ‘Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’ in the theatre. That’s your cue to run to your seats! I love peeking through the curtain, feeling the buzz in the crowd, and watching the energy lift.”

Palmy Drag Fest begins on Wednesday 1 October and concludes with its star-studded Main Show on Saturday 4 October.

Tickets are available at palmydrag.com



The poster is a vibrant collage of event information. At the top, the 'PALMY DRAG FEST' logo is in a stylized, multi-colored font, with '2025' below it. A pink banner reads 'FRIDAY | 3rd OCTOBER | GLOBE THEATRE'. Below this is a photo of DJKITA MEAN in a red outfit, with her name in pink neon. A large yellow sign says 'MUSICAL MADNESS' and 'ALL MUSICALS, ALL NIGHT!'. Another pink banner reads 'SATURDAY | 4TH OCTOBER' and 'MANAWATU'S LGBTIQA+ FAIR!'. The 'RAINBOW FAIR' logo features a rainbow flag. A yellow starburst says 'FREE ENTRY'. Below that, '10AM - 2PM' and 'FLY PALMY ARENA' are listed. The 'MAIN SHOW' section features photos of four drag queens and the 'PALMY DRAG FEST' logo. A red starburst says 'TICKETS SELLING FAST!'. A pink banner reads 'NZ'S BIGGEST DRAG SHOW! | REGENT ON BROADWAY'. The bottom section has a purple background with 'OFFICIAL AFTER PARTY' in large white letters, 'BREW UNION BREWING COMPANY' and 'MADE IN THE MANAWATU' in smaller white letters. At the very bottom, a pink banner reads 'WWW.PALMYDRAG.COM'.

PALMY DRAG FEST
2025

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DJKITA MEAN

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ALL MUSICALS, ALL NIGHT!

SATURDAY | 4TH OCTOBER
MANAWATU'S LGBTIQA+ FAIR!

RAINBOW FAIR

FREE ENTRY

10AM - 2PM
FLY PALMY ARENA

MAIN SHOW

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G.A.Y'S 6TH BIRTHDAY

Saturday 9 August was one for the history books — G.A.Y Auckland hit the big 6, and the celebrations lit up the city like never before. From its legendary basement beginnings to now taking over both floors with the wild and wonderful Pink Pony upstairs, the ultimate party palace proved once again why it's the heart of Auckland's nightlife.

The birthday bash dripped in sparkle and sass, with glamorous hosts Ieta Buffet and Natrasha turning up the high camp energy all night long. DJs Hamish, James, and Wanda kept the beats pumping right until closing, ensuring the dancefloor never missed a moment.



OUT & ABOUT



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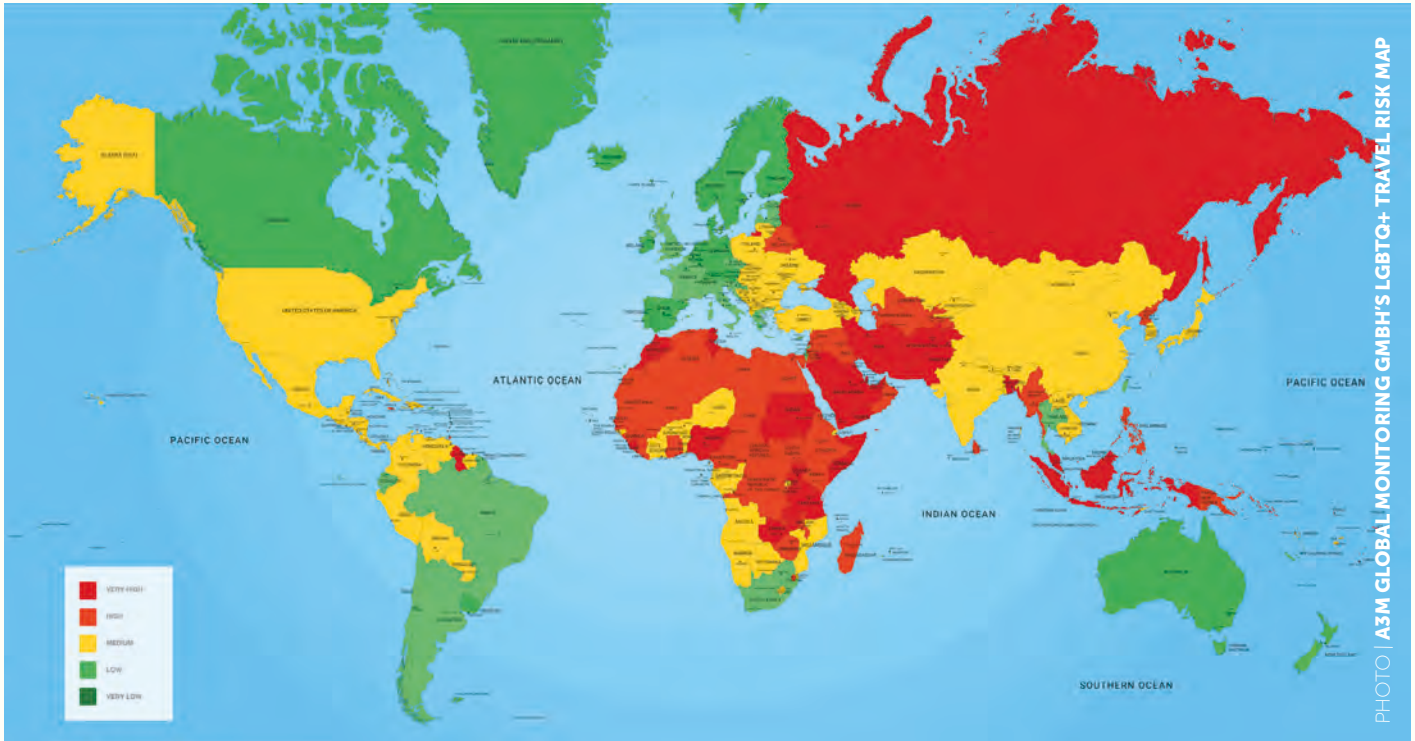


