10 LGBT-Friendly Travel Destinations Chosen by Travel Agents

GAY-FRIENDLY VACATIONS FOR LGBTQ+ TRAVELERS

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Over the past 5 decades, the development and marketing of tourism products and services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer people has undergone a steady evolution, according to the Europe Travel Commission and the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA).

And the LGBTQ+ segment continues to demonstrate higher-than-average patterns of spending. “Using an extrapolation of the U.S. Travel Industry, the LGBTQ+ travelers account for at least 5% of all of the travel in the USA, which amounts to about $100 billion per year,” said Thomas Roth, Founder of Community Marketing & Insights.

LGBTQ TRAVEL - *"LGBTQ+ travelers account for at least 5% of all travel in the USA, which amounts to about $100 billion per year."*

These positive trends have sparked travel agencies to recruit travel agents who specialize in customizing gay-friendly luxury vacations, honeymoons and destination weddings. Avid travelers are always looking for the next big destination to visit; so, we decided to chat with a few of our LGBTQ+ travel specialists at Travel Leaders Group (parent company of Vacation.com) for their list of top LGBTQ+-friendly destinations. Find out if your favorite destination made our list for LGBTQ+ travelers!

SITGES, SPAIN

Located just a 40-minute train or bus ride from Barcelona, Sitges hosts dozens of LGBTQ+ events throughout the year, including a Bears Week in May and September. But that's not the only reason the seaside town is attracting gay travelers from all over Europe and the U.S. "The town offers a beautiful boardwalk on the beach, tons of restaurants and lots of shopping options. Plus, it has several gay bars all within walking distance," said Jose Luis Lopez, founder of Fontane Travel and a New York City-based travel agent.

SITGES, SPAIN

Sitges’ vibrant nightlight is centered around a strip of bars, which includes XXL, Bear Bar and the Parrot Pub, a lively and large bar with outdoor seating that’s perfect for patrons who like to people watch while sipping on a cocktail. And with its LGBTQ+-friendly accommodations, venues and welcoming charm, it’s not surprising why Sitges also made our list of 8 gay-friendly honeymoon destinations.

For vacationers who don’t want to leave Spain with tan lines, this small town has two popular nude beaches – Playa De Las Balmins and Playa del Muerto. For the more modest sunbather, Playa de la Bassa Rodona is the town’s main and most well-known gay beach – swimsuit required. All of these are clear reasons that make Sitges the ideal vacation spot, and it has also led to another interesting trend. “It [Sitges] is growing in popularity, even to the point of Americans moving there permanently,” said Los Angeles-based travel agent Leigh Gernert. So, you may want to pack extra clothes just in case.

Bassa Rodona S.L.

PLAYA DE LA BASSA RODONA

ICELAND

For American travelers, part of the reason Iceland has become a popular destination is because of a recent increase in direct flights, making it an easily accessible vacation spot. But there are other reasons why Iceland is growing in popularity among this segment of travelers. “It’s a welcoming and inclusive country and also at the leading edge of LGBT rights,” said Greg Kiep, a Beverly Hills-based travel agent. Greg organizes LGBT-friendly tours of the country that feature unique excursions to visit Thingvellir National Park, the picturesque Gullfoss waterfall, a jaw-dropping walk across Sólheimajökull Glacier, and a relaxing dip in Blue Lagoon, a world-renowned geothermal pool.

Iceland is very gay friendly, and people are attracted to the unique landscape,” said Keith Wein, a New York-based travel agent, adding more credibility to why Iceland made our list.

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

PORTUGAL

Spain’s next door neighbor is also an emerging market for gay travel. Why? Portugal is one of the few countries in the world whose Constitution has a strict ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation. In addition to its advancement in human rights, Portugal’s cities like Lisbon, which continues to attract LGBTQ+ travelers with its bars and clubs located in Bairro Alto, and its beautiful beaches, including the clothing-optional Beach 19. But that’s not all you should do when visiting this small country. During your visit, go wine tasting in the Douro Valley; explore Porto’s historic sites via walking tour, tram or boat; and take an exclusive walking tour to explore Lisbon’s unique architecture.

LISBON, PORTUGAL

“Being a relatively small country, travel there [Portugal] is relatively easy, and it just seems to appeal to many gay sensibilities,” said Leigh Gernert, a Los Angeles-based travel agent. “Portugal even has an entire region (the Algarve region) that boasts many gay accommodations and beaches. When you book your Portugal vacation with one of our travel agents, make sure you ask about our SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program. This exclusive program offers perks at 15 luxurious properties in the Algarve region, including Vinoa, Pine Cliffs Hotel, Villa Alcor, Poente, Marquesa, Edumundo, and the Conrad Algarve.

