



Designing Authentic
Tourism Experiences to
Engage the LGBT+ Market

A Guide for Developing LGBT+ Products and Tours



Designing Authentic Tourism Experiences to Engage the LGBT+ Market

Canada is often regarded as one of the safest countries in the world for LGBT+ travellers. Our nation offers beautiful landscapes, a welcoming culture and diverse travel experiences from coast to coast.

This guide will help enhance Canada's reputation for being an inclusive destination by providing your tourism-based business with the groundwork to create and repurpose existing products and services for domestic and international LGBT+ travellers.

Resources include:

- An explanation of inclusive and exclusive travel products for LGBT+ travellers, along with general best practices;
- An overview of LGBT+ archetypes as defined by research conducted for Canada's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC), along with product development best practices for each archetype;
- A product development checklist; and
- A case study featuring international adventure tour operators Intrepid Travel and Out Adventures.

TIP: Before you develop travel products for the LGBT+ traveller, it is key to have buy-in from all destination stakeholders and to appoint a diversity champion who will ensure all staff are trained around LGBT+ issues relevant to their role.

Inclusive and exclusive travel products for LGBT+ travellers

Tourism-based businesses that succeed in attracting LGBT+ travellers through product development do not simply approach the segment as a new revenue stream. Instead, they take a long-term and holistic approach by building diversity and inclusion into the core values of their company.

This *Guide for Developing LGBT+ Products and Tours* complements other components of CGLCC's larger LGBT+ tourism initiative including but not limited to *Navigating LGBT+ Diversity and Inclusion in the Tourism Industry Workshops, Travel Market-Ready Seminars, Destination Audits* and the *LGBT+ Marketing Toolkit*. In order to be successful with this market, completion of diversity training and assessing of your market preparedness are crucial first steps before designing authentic experiences to engage the LGBT+ market.

Today's world is as diverse as ever, and the LGBT+ community has high expectations of the products and services they choose to spend their money on.

Being gay-friendly is no longer enough.

This community now expects to spend money with organizations that are truly LGBT+-welcoming. This means creating a safe space for a diverse group of people regardless of race, gender identity or sexual orientation. The goal in creating both inclusive and exclusive products for the LGBT+ community is to provide an environment where individuals can freely express themselves, participate, feel safe from abuse, harassment and criticism, and not feel singled out due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In short, an inclusive product is any product visibly welcoming to the LGBT+ traveller, whether it's made with them in mind or not. In contrast, an exclusive product is any product made with only the LGBT+ traveller in mind.

Example of An Inclusive Product: A Tier 2 city is hosting a major sporting event and wants to showcase its inclusion and diversity. All official venues are required to feature prominently located gender-neutral bathrooms, and all frontline staff, volunteers and subcontractors have completed inclusion and diversity training. Its mainstream marketing and advertising leading up to the event includes same-sex couples and gender non-conforming individuals.

Example of An Exclusive Product: A medium-sized hotel creates a three-night package for Pride that includes a welcome basket with products from local LGBT+ artists; an exclusive chef's table dinner with a celebrity lesbian chef; tickets to the main Pride event; an exclusive spot on the parade route; and a champagne Pride brunch. A percentage of proceeds will be donated to the local LGBT+ community centre.

Whether your tourism-based business chooses to adapt your existing product offerings to be more inclusive, or to repurpose/create new products exclusively for this market, here are some questions to point you in the right direction and best practices to consider:

QUESTION: Do you have buy-in from all key stakeholders to develop or adapt travel products for the LGBT+ segment?

BEST PRACTICE: Identify and appoint a diversity champion who can prove the case for this market to all key stakeholders.

QUESTION: Does your organization have formal policies and procedures in place outlining harassment and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation?

BEST PRACTICE: Have company-wide inclusion and diversity policies, or have your diversity champion participate in CGLCC's inclusivity and diversity training, returning prepared to share learnings with stakeholders and department heads.

QUESTION: Do you support your local LGBT+ community?