PHOTO | ASGM GLOBAL MONITORING GMBH'S LGBTQ+ TRAVEL RISK MAP

HOW TO TRAVEL ETHICALLY AS A QUEER PERSON

On a recent trip to Bali, Jessie Lewthwaite found herself questioning whether she should even be there.

When my girlfriend asked me if I wanted to go to Bali with her and her friends, I was hesitant – and not just because I wanted to avoid being just another Australian in Bali. My first thought was, *Are we allowed to be gay there?*

After a hyperfixation deep dive into the laws and human rights in Indonesia, the internet reassured me that Bali specifically was so used to Western tourists that, although Indonesia didn't have great laws, my girlfriend and I would be safe.

Unfortunately, in my exhausting quest to be New Zealand's most woke lesbo (I'm coming for your crown, Chlöe – watch out), I then immediately started wondering if it was ethical to give my tourist dollars to a country that was only OK with me being gay because I'm a tourist.

In the end I went, of course, had an amazing time, drank my weight in cocktails, and met several other lesbian couples over there who laughed openly when I told them about my ethical dilemma.

THE THINGS YOU LEARN IN HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

One of the issues with working in the human rights space is you learn things you'd rather not know. Like the fact it is currently illegal to be LGBTQIA+ in sixty-four countries – and twelve of those countries have the death penalty as punishment for "same-sex acts".

This very unfun fact has meant that, in my career, I have helped many rainbow people apply for refugee status so they can stay in New Zealand. Returning to their countries could result in prison, public flogging, stoning, or death.

And because capitalism is yet to be defeated, the governments and regimes that run these countries are partially funded by tourist dollars. As much as I love to complain about the New Zealand government – and I really do – it isn't difficult to see why New Zealand is one of the rainbow pathways for refugees.

SO, HOW DO WE TRAVEL ETHICALLY AS QUEER PEOPLE?

Now that we are all depressed together, what can we actually do to travel ethically as queer people?

First – vote with your dollars. If you are blessed enough in this economy to have the disposable income to travel, then give that money to a government that supports us. And by "us" I mean the whole alphabet family. Some countries might be OK to ignore lesbians, or pretend we don't exist, but will imprison gay men or trans people. Leave no letter in the acronym behind.

Second – make sure you educate yourself. There are so many good resources online that will give you information on laws, human rights, and the social expectations of countries. You can't form an opinion unless it is an informed opinion – so get that info.

THIRD – when you do travel, use your time and money to support local, queer-owned, and queer-friendly businesses. Remember, we are a marginalised group that literally exists in every country, through every time period, under every government. No matter where you go, there will be queer people there – find where they thrive.

TRAVEL WITH A CONSCIENCE

If anyone else has ever binged reels of those "extreme travel bloggers" that go to places that are intentionally dangerous, you'll notice one thing in common with all of them: they are all cis, white, straight men. They are fuelled by unacknowledged privilege and the absolute audacity.

Intentionally going to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan for views and clicks is not our game, fam.

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