

Profit with Pride:

LGBTQ+ Tourism Marketing Strategies for 2026



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Pinqtravel



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*Years of Distinction
2004 - 2025*

"People don't travel for marketing. They travel for belonging."

Why This Conversation Matters

Values-driven travel is reshaping how destinations compete

- Tourism is **fundamentally about belonging** — feeling safe, seen and welcome
- Travel decisions are **increasingly values-driven** — especially post-pandemic
- LGBTQ+ travellers **research and evaluate destinations carefully** before booking
- Inclusive destinations earn a measurable **reputational advantage** — and repeat visits
- The qualities that make a destination welcoming for LGBTQ+ visitors **improve the experience for all visitors**

The destinations that thrive aren't always those with the biggest budgets.

They're the ones where visitors feel seen, respected and safe.

Let's Talk People, Not Percentages

LGBTQ+ travellers are not a niche – they're already in every tourism category you serve

LGBTQ+ travellers are:

Families

Couples

Solo travellers

Business travellers

Adventure seekers

Food & wine lovers

Culture enthusiasts

Nature & eco
travellers

*The real question isn't whether your product fits the LGBTQ+ market.
It's whether the LGBTQ+ market knows your product is for them.*

The LGBTQ+ Market Is Not One Market

Three core segments – each with distinct needs, motivations and safety considerations

Gay & Bisexual Men

- Largest established segment in global LGBTQ+ travel
- Strong leisure travel participation
- High destination loyalty when treated well
- Present across all travel types - from backpacker to luxury
- Relatively well-served by existing marketing, but still sensitive to authenticity



The LGBTQ+ Market Is Not One Market

Three core segments – each with distinct needs, motivations and safety considerations

Lesbian & Bisexual Women

- Underserved and often overlooked by tourism marketing
- Strong family and couple travel – higher rates of travelling with children
- Deeply experience-driven: culture, nature, wellness, food
- Peer recommendations dominate booking decisions
- Safety concerns intersect gender and sexuality
 - a different risk for their consideration



The LGBTQ+ Market Is Not One Market

Three core segments – each with distinct needs, motivations and safety considerations

Trans & Gender Diverse Travellers

- Fastest-growing visibility in global tourism discourse
- Highest safety and documentation barriers of any segment
- ID mismatches, border crossings and screening all create friction
- Fiercely loyal to operators who genuinely get it right
- Cannot be served with the same toolkit as gay or lesbian travellers



Emerging Segment: Queer Youth Travellers

Shaping trends today – and the dominant market of tomorrow

Gen Z and younger Millennial LGBTQ+ travellers are distinctly different from their predecessors. They're more likely to identify as queer or non-binary, more likely to be influenced by social media, and to avoid destinations that feel performative or unsafe.

Values authenticity above all

They research destinations on social platforms and trust peer voices over brand messaging. Rainbow logos during Pride month actively repel this group if not backed by visible commitment.

Seeks representation in the experience

Visible LGBTQ+ staff, local community connections and authentic storytelling matter. They want to feel reflected, not just accepted.

Shaped by social media & peer recommendations

TikTok, Instagram and Reddit are primary research tools. A genuine story from a guest carries more weight than a full-page ad.

Interests: adventure, eco-travel, culture, community

Perfectly aligned with SA and the Kruger Lowveld's core product offering – wildlife, nature, heritage and authentic local experiences.



LGBTQ+ Travellers Across Every Tourism Category

They're not a separate market – they're already in every market you serve

Adventure tourism

Wildlife & nature travel

Ecotourism

Family travel

Culture & heritage

Food & wine

Wellness & spa

Business & MICE

**Digital nomad & long-stay
travel**

**68% of LGBTQ+ travellers seek national parks · 67% seek beaches · 54% seek wildlife.
*Kruger Lowveld delivers exactly what this market is looking for.***