BEST PRACTICES:

- Evaluate your procurement guidelines to ensure that you are not only courting this market but also supporting it. This means ensuring supplier diversity by hiring LGBT+ talent/suppliers and using LGBT+-owned safe spaces.
- Join your local LGBT+ chamber of commerce and attend its networking events.
- Sit on the board of an LGBT+ non-profit.
- Create a product or service that supports a local LGBT+ non-profit.
- Audit suppliers to ensure they do not support anti-LGBT+ organizations or lobby groups.

QUESTION: Do your existing marketing efforts represent the LGBT+ community as part of your mainstream efforts?

BEST PRACTICES:

- Utilize the CGLCC's LGBT+ Marketing Toolkit to improve and create a plan for outreach.
- Respond to all public criticism of your LGBT+ marketing efforts with constructive, educational and inclusive language.

QUESTION: Do you want your product or service to be attractive to all LGBT+ travellers, or would you prefer to create or adapt products for a specific segment, such as gay/bi+ men, gay/bi+ women or trans/non-binary travellers? LGBT+ travel products are often broken down in this manner.

BEST PRACTICE: If you are planning on being more inclusive, you should be visibly inclusive to all LGBT+ travellers. If you are planning on creating or adapting existing products for this community, it is often wise to choose who your demographic is before product development begins (i.e. all LGBT+ travellers, gay/bi+ men, gay/bi+ women or trans/non-binary travellers).

QUESTION: Do you represent gender diversity in your product operations?

BEST PRACTICES:

- In written communication to travellers or guests, use gender-neutral greetings and language.
 - Staff should introduce themselves in person by indicating their pronoun. This indicates a safe space for all LGBT+ travellers.
 - Offer gender-neutral options for any included/loaned clothing/gear or onsite amenities.
 - Ensure gender-neutral bathroom and/or changing facilities are readily available, and communicate this without singling out travellers.
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QUESTION: Do all of your business' forms and applications allow guests to self-identify gender and sexual orientation?

BEST PRACTICES:

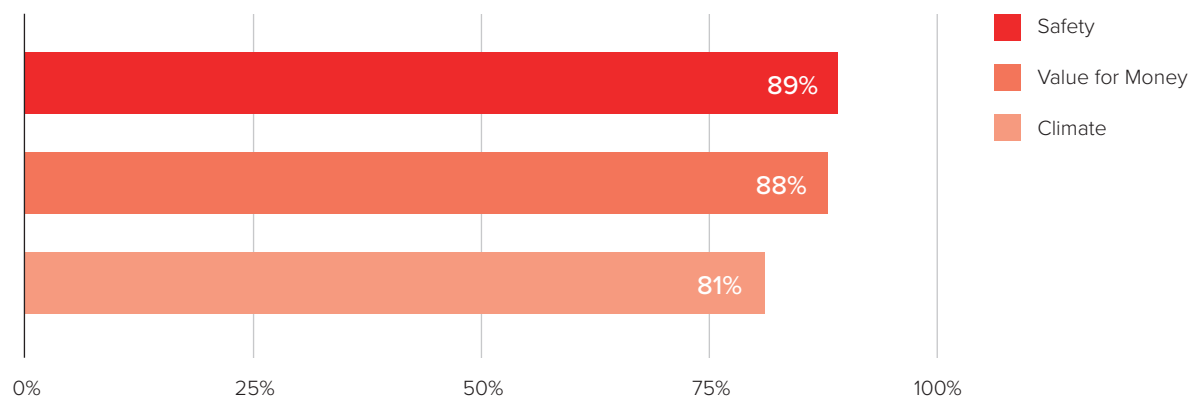
- If your business asks for gender, first ask yourself why. In most cases, you will accomplish the same goal by asking a traveller for their pronouns, such as he/his, she/her, they/their, and including a text box allowing them to self-identify rather than forcing them to choose "other." Note: If you require official identification for the purpose of your service or product, ensure to also ask for a pronoun and preferred name. When asking for gender or pronouns, it is recommended to explain why you are collecting this information. For example, "This information is used for the purpose of helping our staff use the most respectful language when addressing you and to better understand our travellers/guests."
- Ask if guests are travelling solo, as a couple, with friends or family or otherwise. This, paired with pronouns, will help identify LGBT+ couples, for example, which in turn will allow you to provide better customer service.
- Asking a traveller/guest about sexual orientation prior to a trip could be uncomfortable; however, your business can easily and legally ask this question in your post-experience feedback in order to better understand your customers and their experience with your business. Position this question with a statement about your organizational beliefs; for example, "Our organization believes in equal and fair treatment including but not limited to sexual orientation. Sharing this information is voluntary and confidential and will help us ensure your experience with us was safe and welcoming."