GAY PRIDE CELEBRATION IN LISBON

PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

This coastal town in the U.S., is known for attracting LGBTQ+ travelers year round, especially during the summer. “In the summertime, P-Town has been a big gay destination; however, it had simmered down for a long time,” said Jose Luis Lopez, a New York-based travel agent and founder of Fontane Travel. “Recently, however with the added homeshare options available with hotels, it has picked right back up again.”

PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

In addition to its 16 gay bars and clubs, P-Town hosts numerous LGBTQ+-themed events throughout the year, including Bear Week, Women’s Week, Men of Color Weekend, Girl Splash, Gay Pilots Week and Spooky Bear Weekend. Aside from gay-themed weeks and weekends, this small, but charming town also hosts special festivals and events to attract vacationers who enjoy antique cars, whale watching, independent films, sailing and literary geniuses like Tennessee Williams.

PROVINCETOWN BEACH AT SUNSET

TAIPEI, TAIWAN

With Taiwan becoming the first country in Asia to legally recognize same-sex marriages, Taipei has come into its own as a popular travel destination for LGBTQ+ travelers. “Some may be surprised that this is one of the most LGBTQ+-friendly cities in Asia,” said Danielle Rouviere, a travel agent based in San Diego. “Last year, gay marriage was legalized, furthering its spot as a top LGBTQ+ destination.” And surprisingly, the city has an amazing nightlife. Taipei’s strip of gay bars and clubs – including G-Paradise and Bears Bar – are located in the Red House District. But before you grab a cocktail, stop by the Ximending Night Market (opens at 5pm) to sample local food from street vendors or to shop at the numerous shops in this popular area. Add it to your must-see list! Consider staying at the luxurious, family-friendly Regent Taipei, located in the city’s commercial district with easy access to the main railway system.

TAIPEI, TAIWAN

“Aside from the typical array of bars and clubs, Taipei is home to temples, markets, a thriving art scene and one of the largest gay saunas in Asia,” said Danielle. Before you visit, a travel agent can customize your itinerary to include the city’s top attractions and fun activities. See one of the largest collections of jade at the National Palace Museum; go shopping for local handmade arts and crafts at Huashan 1914 Creative Park; visit Taipei 101 for panoramic views of the city and high-end shopping; and travel to the National Revolutionary Martyrs’ Shrine to watch the changing of the guard at noon.

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XIMENDING NIGHT MARKET IN TAIPEI

BALI

Known for its volcanic mountains, coral reefs and beautiful beaches, Bali made our list of emerging destinations recommend by our LGBT travel specialists. “It’s nature, beauty, Zen way of life, and the country’s nice people are attracting gay travelers for a different experience,” said Keith Wein, a New York City-based travel agent. More LGBTQ+ travelers are looking for unique experiences in off-the-beaten-path travel destinations.

ULUN DANU BERATAN TEMPLE IN BALI

You can’t travel to this exotic paradise without taking a tour of its historic temples (Tana Lot Temple and Uluwatu Temple), beautiful rice terraces, the Ubud Monkey Forest and the Bali Safari & Marine Park. Consult one of **Vacation**'s trusted travel agents to book your stay at a luxurious property, such as InterContinental Bali Resort, Conrad Bali Resort & Spa, St. Regis Bali Resort, Six Senses Uluwatu, or the Viceroy Bali – all part of our exclusive SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program.

UBUD MONKEY FOREST IN BALI

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Great beaches on the Mediterranean Sea, trendy clubs, live music, dancing, shopping, and restaurants serving Middle Eastern to Asian cuisine (and everything in between) – Tel Aviv is the center of Israel's modern life and it's also the epicenter of LGBT life in this region of the world. "The Middle East is probably not the first place you'd think of as being an LGBTQ+-friendly destination, but Tel Aviv has been referred to as the gay capital of the world," said Danielle Rouviere, a San Diego-based travel agent. "From gay beaches to drag nights to a huge Pride fest in June, this is one of the best cities for LGBTQ+ activities." In fact, it's not uncommon for party-goers to flock to the city's 10 gay-friendly bars and clubs on Thursdays and Fridays, when some venues host some of the hottest DJs in Europe and the U.S.

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

As for places to stay while visiting, Danielle recommends the gay-friendly Inta Hotel. **Vacation** suggests the Carlton Tel Aviv overlooking the marina, too. It's also part of our SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program. A travel agent can also help tailor your dream itinerary to include sights and activities such as a visit to Jaffa (an old Arab port town), the Yemenite Quarter, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the Neve Tzedek Quarter, Bialik Street, Netanya, Beit Hatefutsoth (Museum of the Jewish People) and the Yitzhak Rabin Center.