The Global Landscape: Progress Is Real - But *Uneven*

Laws shape travel confidence; lived reality shapes travel decisions

134

states with some form of
PROTECTION

78

states with some form of
RECOGNITION

64

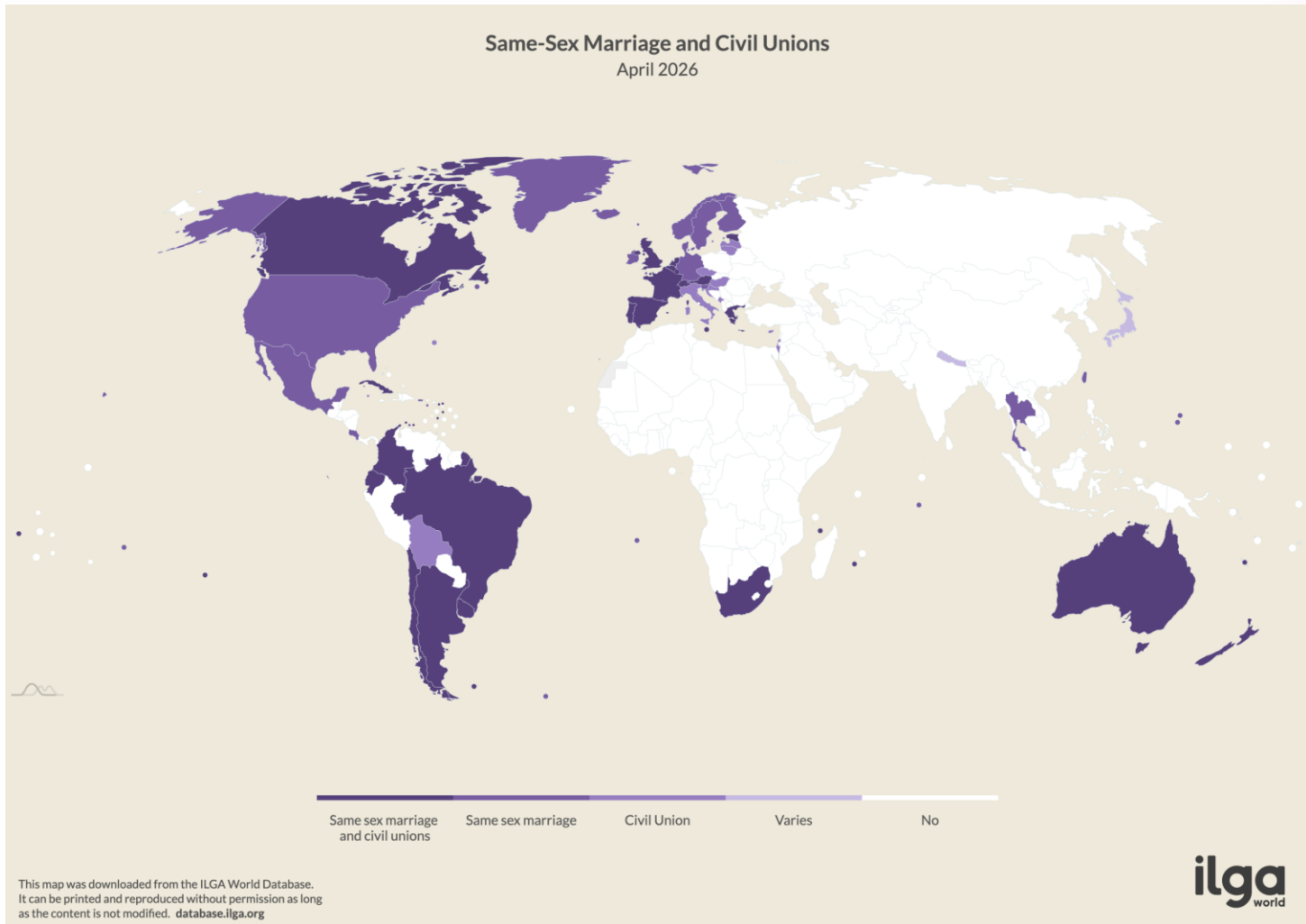
states that still
CRIMINALISE

Progress is real, but fragile. In 2024 alone, Mali criminalised same-sex activity for the first time, and Trinidad & Tobago reinstated previously repealed laws. Ghana has introduced harsh new laws in 2026, pending approval by their president. The death penalty remains the legal prescription in 7 UN member states. Simultaneously, Botswana, Namibia, Dominica, Greece and Thailand made landmark legal gains.