LGBT+ archetypes as defined by the LGBT+ Travel Study prepared for Tourism HR Canada & CGLCC

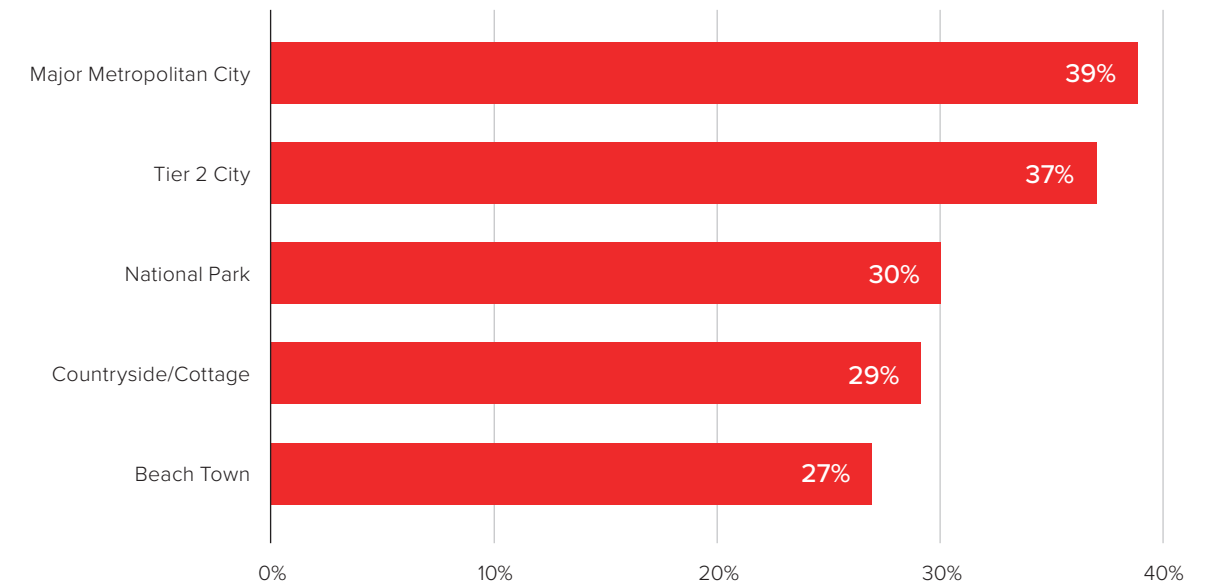
In partnership with Travel Gay Canada, CGLCC conducted three surveys in 2007, 2010 and 2014 to examine travel behaviours and preferences of the LGBT+ population in Canada. In 2020, CGLCC and Tourism HR Canada updated this research with funding from the Government of Canada, specifically focusing on unearthing trends, behaviours, preferences and motivators for Canadian LGBT+ travellers. Based on these findings, seven archetypes of LGBT+ travellers were identified.

The key takeaway from the data outlines that safety and cost are key factors for the majority of LGBT+ travellers when planning leisure trips. In addition, the following findings have been included to provide a greater understanding of this segment:

