

The Big Business of LGBT Travel

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender travel has always existed, but recently mainstream companies have been tailoring campaigns to the demographic. As social and political views in the U.S. evolve and become more accepting of the LGBT community, we see businesses revamping their marketing models to become more inclusive as well.

By Merryn Johns + Skift Staff



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Executive summary

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community has never been more visible or powerful than now. With the steady progress of LGBT rights coupled with global economic recovery, the LGBT consumer is highly desirable—a “dream market” as described by The Wall Street Journal in 1988 – due to its high discretionary income, economic resilience, confidence, and brand loyalty.

“Gay travel” has always existed, whether in the form of gay men partying the night away on Mykonos or lesbians making a pilgrimage to their namesake Lesbos. This travel market has grown visibly in the past 20 years, reflecting advancements in LGBT rights and social acceptance, resulting in a corresponding increase in corporate marketing, communications and responsibility aimed at the LGBT demographic. Today, most players in the travel and tourism industry agree that the LGBT market is lucrative and actively court it.

LGBT travel might be booming, but marketing strategies and diversity awareness are still evolving at a business level. This report will discuss the events that helped create LGBT market awareness, the major trends in today’s market, and innovative approaches to campaigns and strategies that work.

Introduction

LGBT travel is nothing new. Bob Damron's "Address Book" of 1964 offered a guide to the gay bars and bathhouses of Texas (Damron went on to create the Damron LGBT Travel Guide, now in its 50th edition, and with men's and women's versions), and in the 1970s Hanns Ebensten took groups of gay men on adventure tours, rafting in the Grand Canyon, or to Carnival in Rio de Janeiro (this concept lives on in HE Travel).

The emergence of visible and vibrant gay communities and events in cities and towns such as San Francisco, New York, Provincetown, and Key West, also helped fuel LGBT travel. In 1979 the clothing optional guesthouse for gay men in Key West "Island House" opened and prompted a flood of others; in the 1980s and '90s same-sex cruises became popular—Atlantis for men, Olivia for women.

But while there have always been LGBT travelers, a consensus on the importance of the LGBT market had its watershed moment in 1993. Viewed as a pioneer in LGBT marketing today, American Airlines' early adoption of corporate responsibility "grew out of setbacks that initially rocked the company," says Bob Witeck, founder and principal of Washington D.C.-based consulting firm Witeck Communications Inc. AA flight crew on a flight from Washington, D.C. to Dallas/Fort Worth requested a change of pillows and blankets due to the number of "activists returning from the gay march on Washington" on board. Leaked to the LGBT media, this message, which hinted at panic around HIV/AIDS, inspired protests. While American's response included a public apology, sensitivity training, and the promise of an internal investigation, there were calls for a boycott. Only months later, a passenger living with AIDS was forcibly removed from an AA flight after he attempted to administer medication via an intravenous drip. The protests against American grew to the threat of an international boycott.

American consulted Witeck, an expert in the field of LGBT marketing and communications, and action was taken to prove that American recognized and welcomed its LGBT customers. "Word spread within the gay community that American was serious about making changes to be a better company for customers and employees who

are LGBT as well as people living with HIV/AIDS,” recalls Witeck. These actions included the creation of a gay-identified sales and marketing team to handle incoming gay travel requests and to promote American Airlines at LGBT community events; the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in American’s non-discrimination policies; domestic partner and transgender health benefits; joining IGLTA; reaching out to top LGBT organizations to serve as exclusive airline sponsor. American is the only airline to have earned a 100% score every year since 2002 on the HRC Corporate Equality Index, and today, many other corporations aim to reach this standard of LGBT corporate responsibility.

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About Skift

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Economic value of LGBT consumers



Source:
www.familyvacations.com

According to Witeck Communications, U.S. LGBT buying power is estimated at \$830 billion in 2013, up from \$740 billion in 2012. Thomas E. Roth, president of Community Marketing & Insights (CMI), a San Francisco-based consultancy firm for travel industry leaders including Hyatt, Kimpton, and the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority points to one figure as a “standard in the industry”—and it’s pretty impressive. “According to the US Department of Commerce, the travel industry generated more than \$2 trillion in economic output in 2012. “Based on this data and CMI sample demographics, we estimate that the annual economic impact of LGBT travelers is over \$100 billion per year in the U.S. alone,” says Roth.