This is why welcome signals matter.

They reduce uncertainty, build trust and convert hesitation into bookings. Even in legally progressive destinations, travellers need signals that confirm lived safety – not just legal status.

The Global Landscape: Progress Is Real - But *Uneven*



What Research Shows: LGBTQ+ Traveller Priorities

CMI 2024 – the most comprehensive annual survey of LGBTQ+ travel behaviour

✈ How they travel

- **62%** travel **with a partner or spouse**
- **44%** travel **solo**
- **35%** travel **with LGBTQ+ friends**
- **24%** travel **with family**
- **9%** travel **with children**
- **89%** booked **paid accommodation**
- **66%** booked **directly with hotels**
- **37%** used **Airbnb / Vrbo**

✈ What they want from a destination

- **83%** want destinations known to be **LGBTQ+-welcoming**
- **76%** value good overall **value for money**
- **72%** prioritise **safety**
- **71%** want **natural beauty**
- **65%** want **diverse cultural experiences**
- **68%** seek **national parks**
- **67%** seek **beaches**
- **54%** seek **wildlife experiences**



Visibility Matters

Travellers don't just want to feel welcome – they need to see it before they book

83% of LGBTQ+ travellers specifically **choose destinations known to be LGBTQ+-welcoming**. That means visibility isn't a nice-to-have – it's a booking driver.

People like them are visible: In marketing imagery, on-site and among staff. Not token representation - proportional, natural, unselfconscious presence in how the destination presents itself.

Marketing feels authentic: Stories told by real LGBTQ+ guests and community members carry far more weight than professional photography that 'includes' a same-sex couple as an afterthought.

Inclusion is consistent: Year-round, not just during Pride month. On booking platforms and in-person. In how staff communicate, not just in the welcome policy framed at the front desk.

Community partnerships are real: Working with community bodies such as KZNGALTA, globally with IGLTA-affiliated bodies and local LGBTQ+ organisations signals commitment. That's verifiable - and LGBTQ+ travellers do verify.

From Rainbow-Washing to Real Inclusion

The industry has matured. Travellers expect action, not symbolism

What Doesn't Work

- Pride logos changed once a year - then dropped
- Generic rainbow stock photography with no community connection
- Token LGBTQ+ representation in marketing imagery
- No staff training or internal awareness programme
- No internal commitment backing the external messaging: marketing/sales ≠ operations
- Sponsoring Pride or LGBTQ+ community events without operational follow-through
- Treating LGBTQ+ guests differently to other guests - in either direction

What Works

- ✓ Year-round consistency - not a June project
- ✓ Staff awareness, sensitivity and pronoun training
- ✓ Inclusive language across all guest touchpoints
- ✓ Real community partnerships - KZNGALTA, IGLTA, local LGBTQ+ organisations
- ✓ Visible, specific policies on your website and booking platforms
- ✓ Genuine storytelling - guests' real experiences, not branded or AI-generated content
- ✓ Internal commitment that pre-dates the marketing campaign

South Africa's Competitive Advantage

The continent's most progressive legal framework – and a genuine global marketing asset

Constitutional protection since 1996: South Africa is the only African nation with full constitutional protection of LGBTQ+ rights and the first in the world to enshrine them. That's a unique selling point on an entire continent.

International reputation for diversity: SA consistently ranks among top LGBTQ+-friendly long-haul destinations in global surveys. Cape Town regularly features in world top-10 lists. This national reputation is a foundation to build on.

Established LGBTQ+ tourism history: KZNGALTA has been at this since 2004. IGLTA has established presence in country. The infrastructure, relationships and experience are already here. We're not starting from scratch.

Strong hospitality culture: Ubuntu – the ethos of warmth, humanity and welcome – is already embedded in our best hospitality. That's exactly the disposition that creates genuine inclusion.