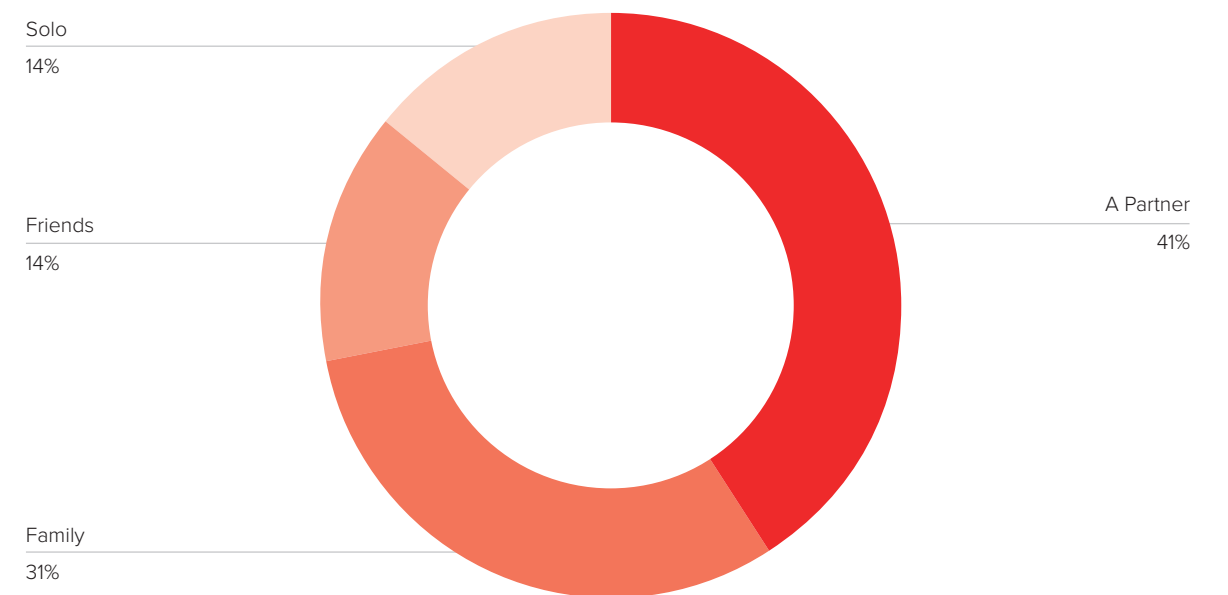
IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN BOOKING TRAVEL



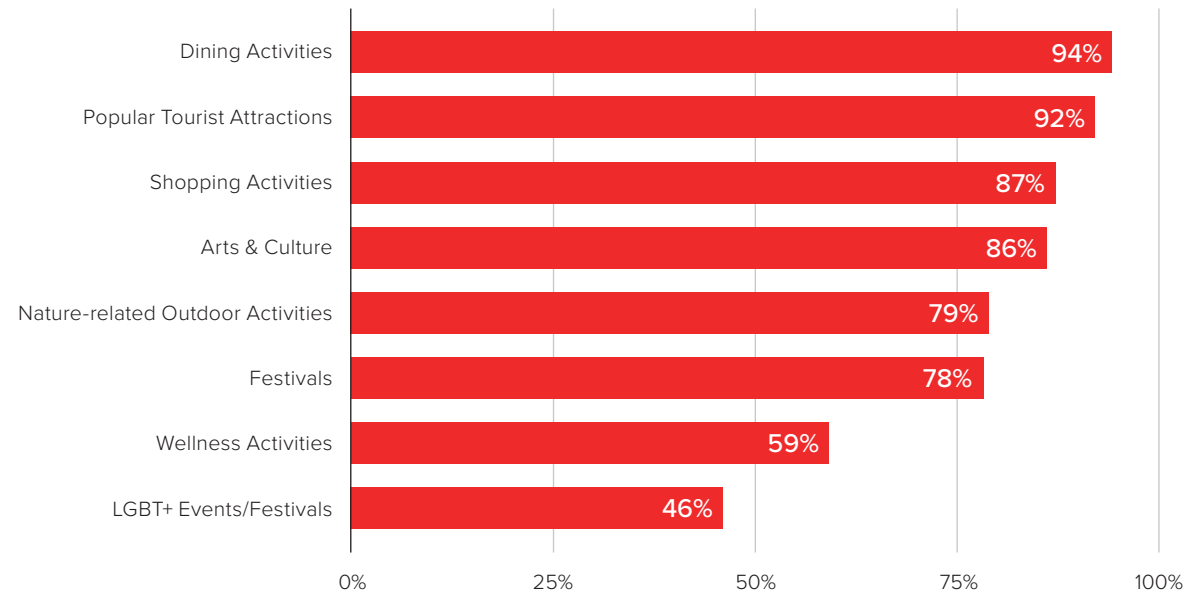
IN 2019, RESPONDENTS TRAVELLED TO:



IN 2019, RESPONDENTS TRAVELLED WITH:



RESPONDENTS SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS ENGAGED IN:



SHOW ME THE MONEY

LGBT+ travellers outspend the general tourism market by more than 7 times. When comparing ages:

- 81% of Gen Z and Millennials (ages 18 to 38) are likely to spend less than \$2,000 per leisure trip.
- 40% of Baby Boomers (ages 56+) are likely to spend more than \$2,000 per leisure trip.

Below are the archetypes identified in the LGBT+ Travel Study prepared for Tourism HR Canada and CGLCC. Archetypes have not been segmented by gender identity or sexual orientation, thus they represent all LGBT+ travellers generally.



Safety Conscious Travellers consider safety the most important factor when choosing a travel destination. Within this group, over 60% of bisexual, gay and lesbian travellers identified safety as a very important factor with 45% representing women and 38% representing men. Over 50% of all age categories rank safety as very important.

A note on Safety: While Safety Conscious Travellers represent a unique archetype, it should be noted that all LGBT+ travellers value safety. Canada's reputation for being a progressive and inclusive nation means safety is most likely an expectation for most LGBT+ travellers who visit.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Ensure all customer-facing staff and subcontractors have completed diversity and inclusion training in advance of receiving travellers.
- Use a diverse range of suppliers that represent the LGBT+ community.
- By ensuring trans/non-binary travellers feel safe, other LGBT+ travellers will likely feel safe as well.



Metropolitan Foodies are most likely to visit a major metropolitan city, with 82% visiting a city at least once a year, and 19% planning three or more city trips per year. They are most likely to partake in food and dining-related activities. On average, 33% spend more than \$2,000 per trip.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Include unique dining experiences that celebrate the local LGBT+ community.
- Highlight local food tours with authentic dishes along with farmers' markets seeking out LGBT+-owned vendors.
- Include meet-and-greets with well-known chefs, and showcase restaurants with views of the city.



Cultural Explorers prefer planning trips to explore different locations and cultures rather than to de-stress and relax. They have a strong preference toward exploring destinations steeped with LGBT+ history and culture. They engage in arts and culture activities and they attend festivals or LGBT+ events at their travel destinations. Of these individuals, 34% find LGBT+ history and culture important when choosing a leisure travel destination.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Pair products/services with, or alongside, LGBT+ events.
- Find local LGBT+ "tastemakers" to feature prominently in your product or package.
- Focus on local/boutique products and experiences.
- Include unexpected add-ons and surprises.
- Focus on both historic and modern culture.



Practical Lodging Travellers are family-oriented and view minimizing expenditure as the most important factor when planning leisure trips. This group is most likely to spend less than \$1,000 per trip, and women specifically are 13% more likely to view minimizing expenditure as very important. With this archetype, 41% are most likely to travel with family, 24% will always stay with friends and family, and only 20% will stay at a hotel.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Offer packages for travellers without children around shoulder season, when you can offer a better selling price but maintain a high-quality experience.
- Offer self-drive experiences that prominently feature LGBT+-owned businesses.
- Create inclusive group experiences rather than private in order to bring cost down but maintain quality.
- Create experiences that appeal to both locals and tourists, since this traveller is likely to be staying with friends and family.



Value Travellers prefer booking leisure trips that maximize value through loyalty programs. They are less likely to stay at a short-term rental or to follow accommodation advice from friends and family. In this group, 41% are most likely to travel with a partner, and 33% spend less than \$1,000 per trip.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Offer shoulder season packages when you can offer more inclusions for the same price as peak season, partnering with local LGBT+ suppliers.
- Partner with loyalty programs or their members (airlines/hotels) to develop or market products and services.
- Offer incentives for repeat visits/bookings.