During the 2007-2009 global economic crisis the LGBT market remained resilient, spending on leisure travel, and remaining optimistic about the economic future. The LGBT Financial Experience, a 2012-13 report conducted by Prudential, found that the median household income of LGBTs was \$61,500 compared with \$50,000 for the average American household. According to the report, travel was a top item in LGBT spending. CMI’s 18th Annual LGBT Travel Survey of 2013 reported that gay men and lesbians took an average of seven leisure trips per year, and with nearly 40% of LGBTs taking a vacation of five nights or more in the past year, travel is clearly a priority, even over other purchases such as a computer devices or cars.

The LGBT Traveler Today



Source: Tourisme Montréal, Queer of the Year contest

Despite the gradual mainstreaming of LGBT communities and identities, the LGBT traveler has specific needs and wants that set them apart from heterosexuals. Gay men and lesbians travel more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts; as John Tanzella, president and CEO of IGLTA told the New York Times in May 2014, 6 to 8 percent of overall American tourism spending (according to Department of Commerce figures) is L.G.B.T. spending.”

LGBTs are attracted to urban and cosmopolitan destinations such as New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles/West Hollywood—the top domestic destinations according to CMI. Fort Lauderdale, however, specifically Wilton Manors, Florida, a beachside location with a visible LGBT community out-ranks Miami/South Beach as a destination because of the concerted LGBT outreach through its “Hello Sunny” campaign.

TOP U.S. LEISURE DESTINATIONS FOR GAY MEN

DESTINATION	% VISITED
New York City	23%
San Francisco	18%
Chicago	18%
Last Vegas	18%
LA/West Hollywood	15%
Washington D.C.	
Ft. Lauderdale/Wilton Manors	15%
Palm Springs	13%
Orlando	10-11%
San Diego	10-11%
Boston	10-11%
Miami/South Beach	10-11%

SOURCE: CMI's 18th Annual LGBT Travel Survey Report

TOP U.S. DESTINATIONS FOR LESBIANS

DESTINATION	% VISITED
New York City	15%
San Francisco	15%
Las Vegas	13-14%
Chicago	13-14%
LA/West Hollywood	11-12%
Washington D.C.	10%
Boston	8-9%
San Diego	8-9%
Orlando	8-9%
Seattle	8-9%

SOURCE: CMI's 18th Annual LGBT Travel Survey Report

TOP INTERNATIONAL
DESTINATIONS FOR LGBT TRAVELERS

DESTINATION	% VISITED
Canada	13%
England	7%
France	7%
Mexico	7%
Spain	6%
Germany	5%
Italy	5%
Montreal, Canada	5%
Toronto, Canada	5%
Vancouver, Canada	5%

SOURCE: CMI's 18th Annual LGBT Travel Survey Report

Las Vegas, Nevada, also ranks highly amongst LGBTs because of marketing which features the tagline "Everyone's welcome, even straight people." Internationally, Canada, England, France, Mexico and Spain rank highly in the CMI report possibly because these countries have forms of relationship recognition for LGBTs. And Montreal and Toronto have launched sophisticated and concerted outreach programs targeting LGBT travelers.

In one sense, the LGBT traveler sounds like all travelers: rest and relaxation is the main motivator for most LGBT vacations, and both men and women favor beach escapes and warm climates. However, LGBTs are also motivated to travel for Pride, prefer forward-thinking, progressive destinations, seek out mid-range hotels with free Wi-Fi and good amenities, and tend to avoid organized tour groups. These distinctions increase across age and gender.

Gay Men

The gay male traveler—even when traveling with a partner—is open to meeting other men, seeks out cul-

tural attractions, has high service expectations, and tends to be an "urban core" traveler. According to the CMI report, when choosing a hotel, high-end design is more important to gay men than to women, and upscale cruises are popular. In media aimed at gay men, especially in imagery, clothing optional properties and settings are also attractive—the "heterofriendly."

