

How to target LGBT travellers

By  Eugene Yiga

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Based on data from the Department of Commerce and Community Marketing Inc., the estimated annual economic impact of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) travellers is over \$75bn per year in the US alone.



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Eugene Yiga chats to Mark Chesnut, founder and editor of LatinFlyer.com and monthly columnist for on LGBT travel trends for Global Traveler, to learn more about the exciting trends.

What's happening in LGBT travel right now?

I've witnessed the wonderful evolution of the LGBT travel market and there are a lot of exciting trends and tactics to talk about. Greater acceptance of LGBT rights around the world has resulted in more acceptance of LGBT travellers and advertisers, as well as more integration into the so-called 'mainstream' marketplace. It's also brought more straight allies into the LGBT travel arena and that's good news for everyone.

What examples can you share of how this is working well?

Puerto Vallarta is the top international LGBT vacation destination in Mexico and their tourism office has recognised that. They've used appropriate images and also addressed the diversity of interests of LGBT travellers. They know that it's not

just about gay bars and nightlife; LGBT travellers enjoy lots of different activities. They've also used content that speaks to travellers and shows their gay-friendliness and sophistication, but they also provide detailed and useful information, and they make it easy to find all that information on their website.

Another great example in Latin America is Mexico City. This is one of the world's largest cities and it's one of my personal favourites. It's also one of Latin America's most progressive when it comes to gay rights (they legalised same-sex marriage years ago before Argentina did).

The Mexico City website offers a free downloadable LGBT travel guide that's richly detailed, nicely designed, and fun to look through. The downside at this point is that the guide is a little bit old and in need of an update; I'd personally like to volunteer my services to do that update because I do love Mexico City! You can find information about LGBT Pride and nightlife as well as neighbourhood guides and general travel tips.

Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, is another great example of a destination that doesn't hide its gay-friendliness. They offer their LGBT travel tips in both English and Spanish, and it's easy to find on their website. And of course, hotels have jumped on the bandwagon too.

Which hotels stand out for you as doing this well?

Preferred Hotels & Resorts has what's called the Preferred Pride programme, which identifies gay-friendly member hotels in their consortium in a variety of destinations. Hilton Hotels & Resorts is another example of how you can expand your product line and campaigns to include LGBT travellers, both as part of so-called mainstream campaigns as well as with targeted advertising or online content.

Which other companies are succeeding?

American Airlines is one of the major mainstream suppliers that have enjoyed a positive image within the community for a long time because they share their pro-gay stance publicly, with dedicated online and social media content. Similarly, Marriott makes it public how it respects its LGBT employees and that makes it more obvious how it will treat guests well too. So listen to your employees. This is obviously something that's much more visible if you're a big company like Marriott or like American Airlines but we know that everyone likes to patronise businesses that treat their employees well.

What content works well?

I write a lot of sponsored content for both business-to-business and consumer media outlets and I work with a variety of clients but there's still room for growth, particularly in the LGBT segment. I don't think it's been explored as much as it could. Sponsored content helps cut through the clutter of advertising by providing interesting, informative, and sometimes entertaining or even funny content that catches travellers' attention. And it's a great way to differentiate yourself and show your leadership in the industry on certain topics and types of travel.

“ Gay-specific businesses can turn the tables and advertise their straight-friendliness. ”

What makes content stand out?

Appropriate visuals play a key role. A while back I participated in an individual trip to Island House, a gay male hotel in Key West, Florida. The primary purpose of my visit was so that I could share photos and videos via Instagram and other social media outlets. So it's a tactic for creating engaging content and fun visuals that people want to share, especially if it's good-looking people in their bathing suits. People do love that, don't they!

Another example is the Mexican Tourism Board. They recently sponsored this Mexico LGBT travel guide, which ran in Travel Weekly. This is a great example of how to do that within the LGBT segment.

How might LGBT travel also be great for straight people?

Gay-specific businesses can turn the tables and advertise their straight-friendliness. That's what the Highlands Resort in California does on their website. And just look at how many straight people you might see on the street in the summer in Provence Town; now **that's** integration!

So if you have a small business that's targeted to LGBT trailers, you might also expand your reach beyond that and attract some traditional 'mainstream' or straight travellers too because that can provide even more opportunities. In other words, you might find that straight people are enjoying travel that in the past would have been thought of as gay.

What type of straight people might seek out gay-friendly travel companies and suppliers?

It's a broad group of people of those who are fun, open-minded, adventurous, educated, curious, creative, professional, energetic, sophisticated, and well-travelled. That's a good thing, because it creates more opportunities for those of us in the travel industry.

What are the appeals of LGBT travel?

First, it's fun and comfortable. Second, gay travel can also offer a high quality and less touristy experience. For example, my sister and her husband recently went on vacation in Scotland and they stayed at a gay-owned and operated bed-and-breakfast in Edinburgh. They loved the insider travel tips they got from the owner and the hotel's relaxed vibe and more authentic feel than if they were staying at some cold and calculated chain hotel. So there are selling points for the gay travel experience within the straight market.

What about business travel?

LGBT travel can even be a good approach for business travel. I came across an example of this overlap during a recent trip to San Francisco. I stayed at a place called Parker Guest House, which is a mostly LGBT bed and breakfast in the heart of San Francisco in the Castro District. My husband and I met a straight businesswoman who travels a lot for work but whenever she visits San Francisco for a business trip, she prefers to stay at that particular gay guesthouse. She says she feels safer there and that she also gets a more welcoming and personalised experience.

What's next for gay travel?

It's so exciting to see what's happening in Australia right now, and it'll be interesting to see how the destination wedding and the honeymoon market develops out of same-sex marriage being legalised. It's already a dream destination, so there's going to be increasing excitement.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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