Frequent Travellers are very likely to travel within Canada, with 33% having gone on three or more trips in Canada over the last year and a third using their car for leisure trips. Nearly 79% of these travellers spend under \$2,000 per trip.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Feature highlights of the destination, but focus on hidden gems. These travellers have “seen it all” and need to be impressed through unique and exclusive experiences.
- Consider offering day trips outside of the city and evenings in the city.
- Offer self-drive experiences that prominently feature LGBT+-owned businesses.
- Develop weekend and long weekend city-escape experiences.



Influencer-Driven Travellers often follow recommendations from travel forums, blogs or Instagram influencers when planning a leisure trip. They prefer to plan a trip six months in advance, and 37% view reviews and ratings as very important when booking leisure accommodations. In this group, 11% consider reviews on LGBT+ travel sites as very important when planning, while 26% of these individuals take cues from LGBT+-specific influencers/resources when planning a trip.

Best Practices to develop or tailor products for this traveller:

- Search LGBT+/gay/lesbian and other popular hashtags in your area in order to capitalize on supplier partnerships that could gain you exposure when marketing your product or service.
- Include high-end/well-known brands as add-ons or value adds.
- Focus on the main attractions, as this traveller will likely want to see it all.
- Build in margin for affiliates/influencer referral fees.

Product Development Checklist

First Steps - Before your organization starts to create or adapt product for the LGBT+ market, these are the first steps to make sure you are market ready:

- Stakeholder buy-in** - Internal and external stakeholders must be fully on board so there isn't surprise resistance once the product is in market. For smaller businesses, this will likely involve employees and key suppliers. For DMOs, this could also include members, local government and consultation with the community at large.
- Internal diversity training** - This is a required step to ensure that internal stakeholders and traveller/guest-facing employees are prepared to foster a safe environment and experience for the LGBT+ community.
- Ensure supplier diversity** - Where possible, include a diverse range of suppliers for this product. This could mean hiring LGBT+-owned suppliers or ensuring non-LGBT+ suppliers have done internal diversity and inclusion training.
- Gender-inclusive washrooms and unisex gear/amenities** – Gender-inclusive washrooms should be available and clearly labelled for trans and gender non-conforming people. Guidelines for this can be found at the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Tour providers/operators that use specialized equipment such as helmets for activities should secure gender-neutral options. Accommodation providers should ensure amenities including, but not limited to, robes and slippers, are gender-neutral.
- Gender identity declaration** - When possible, instead of asking for gender, ask for a pronoun, such as he/his, she/her, they/their, and include a text box allowing them to self-identify rather than forcing them to choose “other.” If you require official identification, also ask for a pronoun and preferred name.
- Gender-neutral language in all communications** - Audit all internal and external communication, and ensure you use only gender-neutral language. For example, use “couples” rather than “his and hers.”
- Obtain LGBT+ imagery for services/activities** - Audit your promotional photo library, and ensure it includes LGBT+ folks and racially-diverse imagery. Pro Tip: Partner with local LGBT+ organizations in order to access their digital assets.

Partnerships and Events - Engage with local LGBT+ businesses, non-profits and events to form strategic partnerships:

- Partner with LGBT+ businesses** - Work with Canada's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) or International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) to find LGBT+-owned restaurants, cafes and tour operators that can be incorporated into your products and services.
- Plan products and services around existing LGBT+ events** - From large Pride events to ski weekends and film festivals, there are many events across the country that can complement your LGBT+ products and services. Smaller events may present opportunities in the shoulder seasons.