Axel Hotels in Barcelona, Berlin, and Maspalomas have an almost legendary status among gay men due to an image-driven brand that emphasizes this. All-male getaways have been popular since the dawn of gay travel and continue today, fueled by social media and dating apps. Listed on the IGLTA website for August 2014 was a two-week Nude Gay Sailing Cruise to Croatia by the Dutch company, Gay Sail. "Two 50 feet sailing yachts, 20 nude gay boys and m[e]n!" Another listing for a Gentlemen Only Party Event in Santorini promised a clothing optional pool along with sunsets. Island House For Men, Key West's largest gay men's guesthouse, has built its client base around its "private clothing-optional compound with pool, sundecks, poolside cafe & bar, gym (both free weights & machines), sauna, steam room, indoor & outdoor jacuzzis, and erotic video room."

But it's not all about sex. Gay men are increasingly interested in experiential and authentic travel, says Ed Salvato, editor-in-chief of digital magazine ManAboutWorld. "Quirky local events, like the gay matchmaking festival in Lisdoonvarna, Ireland we write about in

Source:
<http://escollectionamsterdam.com/web/>



our current issue; gay travelers are seeking out these experiences in record numbers.” Luxury and curated international travel is also of interest, with websites such as TravelAlt.com and HautesVacances.com catering to the upscale gay consumer.

Gay Women

Lesbians tend to travel in couples (according to Curve magazine’s reader survey, a majority of gay women are in relationships), and they are more likely to travel for romance, not surprising given that 65% of female same-sex couples went on a honeymoon last year compared to 49% of gay male couples [CMI]. They seek out seclusion, nature, and soft adventure. Safety and value for money are top priorities.

While some marketers believe that the lesbian market is too defined by budget consciousness, the Prudential report indicates that lesbians actually slightly outspend gay men on travel (53% vs. 52%). “While the media typically focuses on the buying power of gay male couples, the study indicates that lesbians are also a significant economic force. Lesbians have a higher median individual income

than women in the general population, and their overall household income is on par with gay men because the majority live in a dual-income household.” [Prudential]

Lesbians are more likely to be adventure travelers and seek out travel off the beaten path. The lesbian-owned travel companies Pink Iceland, which specializes in soft adventure tours of Iceland, and the lesbian-owned and nature-centric Ecocircuitous in Panama, Wild Rainbow African Safaris in South Africa and Brazil Ecojourneys in South Africa and Brazil Ecojourneys are a few such examples. Lesbians are more likely to consider accommodation alternatives to hotels, such as apartment rentals, home exchange, and even house sitting (Globetrotter-girls.com and Housesittingworld.com are lesbian-owned websites). They’re also more likely to self-cater, live like a local, and give back to local communities through carbon offset or charities. “We get gay guys and women doing our tours but normally the lesbians are the ones that ask the questions about our ‘green’ credentials and how sustainable our tours are,” says Marta Dalla Chiesa, lesbian owner/operator of Brazil Ecojourneys.



Source:
 American Airlines,
 Human Rights Campaign

Bi-Sexual and Transgendered Travel

The other two groups in the LGBT community are harder to identify as consumer profiles. Bisexuals are less readable in public, since they are read as either gay or straight depending upon the partner they are traveling with, and are serviced accordingly.

Trans and gender nonconforming travelers have special needs when they travel depending on their gender expression, which may or may not match their government-issued identification.

To this extent, sensitivity training of airline and TSA personnel is necessary. Travel businesses specifically catering to trans travelers are few, although Dynamic Travel & Cruises, established 30 years ago by a transgender travel agent, recently advertised a cruise on the IGLTA website. The IGLTA has itself attempted outreach to the trans community mostly through its nonprofit foundation, which recently offered drastically reduced membership rates to assist small LGBT-owned travel businesses in emerging markets where the infrastructure for this com-

munity is not

yet established. "Due to the lack of visibility for transgender-run businesses, this program is open to transgender-owned/operated businesses anywhere in the world," ran the post, and encouraged businesses especially in Central and South America, Asia, the Eastern Bloc, Africa and the Middle East to apply.