World-class tourism assets: Wildlife, beaches, mountains, culture, food, adventure. Everything LGBTQ+ travellers tell research they're looking for – already exists here.

The Kruger Lowveld Opportunity

Your challenge isn't product, it's visibility

What You Already Have

- **Wildlife** – Kruger National Park, private game reserves and the Big 5 within easy access
- **Adventure** – from the mountains, to the Blyde River Canyon, to nearby deep sea
- **Culture and heritage** – indigenous history, sites of interest and living culture
- **Excellent climate** – year-round appeal regardless of season
- **Strong existing hospitality sector**
- **Connectiveness** – local air and road connections

What You Need More Of

- **Visibility** – LGBTQ+ travellers don't yet know Kruger Lowveld region the way they know Cape Town
- **Confidence-building** – reassurance that welcome is genuine, not performative
- **Inclusive marketing** – imagery, language and platforms that speak to this audience
- **Staff readiness** – training that translates policy into lived guest experience
- **Industry collaboration** – sharing knowledge across the tourism sector
- **Storytelling** – real guest experiences, not branded messaging

Size Matters: The SA LGBTQ+ Market in Numbers

The Other Foundation & Ipsos SA, 2024 – first-ever quantification of the local market

R250Bn

SA LGBTI market value annually

↑ 20% from the 2017 estimate

90%

of LGBTI respondents in income-earning activities

vs. ~66% general population

44%

hold managerial or professional roles

Strong disposable income potential

35%

more likely: TGD employment barriers

Significant intra-community disparities remain

Important caveat: Black, LBQ women and transgender respondents face significantly greater economic pressures than white and cisgender counterparts. Inclusive tourism must serve all of this community – not just the most affluent slice.

The true market value is almost certainly higher than R250Bn, as the 1.4–6% population estimate used is conservative.

Case Study: Sydney WorldPride 2023

A global benchmark for what inclusive tourism investment can deliver



Source: <https://www.theaureview.com/travel/photo-gallery-pride-march-sydney-worldpride-2023/>



Case Study: Sydney WorldPride 2023

A global benchmark for what inclusive tourism investment can deliver

A Global Benchmark for Inclusive Tourism

70,000

International visitors

From 60+ countries

AU\$235m

Direct economic impact

Measured within 12 months

5,000+

Jobs created or sustained

Across hospitality, events, transport

95%

Attendees felt fully safe & welcomed

Exit survey – industry record

82

Arts and cultural projects

Including 50 world premieres

17 days

Duration of the event programme

Citywide participation

Case Study: Benidorm, Spain

Reinventing a traditional destination through consistent, committed inclusion



Sources: Photo by Ágila Szórányi on Unsplash (under free license)

Case Study: Benidorm, Spain

Reinventing a traditional destination through consistent, committed inclusion

Not every success story requires a major event. Benidorm shows what sustained, authentic commitment to the LGBTQ+ market looks like in a traditional tourism destination.

Why Benidorm Works

- Clear, year-round LGBTQ+ destination positioning
- Strong partnerships between accommodation providers, hospitality and tourism bodies
- Inclusive hospitality training – industry-wide, not just a few flagship hotels
- Dedicated LGBTQ+ events programme that reduces seasonality
- High repeat visitation driven by consistent positive experience

Measurable Impact

- Significantly boosted hotel occupancy in traditionally quieter months
- Reduced seasonal dependency – more stable year-round revenue
- Strengthened overall destination brand reputation globally
- Attracted press coverage and social media visibility far beyond traditional ad spend
- Demonstrated that LGBTQ+ inclusion benefits mainstream tourism – not at its expense

Case Study: Cape Town

South Africa's LGBTQ+ flagship – and a model for the rest of the country



Case Study: Cape Town

South Africa's LGBTQ+ flagship – and a model for the rest of the country

Cape Town proves South Africa can compete globally. It consistently ranks among the world's top LGBTQ+ destinations – not despite its African identity, but because of how it combines African warmth with world-class hospitality. Kruger Lowveld can build on this – in its own way.