- **Partner with existing LGBT+ events** - Become a sponsor and/or official provider of an LGBT+ event or Pride festival, which may allow you to leverage their digital assets like their logo and photography.
- **Support a local LGBT+ charitable organization** - Support for the LGBT+ community as a whole is a crucial component of any long-term outreach to this segment.
- **Include LGBT+-inclusive events/spaces** - These are most successful when they are geared toward the LGBT+ community but open to everyone. You can also ensure that your products or services use LGBT+ safe spaces, such as community centres or other LGBT+-owned establishments. Some good examples of this are Pride House at the Olympics, Pride Day at the Calgary Stampede or the LGBT+ Welcome Parties on Celebrity Cruises.
- **Build in margin to partner with LGBT+ affiliates/agents** - Partnering with bloggers, influencers and travel agencies can go a long way in reaching an audience that's often hard to target and it helps build trust with the consumer. Affiliate partner commissions can range from 3% to more than 10% of your gross price, and there are various software developers that offer affiliate tracking programs and apps available for websites built on platforms such as WordPress.

Product/Service Features to Consider - These features are important to LGBT+ travellers based on insights gained both from Canadian and U.S. research:

- **Feature hidden gems** - In addition to key highlights, LGBT+ travellers value destinations and experiences that may be less busy and allow them to experience a destination like a local. This is especially important to the Frequent Traveller and Cultural Explorer archetypes.
- **LGBT+ history** - When possible, feature a nod to LGBT+ history as part of your inclusive or exclusive products and services. The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives can be used as a resource to uncover these.
- **Unique local food experience** - Food and dining is an important part of travel for Metropolitan Foodies. Look for experiences that are uniquely Canadian and ideally LGBT+-owned. Where possible, aim for a range to suit all budgets, depending on your price point – a high-quality food and dining experience does not always mean it has to be luxurious.
- **Appeal to LGBT+ families** - LGBT+ parents place more importance on family-friendly amenities and activities than they do on LGBT+-specific activities, however, they still want to see themselves represented in marketing materials.
- **Urban/nature split** - Research shows that U.S. LGBT+ travellers are interested in a mix of urban and nature-related activities. Men tend to be more interested in urban and nightlife activities with nature-related day trips, while women are interested in more varied urban/outdoor experiences. *Source: LGBTQ Vertical Baseline 2019 by Destination Canada/Community Marketing & Insights.*
- **Outdoor activities** - Canada is well-known for its natural attractions, and among U.S. LGBT+ travellers, there is significant interest in the northern lights (77%), coastal regions (59%), national parks (57%), hiking or walking in nature (54%), train journeys (52%), mountain regions (52%), wildlife or marine life (51%) and fall colours (50%). Outdoor activities are of particular interest to lesbian/bi+ women. *Source: LGBTQ Vertical Baseline 2019 by Destination Canada/Community Marketing & Insights.*

- **Winter-based activities** - Although the majority of U.S. travellers to Canada come in the summer, those under 45 years of age are more likely to visit in the winter and to be motivated by winter scenery and activities. *Source: LGBTQ Vertical Baseline 2019 by Destination Canada/Community Marketing & Insights.*

Pro Tips for Post Trip - The trip is over but the work isn't. Continued engagement with partners and travellers/guests will ensure you can improve future experiences:

- **Post-trip feedback** - Encourage guests to provide post-trip feedback. In Canada, it is legal to ask for a traveller's/guest's sexual orientation so long as the information is obtained to ensure your diversity and inclusion efforts have resulted in a safe and welcoming environment. The information must remain confidential. Positioned correctly, your diversity and inclusion questions can be asked to all guests, LGBT+ or otherwise, to gauge overall inclusivity.
- **Continue engagement with LGBT+ community** - Continue LGBT+ community outreach to determine wins or areas for improvement for future collaboration.



Case Study: Intrepid Travel

In 2008, public sentiment was quickly shifting toward acceptance for the LGBT+ community in Canada and abroad. In turn, mainstream travel companies and DMOs were cautiously identifying opportunities to appeal to LGBT+ travellers – but for most organizations, the big question was, “How do we reach this market?” Approaches varied, but it was rarely recognized that speaking to LGBT+ travellers would require a long-term approach to ensure they felt understood, appreciated and welcomed.

Australian-based adventure tour operator Intrepid Travel had been strategizing various methods to reach this demographic. Ultimately, co-founders Darrell Wade and Geoff Manchester made the decision to partner with Canadian-based LGBT+ tour operator Out Adventures. By forming a strategic partnership, these two companies were able to leverage each other’s strengths. Intrepid Travel was one of the world’s largest adventure tour operators, running over 450 itineraries at the time – and Out Adventures, although a new company, had a deep understanding of the LGBT+ traveller.