Mixed Travel

As the LGBT community wins the same rights and acceptance as heterosexuals, mixing socially is more common. LGBT weddings, honeymoons and family travel are increasing. Some straight clientele even follow the gays market as an influencer market, preferring the upscale aesthetic of gay favorites such as the W Hotel. The Out NYC is New York City's first "straight friendly" urban resort, and in other such hip and urban core environments as Barcelona or Las Vegas, where the gay traveler will not be placated by the image of the humble rainbow flag, "straight friendly" is becoming an appealing tagline.

Why Age Matters



Source:
visitlasvegas.com/gaytravel

As with other travelers, the needs and preferences of LGBT travelers differ according to age and stage in life.

Baby Boomers

According to the CMI report, older LGBTs are warm weather travelers and older gay men are likely to stay LGBT-dedicated properties and guesthouses. Some older gay men are more likely to vacation with lesbian friends of a similar age, since nightclubbing and meeting other men are no longer priorities. "A very important segment is the aging LGBT traveler," says co-founder of R Family Vacations, Gregg Kaminsky. "I still love disco music, but I might not be on the dance floor all night with my shirt off anymore. Stick me in a piano bar with show tunes and cocktails and I'm a happy gay man." Salvato agrees, "the over-50 gay traveler is part of a first-ever generation of out, gay-identified travelers, with the money and time for extensive travel. This diverse market includes guys celebrating milestone birth-

days, and traveling with small to medium sized groups of friends and family—often footing the bill."

X, Y and Millennials

According to the Boston Consulting Group, 16-34 year olds are more likely to travel internationally, use low-cost carriers and less likely to use loyalty programs. According to CMI, younger LGBTs are motivated to travel by friends, entertainment and LGBT nightlife. They are more likely than older LGBTs to describe themselves as budget, urban, adventure travelers, and more likely to use mobile devices for planning and during trips.

Despite the mainstreaming of the LGBT community, Millennials still need niche, bespoke or consulting services to cater to their specific consumer profile and tastes. "We are looking at diversifying to include women-only groups, because younger lesbians, specially in Europe, seem to prefer that," says Marta Dalla Chiesa of Brazil Ecojourneys.

Current Travel Trends



Source:
www.familyvacations.com

The LGBT consumer market is an “influencer” market and an early adopter of new trends. Add to this the rapid progress in equal rights for LGBTs and numerous trends are apparent.

Weddings & Honeymoons

The Williams Institute has found that there is a substantial impact on a state’s economy tied to its law regarding gay marriage. Massachusetts gained \$111 million over the first four years after same-sex marriage was made legal. One year after New York passed the Marriage Equality Act, “gay marriage generated \$259 million in economic impact in New York City alone,” noted ThinkProgress.

States with marriage equality such as Washington are aggressively targeting the LGBT traveler. The “Marry Me in Seattle” advertising campaign invites couples to enter sweepstakes to marry with openly gay Seattle Mayor Ed Murray as wedding officiant, and offers the services of 50 local companies.

“Same-sex couples will become more ambitious in selecting honeymoon locations as well, considering nuptials in other parts of the world,” says Witeck. “With the merger between American Airlines and US Airways, the airline will probably reach more of the world than ever before, and perhaps more than any other airline.”

Family Travel

While lesbians have children more than gay men, there is also “much pent-up desire to have and raise families, particularly among gay men for the first time,” says Witeck, “so the options for family-friendly travel will be growing too.” According to CMI, the majority of LGBT parents are motivated by child-friendly over LGBT-friendly destinations and hotels. Orlando, FL. has its own LGBT Convention & Visitors Bureau and launched the inaugural Family Outfest in 2014. “There are certainly many more LGBT families so the market size has certainly increased,” says Kaminsky. “We provide an important

experience to LGBT families—the ability to spend quality time with families just like theirs.” And because family trumps gay identity, R Family offers “something for everyone” including different price points, vacations on land and sea, weekend getaways, summer camps, and trips for gay parents with adult kids, gay empty nesters, or gay adults with no kids. “We certainly see in the future gay grandparent vacations, so stay tuned!”