JAFFA - AN OLD ARAB PORT TOWN IN TEL AVIV

BERLIN

Known as a progressive city, Berlin isn't a surprise LGBTQ+-friendly travel destination on this list. With more than 40 gay bars and clubs, you're likely to find a place(s) with the perfect vibe. "The bar and club scene remains one of the best in the world, and there is obviously so much history and so many things to see as well," said Greg Kiep, a travel agent based in Beverly Hills, California. Reichstag, Brandenberg Gate, Gendarmenmarkt, Charlottenburg Palace, Museum Island, Potzdamer Platz and the Berlin Mall Memorial are a few sights a travel agent can add to your customized itinerary before visiting this historic, gay-friendly city.

BERLIN, GERMANY

Berlin continues to be a huge LGBT destination after dipping a bit in past years," said Kiep. To make the most of your trip to Berlin, a travel agent can book your stay at one of the 5-star properties in our SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program, such as the Ritz-Carlton Berlin, Grand Hyatt Berlin, Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin or the Orania Berlin.

COUPLE IN FRONT OF BERLIN'S BRANDENBURG GATE

MYKONOS, GREECE

It's already a popular port of call for some well-known LGBT-friendly cruises. The Greek island of Mykonos has an appeal all its own. "Not only did I spend my honeymoon and 50th birthday here, but I continue to recommend it to my clients," said Kelli Carpenter, a New York-based travel agent. "It continues to be an incredible destination for LGBTQ+ friends and it's a stunning travel destination with its turquoise blue waters, preserved architecture, and gorgeous seasonal weather."

MYKONOS, GREECE

And there are dozens properties in our SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program that you should consider staying when you're visiting, such as the Myconian Avaton Resort, Myconian Naia Luxury Suites and the Santa Marina Resort & Villas. According to Kelli, the island's beach resorts have a gay sensibility that appeals to the LGBTQ+ community.

Another factor in attracting our community is the bars and clubs in Mykonos, where patrons can grab a cocktail, listen to live music and mingle with both locals and out-of-towners. In addition to Mykonos, New York City-based agent Keith Wein recommends adding other Greek islands to your itinerary, including the romantic island of Santorini, "where LGBTQ+ travelers can feel safe and enjoy the island's breathtaking scenery."

SUPER PARADISE CLUB, MYKONOS, GREECE

SEATTLE

On the West Coast of the U.S., Seattle is home to several big-name companies, such as Amazon and Microsoft, and it is also an emerging LGBTQ+ destination. “It’s becoming home to the largest gay population in the U.S. and has beautiful scenery and so many things to see and explore,” said Keith Wein, founder of 127 Travel and a New York City-based travel agent. Travelers who enjoy hiking, camping or just being outdoors will appreciate this city and the jaw-dropping beauty of the National Parks nearby. For those who don’t want to make the 2- to 3-hour drive on their own, you can consult a travel agent, who can arrange private transport to and from Mount Rainier National Park, Olympic National Park, and North Cascades National Park.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Within the city limits, spend time checking out the local sights and the city's nightlife, which includes nearly 20 bars and clubs. Some of the Emerald City's must-see sights include the Space Needle, Museum of Pop Culture, Chihuly Garden and Glass, Seattle Art Museum, Pike Place Market, Museum of Flight, and for coffee drinkers, the Starbucks Reserve Roastery & Tasting Room. There's no shortage of places to stay, but if you want to take advantage of our SELECT Hotels & Resorts Program and its amazing perks, then consider staying at 9 centrally-located properties, including the Motif Seattle, Grand Hyatt Seattle, W Seattle, Fairmont Olympic Hotel or the Loews Hotel 1000.

MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK

OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH DESTINATIONS

In addition to these 10 amazing destinations, our travel agents said more LGBTQ+ travelers are looking for off-the-beaten path destinations to satisfy their wanderlust. “Emerging destinations are wherever my LGBTQ clients are going next,” said Shelly Bunge, a Beverly Hills-based travel agent. “So, for me lately, that means Oaxaca, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Fiji.” Unfortunately, some of these off-the-radar destinations are not welcoming to LGBTQ+ travelers or they may have a terrible human rights record against LGBTQ+ citizens. Our travel agents and LGBT travel specialists stress the importance of adhering to local laws and traditions for your safety. That includes not using dating apps when traveling. In any case when traveling, make knowledgeable and common-sense decisions to ensure your safety when exploring different cultures around the world.

Inspired by this article and want to speak with an expert LGBTQ+ travel specialist about how you can plan your fabulous dream trip? Let one of ***Vacation****’s on-call travel experts match you with a LGBTQ+ travel specialist, who can* customize the ideal itinerary that you deserve.

ASPARA DANCERS AT ANGKOR WAT IN CAMBODIA