Product Development Checklist Best Practices used:

- Stakeholder buy-in (First Steps)
- Partner with LGBT+ businesses (Partnerships and Events)

The companies planned to launch a small selection of exclusive LGBT+ tours with a focus on providing a safe environment while also supporting the communities they would visit by hiring local LGBT+ guides and engaging with LGBT+ organizations. In Cuba, they partnered with Red Humanidad por la Diversidad (Humanity for Diversity Network) to provide Out Adventures travellers with the opportunity to learn about the activist group’s wins and challenges and also to donate much-needed supplies that were often unavailable in Cuba, such as rainbow flags, gently-used smartphones, laptops and portable hard drives. In addition, the meetings were held at a local gay-run theatre.

Product Development Checklist Best Practices used:

- Support a local LGBT+ charitable organization (Partnerships and Events)
- Include LGBT+-inclusive events/spaces (Partnerships and Events)

There were many companies offering high-end and luxury travel to the LGBT+ community, but Out Adventures and Intrepid Travel felt there was an opportunity to fill a gap in the marketplace. Both companies wanted to appeal to travellers willing to get out of their comfort zone and experience off-the-beaten-path destinations at a reasonable comfort level and price. By supporting small, locally-owned hotels and restaurants, and often operating tours during shoulder season, they were able to offer competitive trips – and prices. Out Adventures would sell the tours under its own brand, and Intrepid Travel would sell the tours identifying them as LGBT+-friendly.

Product Development Checklist Best Practices used:

- Feature hidden gems (Product/Service Features to Consider)
- Unique local food experience (Product/Service Features to Consider)

Both companies quickly learned that while LGBT+ travellers were interested in grassroots travel, they also expected a high level of quality, generally speaking. Key learnings were made through client feedback that clearly outlined the need to include more comfort and a greater focus on LGBT+

life in the destinations visited. As such, Out Adventures and Intrepid Travel embarked on a mission to increase the overall quality of their product offerings; to offer LGBT+ inclusions that went beyond visits to gay bars; and to support the LGBT+ community further than they had to date.

In 2011, the companies became a major sponsor of the Friends for Life Bike Rally in support of the Toronto People with AIDS Foundation. Out Adventures staff also took part in the event and personally fundraised in order to stand behind their commitment to support the LGBT+ community.

Product Development Checklist Best Practices used:

- Post-trip feedback (Post Trip)
- Continued engagement with the LGBT+ communities (Post Trip)

In the same year, however, the companies parted ways, and Out Adventures became fully owned and operated by its original two founders. It has since continued using the services of Intrepid Travel through PEAK DMC, its global DMC, for some of its tours.

While Intrepid Travel no longer sells exclusive LGBT+ products, it has continued to focus on equality in all its forms including but not limited to gender equality and LGBT+ inclusion. To this day, Intrepid offers LGBT+ resources on its blog, and it includes LGBT+ diversity training for sales and operations staff, along with its thousands of guides around the world.

As outlined above, Intrepid Travel did not need to follow all of the best practices or checklist items in this document in order to successfully welcome the LGBT+ community, but the company’s commitment to the LGBT+ traveller has spanned many years, resulting in its recognition for being a truly LGBT+-welcoming brand.





Summary

Numerous data sources were used in creating this document, and as such, guidelines and recommendations have been made for LGBT+ travellers as a whole, rather than the diverse segments within the community. Depending on the level to which your organization wishes to adapt or create LGBT+ products and services, further work and research could be executed to narrow your focus by gender identity or sexual orientation. Special consideration should be given when developing or marketing product for the transgender and non-binary community, and it is vital that any outreach is genuine in nature.

Tourism-based businesses that take a top-down approach to LGBT+ inclusivity and diversity by following the advice in this resource guide will ensure that product development is time well-spent and that their business is a beacon to LGBT+ travellers who are eager to explore Canada.



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