National & International Event Travel

LGBTs travel for community-building events such as Gay Pride and circuit parties and LGBT fundraisers such as White Party, Lazarus, Aquagirl. Politically significant events such as the Gay Games, World Pride, EuroPride, or Prides in regions where LGBT equality is emerging (for example, Prague, Johannesburg, Phuket, Curacao) may also inspire travel. International music festivals aimed at LGBTs are also growing in popularity, including events in Bangkok, Barcelona, Hamburg, Istanbul, Mallorca, and Taipei. “LGBT travel is booming, that’s clear, and we are witnessing a surge in welcoming campaigns and policies from many parts of the world, particularly in Latin America and throughout Europe, even some parts of Asia,” says Witeck.

Voluntourism

Do-gooding while on vacation is also popular with LGBTs. Global Volunteers has an international LGBT program that sends hard-working and non-tourist-minded LGBTs to assist communities on

PRIDE EVENTS BY MONTH

DESTINATION	MONTH
Cape Town	February
EuroSki	March
Phuket	March
Miami	April
Tokyo	April
Cyprus	May
Sao Paulo	May
Los Angeles	June
Honolulu	June
Philadelphia	June
Tel Aviv	June
London	June
Berlin	June
Zagreb	June
New York	June
San Francisco	June
Paris	June
Cologne	July
Stockholm	July
Amsterdam	July
Vancouver	July
Antwerp	August
Reykjavik	August
Montreal	August
Copenhagen	August
Tallinn	August
Taiwan	September

week-long work vacations. Fromhousestohomes.org, based in Guatemala, also offers a satisfying working vacations building houses for underprivileged locals, and is a favorite of CMI’s Tom Roth.

Pets

Many gays and lesbians who do not have children own pets and spend a considerable amount of resources on them. Lesbians outspend gay men on pets but both men and women like to travel with their animals and seek out pet-friendly and gay-friendly hotels such as Kimpton.

Brand Preference



Source:
<http://www.sunny.org/lgbt/>

70% of LGBTs would pay premium for a product from a company that supports the LGBT community and 78% would switch brands to companies that are known as LGBT friendly, according to OutThink Partners. To this extent, brand preference and loyalty is strong among LGBT travelers. CMI survey respondents were able to positively recall five leading hotel brands that had been effective in reaching out to the LGBT community: Hilton, Marriott, Kimpton, W and Hyatt chains.

Case Study: Marriott “Love Travels”

Launched just in time for wedding season, June through November 2014, Marriott International’s #LoveTravels campaign was the

largest-ever diversity campaign for the LGBT demographic (according to mediapost.com). The campaign, which played on the zeitgeist of “love is love” utilized portraits by photographer Braden Summers of well-known LGBT Americans and regular LGBT couples to convey a message of identity, Pride, love, acceptance, and belonging—at home and away.

Key to the campaign were images of out professional basketball player Jason Collins, and Geena Rocero, a transgender Filipina model, advocate and public speaker. The images were displayed Marriott buildings in Washington DC, San Francisco and New York, as well as in display ads and on the microsite Marriott.com/gaytravel.

Trusted Media



Source:
<http://www.manaboutworld.com/>

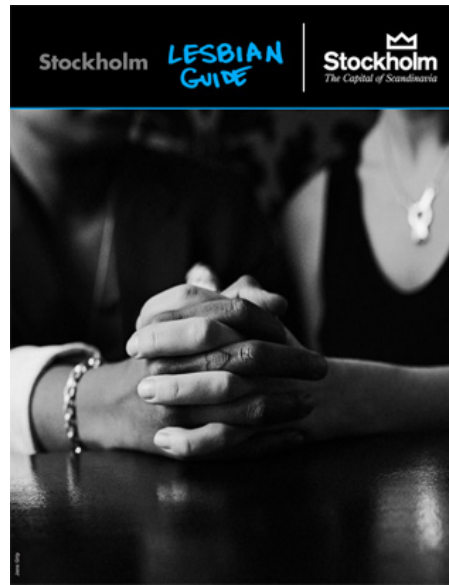
While mainstream media, most recently The New York Times, occasionally tackles the subject of LGBT travel, LGBT media is still the most trusted source of travel information for LGBT travelers. According to the CMI report, a majority of both gay men and women respond to LGBT websites, and feature articles in LGBT print magazines—even over travel guidebooks. While older LGBTs are influenced by print, younger LGBTs are influenced by new media such as travel blogs, as well as social tech like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Foursquare and Snapchat.

