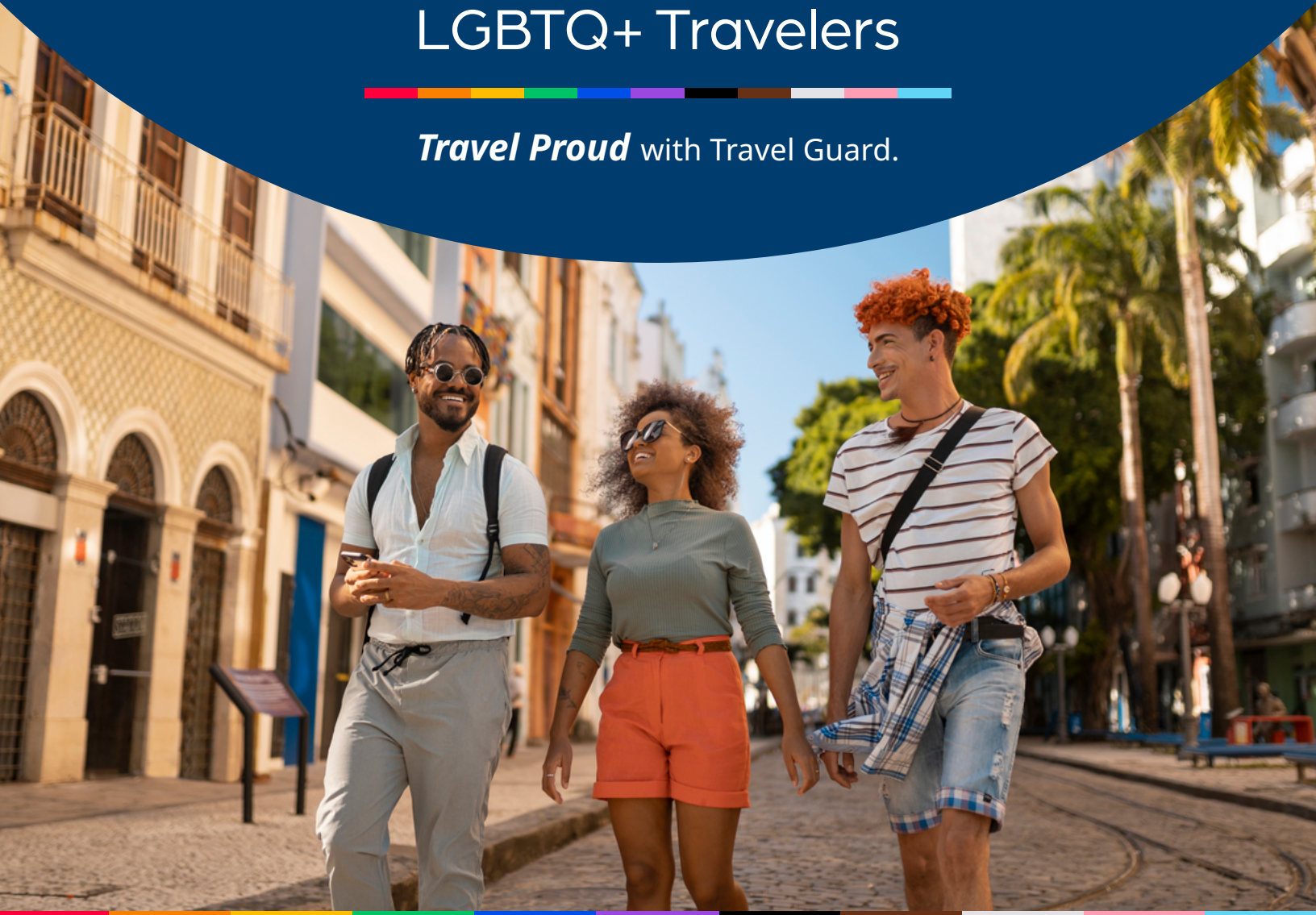


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LGBTQ+ Travelers

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Travel safety report

All travel comes with some risk, and while LGBTQ+ travelers are no different than any other traveler, they do have special considerations when it comes to safety and security.

