

LGBT TOURISM

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The LGBT community represents 10 million adults and has a purchasing power of \$917 billion in the United States. This crucial segment has the means and desire to travel. When you invite guests for dinner to your home, you want to be as welcoming as possible. You find out their taste preferences and maybe even their favorite wine. The same is true with the LGBT tourist, understand their needs and exceed expectations in creating a welcoming experience.

One important step is understanding the LGBT community which actually consists of LGBTQQIAAP – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Allies and Pansexual. This broad scope of individuals defines over 4.1% of adults and the number keeps rising as more adults are willing to self-identify. Disposable incomes are higher, so they tend to spend more on fashion, travel and entertainment. Also, many are traveling with children; 37% have raised a child at some point in their lives. 36 million overnight visitors who traveled to international destinations are part of the LGBT community, making it one of the fastest growing markets in the international travel industry.

The tourism industry as a whole thrives on diversity. However, one in three LGBT travelers feels they are treated differently due to their sexuality while on holiday. 23% even try to change the way they act or camouflage their sexuality while on vacation. To this date, 70 countries still criminalize homosexuality world-wide.

The change starts within each of us by conveying a powerful image of tolerance and respect. Welcoming LGBT tourists is not just displaying a rainbow flag, although this is helpful. It is more about creating an environment of acceptance by having a diverse local population, themed events and openly LGBT public figures or allies. Offer sensitivity training to all hospitality employees and provide certifications for staff. Destinations that make great places to live for the LGBT community, make great places for them to visit.

Once you have developed a positive destination for the LGBT traveler, dedicate marketing activities specific to this market. Attend events such as ITB, IGLTA Convention, LGBT Expo and World Pride in New York City in 2019 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Tour operators have been specializing in this market since 1973, with the first LGBT tour down the Grand Canyon's Colorado River. Connect with these custom tour operators and showcase your destination. Dedicate staff and resources to focus on this key market.

Together we can create a positive travel experience for all. Stated best by World Pride, "One World, One Pride."

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