

LGBTQ International Travel Tips

Researching destinations for your next big vacation getaway may be part of the fun, but for LGBT world travelers — especially those with kids — it is also a very important step to ensuring a safe and enjoyable trip.

Tolerance and legal rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community vary dramatically throughout the world. Even in countries where marriage equality laws exist, LGBT travelers may still face discrimination and harassment or be made to feel unwelcome — some hotels or resorts in remote overseas areas, for example, may refuse bookings from same-sex couples.

“When you travel internationally there is a lot more research that needs to go into it,” said John Tanzella, president and chief executive of the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in an interview. “It’s more precarious.”

According to the U.S. Department of State, some countries may not legally recognize same-sex marriage and [more than 75](#) consider consensual same-sex sexual relations to be a crime, which is sometimes punished severely.

In the most homophobic foreign territories, LGBT public displays of affection could result in fines or jail time — in addition the wider threat of physical attack.

Before You Go, Laws and LGBT

Whether traveling solo, with a partner, or with your kids, it is important to do your homework thoroughly before you book a flight.

The State Department recommends LGBT travelers review important country information on travel.state.gov and the website of the [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) where they plan to travel.¹

The government also advises LGBT travelers to bring with them copies of important documents when crossing borders, especially if they are heading to a country where they may not be afforded the same legal protections as in the United States. Such paperwork includes a living will or health care directive, contact information for your family and/or attorney back home in the United States, and parentage or custody documents for any minor children in tow (particularly if they have a different last name).

FamiliesGoTravel.com further [recommends](#) parents have an attorney draft a health care proxy for both parents, so each parent has the right to make medical decisions for each other and their kids.

Same-sex travelers should also keep handy the address and phone number of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, in both English and the local language. Remember, you are subject to the laws and the justice system of whatever country you visit. As such, it’s wise to familiarize yourself with the local laws impacting LGBT individuals. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association, based in Geneva, Switzerland, provides a [world map](#) of sexual orientation laws.

¹ U.S. Passports & International Travel, “LGBTI Travel Information”

Top LGBT Destinations ... and Not

While LGBT travelers need not limit themselves to destinations with a history of hospitality, of course, it may make for a better overall experience to visit places that regularly make the top 10 list of gay- and lesbian-friendly locales, including Tel Aviv, Copenhagen, and Toronto. The Lonely Planet offers more [LGBT hotspots](#) on its website, as does Out Traveler magazine's global [destination guide](#).

Similarly, it's possible to book packages that include entertainment, hotels, and airlines that embrace LGBT consumers.

Many travel sites, including [Expedia](#), provide filters for hotels that are gay/lesbian friendly. Indeed some hotels, like [Hilton Hotels](#) and [Marriott](#), bill themselves as committed to treating gay and lesbian guests with respect. Some travel companies, including [OUT Adventures](#) and [Detours](#), also cater to gay and lesbian travelers, with all-inclusive resorts, cruises and tours.

Importantly, "Out Traveler" also publishes a list of the top 10 destinations where LGBT travelers [should not venture](#), including Nigeria, Uganda, Russia and Lithuania, where anti-gay laws or sentiment may encourage the persecution of LGBT individuals.

While Traveling on Vacation

Once you get to where you're going, the State Department advises LGBT travelers to avoid potentially risky situations and to be wary of entrapment campaigns when reaching out to the local community, as police in some countries monitor websites, mobile apps and meeting places.

In more conservative corners of the globe, where LGBT couples might face discrimination (or worse), lesbian blogger Jen Bauer suggests in a 2013 article for [Familiesgotravel.com](#) that same sex couples potentially avoid behavior that calls attention to their sexual orientation, including physical displays of affection.

And Adam Groffman, a self-professed gay travel expert and [blogger](#), added in a 2014 column for [NomadicMatt.com](#) that LGBT travelers should carefully consider the wisdom of "outing" themselves to strangers they meet during their travels. Be mindful of circumstances.

Same Sex Parents

If safety is a concern, same-sex parents may also wish to coach their kids on how they address each other, at least temporarily while they are abroad, lest a declaration of "mommy and momma" create unwanted attention.

"LGBT parents need to make sure they have all their ducks in a row before leaving the country," said Tanzella. "That is always a challenge, especially if their children are adopted."

Travel Builds Bridges

The potential challenges that gay and lesbian individuals face when traveling abroad are no reason to stay home on the couch. Travel is an excellent way to broaden your horizon and shake off the cobwebs. It also fosters a more global perspective.

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