Case Study: Man About World

A magazine developed exclusively for iPad and Android tablets, ManAboutWorld provides broad inspiration and highly curated

recommendations for gay men who love to travel,” says Salvato. From the same founder as landmark travel magazine Out Traveler, it aims for savvy, inspired and opinionated editorial, but with a modern digital-native, immersive platform, featuring live links, embedded audio, video and HTML. “In two years, we’ve been downloaded onto 25,000 tablets—and we gain 1,000 new downloads a month,” says Salvato. ManAboutWorld has a contributor network of more than 75 “travel experts—kind of a ‘who’s who’ of gay travel. They are our eyes and ears around the world, sending us their new discoveries and keeping our travel guides up to date.” In addition to 10 issues per year, ManAboutWorld offers guides as separate downloadable e-books.

Marketing to LGBT Travelers



Source: Stockholm Gay & Lesbian Guide

Creating authentic campaigns to attract the LGBT traveler involves more than display ads festooned in rainbow colors. Since LGBTs are not a homogenous consumer group, the following case studies are illustrative of successful strategies and techniques.

Case Study #1: Visit Sweden/Gay & Lesbian Stockholm

While Sweden's image is already that of a tolerant and welcoming city to LGBTs, its DMOs had an objective to elevate it to a world-class destination for LGBTs. Stockholm Gay & Lesbian Network (SGLN), founded in 2005 as a project within Stockholm Visitors Board, the official marketing organization of Stockholm and owned by the city, had the objective "to make Stockholm a preferred destination for gay and lesbian travellers," says Christina Guggenberger, Project Manager Stockholm Gay & Lesbian Network at Stockholm Visitors Board, Meetings & Conventions.

While the political situation in Rus-

sia has not been a direct factor in prompting Sweden to market to LGBT travellers, it has provided inspiration. Last year's #gowest campaign initiated by Stockholm Pride invited Russian LGBTs to Sweden, and a video initiative during the Olympic Games in Sochi had the Stockholm Stadium filled with LGBT community, family and friends singing the Russian anthem. "Diversity, Openness and Respect are important values for welcoming destinations and are core values for Stockholm and Sweden," says Guggenberger.

Visit Sweden and Gay & Lesbian Stockholm specifically target lesbian travelers. "In our marketing strategy and Gay Guide we have always included both gay and lesbian. However, with input from our lesbian media visits, attending seminars, and taking part in and learning from surveys, we realized that it is very important to communicate with the lesbian community. In 2010 we pinpointed the key persons within lesbian business in Stockholm to get them to participate in our network.

We produce a lesbian destination guide, target relevant sales channels and media, and have done lesbian specific campaigns. Today our Stockholm Lesbian Guide is our most visited page on our blog gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com."

Case Study #2: Montreal, Canada

Tourisme Montreal was a pioneer in the LGBT marketplace with innovative initiatives to attract the LGBT traveler. "In 1994, Montreal, Key West and Provincetown were basically the only destinations with a specific marketing outreach aimed at the LGBT market," says Tanya Churchmuch, a PR consultant who supervised Tourisme Montreal's LGBT outreach. "By being one of the first out of the gate we were able to solidify our presence early on, which is especially important today seeing as there is so much global competition by destinations for the LGBT market. Montreal is known worldwide as a welcoming and exciting destination for the LGBT community."

Key to their success was "authenticity" and keeping up with new marketing strategies. "When marketing to the LGBT community, it is so very important to show that you are not simply 'pinkwashing'," says Churchmuch, who points out that Tourisme Montreal was public about its support of the LGBT community, incorporating it within its greater overall marketing conversation. "You'll find Montreal's Gay Village included on the general tourist map that is given to every single tourist who comes to the city. It's a great neighborhood, and everybody should know about it."