What Cape Town Gets Right

- Strong, globally recognised LGBTQ+ destination brand
- Visible, active local LGBTQ+ community
- High-quality, well-trained hospitality sector
- Strong partnerships between tourism bodies, community organisations and government
- Authentic representation in destination marketing – not stock imagery
- Clear, accessible safety information for travellers

Why It Matters for Kruger Lowveld

- Establishes SA as a credible, safe LGBTQ+ destination globally – regional tourism nodes benefit from this national reputation
- High repeat visitation creates travellers who know SA and are ready to explore beyond Cape Town
- Cape Town's success is proof of concept for what investment in this market returns
- Local product is differentiated – wildlife, adventure, culture, beaches – supporting a national pull
- Collaboration between destinations builds a stronger SA LGBTQ+ tourism story

CMI Insight: How LGBTQ+ Travellers Travel

Community Marketing & Insights Annual LGBTQ Tourism & Hospitality Survey, 2024

Beyond the headline numbers, the booking and travel behaviour data reveals specific opportunities:

62% **travel with a partner or spouse:** Couples marketing, room design and check-in language matter. Same-sex couples notice when forms, room types and staff language assume opposite-sex pairs.

44% **travel solo:** Solo travellers seek safety assurance and community. LGBTQ+-welcoming accommodation with communal spaces, social programming and staff who actively engage creates loyalty.

89% **booked paid accommodation:** This is not a camping-and-couch-surfing market. Hotels, guesthouses and lodges are the primary accommodation category – with direct booking at 66%.

9% **travel with children:** Family LGBTQ+ travel is real and growing. Inclusive family policies, visible welcome for same-sex parent families and child-friendly facilities are increasingly important signals.

Five Practical Takeaways

Starting tomorrow – small, consistent improvements make the biggest difference

01

Audit your marketing: Review every guest-facing touchpoint – website, booking platforms, social media, printed materials. Does it signal welcome to LGBTQ+ guests? Is the imagery representative? Is the language inclusive? **Fix the obvious gaps first.**

02

Review your customer journey: Walk through the guest experience from first contact to check-out. Where are the friction points? Check-in forms that assume opposite-sex couples. Rooms presented without options. Staff language that defaults to assumptions. **Identify and address each one.**

03

Train your staff: Not a once-off session – a culture shift. Pronoun awareness. How to handle a same-sex couple at reception. How to respond if a guest experiences an issue. **KZNGALTA and IGLTA can support this.**

04

Build partnerships: Connect with KZNGALTA, IGLTA and local LGBTQ+ community organisations. Get listed on LGBTQ+ travel platforms. Consider IGLTA membership. **Partnership signals commitment in a way that marketing alone cannot.**

05

Be authentic, always: Your LGBTQ+ welcome should be indistinguishable from your general welcome. Warm, professional, consistent and genuine. If it feels like a special effort, it probably shows. **Make it part of who you are**, not what you do in a campaign only.

Your Next Step: Partnering for Inclusive Growth

Work with Jason Fiddler & Pinqtravel.com

What I Bring

- 25+ years of LGBTQ+ tourism leadership
- Chairperson, KwaZulu-Natal Gay & Lesbian Tourism Association (IGLTA member/partner)
- Founder of Pinqtravel.com
- Africa Travel Indaba & World Travel Market Africa veteran, professional speaker
- Deep, practical understanding of LGBTQ+ traveller behaviour across all segments
- Proven track record helping destinations grow this market sustainably

How Pinqtravel.com Supports You

- Inclusive marketing audits – honest assessment of where you are now
- Staff awareness and sensitivity training
- Product development for the LGBTQ+ market
- Destination visibility strategies
- Partnerships with IGLTA, KZNGALTA and LGBTQ+ travel bodies
- Storytelling and brand alignment
- Ongoing advisory support as your market grows

Pinqtravel



Tourism is *THE* game changer.

*“When LGBTI people do well, businesses do well –
and South Africa can do well.”*

– Neville Gabriel, CEO, The Other Foundation (Size Matters launch, October 2024)

Sources & Key References

All statistics and claims cited in this presentation

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