

Gay and Lesbian Travel

A light blue world map is visible in the background of the title section.

Planning Gay and Lesbian Travel



Travel planning for the gay and lesbian traveler is both a very similar and yet very different experience than most straight travelers encounter. After all, travel is travel and many of the issues are the same: where to go and when, budget, who you travel with. Behind each of these seemingly simple decisions, however, is the somewhat amorphous term "gay-friendly" and the issue of the extent to which a gay traveler will be allowed to travel openly, safely, and comfortably in a destination.



Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco

In general, gay and lesbian travelers travel often and have an above average disposable income, comprising approximately 10% of the traveling public. Gay travelers are as varied in their choice of destinations as any other group, but tend to pursue destinations that market to and recognize the gay community.

Naturally, a complicating factor is the absence of absolutes. Bigotry can arise in the most "gay friendly" of locations and many supposedly hostile environments fail to live up to the reputation a vocal minority has fostered. Nevertheless, some advance planning can help to ensure that your travels are trouble-free and as relaxing or engaging as you

choose, without undue additional consideration.

As always, one of the best possible places to start planning is with a good travel consultant. Most travel agents have professional resources at hand to assist all types of travelers in selecting travel environments that match their needs. These resources also provide direct and unbiased information on the quality and ambiance of various destinations and accommodations and the general attitude toward gay travelers; many destinations have no concerns or laws surrounding gay travel, while others are openly hostile environments, both legally and socially. In addition, experienced travel agents will know which travel companies are capable of delivering quality services and have a history of providing reliable travel arrangements for gay clientele.

Choosing a vacation destination involves seriously considering the purpose of your trip and your willingness to conform to indigenous customs. According to the Travel Industry Association (TIA), nearly half of gay and lesbian travelers said that a destination with a gay-friendly reputation is a prime consideration in leisure travel choices, and locating a destination where gay travelers can "hold their partner's hand in public with no concerns for harassment" influenced more than half of gay men and two-thirds of gay women in their choices. This is not a surprise, since cultural norms in many countries frown on open displays of affection in any circumstance for any traveler, and for gay travelers, this can even result in legal action.

If you want to experience the culture and sights of another country, your travel consultant can give you a good idea of the local attitudes toward gay travelers. If, however, the trip is a "sun and beach" vacation, attitudes can often be more open and relaxed - in the right location.

Did you know?

- If you've always wanted to visit the pyramids of Egypt, definitely seek specific advice and help with planning your vacation; Egypt, like many mostly Islamic countries, is an amazing destination but has strict social norms regarding affection in public
- The quiet and tranquil beaches of the Bahamas may not be as easy to navigate with a gay companion as you might think - be sure to choose the right island and accommodations that market to gay travelers



The Parthenon, Athens

In case you are wondering, the same TIA survey mentioned revealed the following United States cities as the most gay-friendly:

- San Francisco, CA
- Key West, FL.
- New York City; New York
- Provincetown, Mass.
- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami-South Beach, FL
- Las Vegas, NV
- New Orleans, LA
- Palm Springs-Palm Desert, CA.

Good travel agents also know other less popular or commercial destinations that welcome gay travelers, including small mountain towns like Asheville, NC. Don't feel that you must limit yourself to major destinations.



The Grand Canal, Venice

You also have the choice to travel independently or with an all-gay group. It's up to you, of course: some people are more comfortable surrounded by other gay travelers and the opportunity to be more open and expressive. If the purpose of your trip is sightseeing and cultural exploration, then independent travel may be a better choice, as it allows the most freedom to go at your own pace, and as long as you abide by local customs, you can travel almost anywhere. On the other hand, if you are taking a trip for relaxation or romance, you will almost certainly experience more of both when surrounded by like-minded people. Speaking of being able to relax, openly discuss what you want from your vacation with

your travel consultant early in the planning process - then you'll know you can go where you want to go and do what you want to do.

Surveys have indicated that a gay or lesbian traveler typically seeks originality, excitement, dining, local culture and affordability in their travel options. Which brings us back to our original point, doesn't it? Travel is travel, and our small differences shadow our likenesses. All in all, a bit of expert planning will make travel for gays and lesbians every bit as comfortable and fulfilling as they want it to be - just as it should be.