Also key was keeping up with devel-



Source: Olivia Lesbian Travel

opments in online media and inventing campaigns that lived virally, such as the international, online Queer of the Year competition for three summers via Facebook from 2010-2012. "Nothing like that had ever been seen before," says Churchmuch. "Last year Tourisme Montreal was the first destination to include a transgendered individual (Carmen Carrera) as part of our Do Your Thing LGBT YouTube campaign. This year, we partnered with Logo to create a 6-part web series called Montreal Boy, as a way to approach the younger LGBT market. We use the word 'queer' in much of what we do—a risky move that no other North American DMO has done, but it paid off for us."

The payoff is considerable: around 6-8% of visitors to Montreal self-identify as LGBT, but their spend represents about 11-12% of tourists overall, says Churchmuch.

"That is a huge proportion for a so-called small, niche group."

Case Study #3: Olivia Cruises & Resorts

Olivia president Judy Dlugacz clearly believes in the necessity for lesbian-exclusive travel. Since 1990, when she founded the world's best known cruise company for lesbians the demand for lesbian-exclusive travel has increased. "For example, in 2013, we grew 40% and we continue to see tremendous potential

from the international market as well as the U.S. market.” The appeal of the brand lies in its product, but also the marketing, which depicts couples and groups of women of varying age, ethnic background, body type and gender expression, relaxing against tropical backdrops. The imagery appeals to the lesbian demand for inclusiveness, and safety.

“We are seeing a greater number of women wanting safe, secure ways to see more of the world so we have expanded our offerings and types of trips to include large cruises to Australia, Alaska, Mexican Riviera, and the Caribbean. Our mid-size ships and riverboats have taken women to incredible destinations in Europe, the British Isles and Greece. We have resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico. We do small adventure trips

like safaris, cruises through the Galapagos Islands and polar bear expeditions. We’ve done cruise/land trips to China, Vietnam and Cambodia. And our luxury cruises go to Tahiti, South America, the Mediterranean and much more.”

Affordability is also key to the lesbian traveler—Olivia offers payment plans; plus exclusivity matters to women who live and work in predominantly heterosexually-oriented professions and states with no anti-discrimination protection. “There is nowhere else where you can be in the majority, because we charter the entire ship and resort for our guests and bring amazing talent and redesign the programming for our guests. We make traveling carefree and the joy it should be.”

Best practices for travel brands

While most in the travel trade want the lucrative “pink dollar,” **“authenticity” is the buzzword circulating that enables brands to avoid “pinkwashing,”** or disingenuous marketing that aims at attracting the gay dollar without understanding the consumer behind it. In the past two decades, LGBT marketing and consultancy firms have reached out to corporations and businesses to assist them in this process, to build a relationship with LGBT consumers, and extend an authentic invitation to them.

“Travel brands seeking to engage LGBT consumers need to build a relationship with those consumers and make an authentic invitation to them to experience their product or service,” says Stephan A. Roth, principal of Out-Think Partners. “A booth at the local Pride festival one day out of the year or a rainbow flag on your website is not enough.”

Roth’s recommendations include:

- Show LGBT travelers that you understand their needs
- Support organizations that are important to the community
- Customize products and services to meet the needs of LGBT travelers

“At the end of the day, perhaps the most important way to build a relationship with LGBT consumers is still through the product. As long as the product is excellent and LGBT customers feel valued and respected they will continue to bring their business back. I have a gay friend who’s an attorney and active on the boards of several LGBT non-profits. He recently flew a major U.S. airline and had a terrible experience with a flight attendant who disapproved of his ‘gay lifestyle’ and berated him for traveling to another city to attend Pride there. You can imagine that he won’t be flying with them again anytime soon!”





About Skift

Skift is a business information company focused on travel intelligence and offers news, data, and services to professionals in travel and professional travelers, to help them make smart decisions about travel.

Founded in 2012 by media entrepreneur Rafat Ali, Skift is based in New York City and backed by Lerer Ventures, Advancit Capital and other marquee media-tech investors.

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