Specifically, there are countries in the world where it can be very unsafe for LGBTQ+ people. Cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals can vary significantly, irrespective of the legal protections or restrictions that may exist in a country. Additionally, local laws are not always clearly defined or consistently enforced.

The best course of action in most circumstances is to maintain a discreet profile as a precaution, and to thoroughly research your specific destination, the local laws and cultural attitudes.

This report will discuss some of the prevailing cultural and legal norms toward LGBTQ+ individuals by region.



Europe

Across Europe, attitudes and laws toward LGBTQ+ individuals vary widely. Generally speaking, Western European countries, such as Denmark, Norway, Germany, Spain, France and the United Kingdom, are more LGBTQ+ friendly when compared to Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Hungary and Russia. Likewise, Northern European countries are often less conservative than Southern European countries. Again, even in more accepting countries, LGBTQ+ travelers will encounter locations that are more conservative than others.

In some European countries, laws and cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people present significant challenges and dangers. One of the primary examples of this kind of environment is Russia. Identifying as LGBTQ+ in Russia is not illegal. However, the government bans LGBTQ+ propaganda, meaning that individuals accused of promoting non-traditional sexual relationships may be subject to detention, fines or legal charges, or they may be deported from the country.

The law is ill-defined, and a broad range of activity could fall within its scope. This could include situations discussed earlier, such as public displays of affection, using LGBTQ+ oriented applications and websites or meeting other members of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to legal issues, anti-LGBTQ+ laws in Russia have reportedly led to instances of violence, harassment and discrimination among the general population.

Russia does not have laws protecting LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, so it may be difficult to obtain assistance from officials if you are involved in an incident. Russia is by no means the only country in Europe where LGBTQ+ travelers may face legal, cultural and safety issues, but it is one of the most prominent and is a good example of some of the more extreme circumstances LGBTQ+ travelers could encounter.



Americas

The Americas region is equally diverse in terms of the level of acceptance for LGBTQ+ individuals from place to place. Canada is known to be very LGBTQ+ friendly overall, though of course individual attitudes may vary. Similarly, the United States and Mexico have expanded LGBTQ+ rights in recent years, though this has been most pronounced in larger urban areas.

Many Latin American countries present somewhat of a contradiction. There are a number of countries in Central and South America with laws for the protection and equality of LGBTQ+ people, but culturally, Central and South America are largely conservative and have high rates of anti-LGBTQ+ violence. Essentially, the progressive laws do not match the conservative social norms, making travel within some countries in the region a challenge despite legal protections.

There are some exceptions, however. For example, Uruguay and Argentina, both located in South America, are considered quite liberal when compared to the rest of the region. A number of other countries in the Americas, including the South American country of Venezuela and the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, on the other end of the spectrum, are much

less accepting. Travel to locations such as these without taking the proper steps to carefully research and remain discreet may lead to both legal troubles and safety issues.

An example of a more hostile environment in the Americas region is the Caribbean country of Jamaica which is both legally and culturally unaccepting of LGBTQ+ individuals. In Jamaica, same-sex relations between men are illegal, while there is no similar law in place for women. Despite the legal disparity, cultural attitudes in Jamaica trend toward a lack of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. This has resulted in instances of violence and extrajudicial killings with little or no interference from law enforcement on behalf of the victims.

While there are Jamaican hotels and resorts that accept same-sex couples, any form of public displays of affection between same-sex couples outside of the confines of major resorts opens LGBTQ+ travelers up to significant risks. Likewise, transgender travelers may face risks of harassment and violence outside of resort areas.



Asia

In the Asia-Pacific region, locations such as New Zealand and Australia are quite accepting, though like most destinations, some areas may be less friendly to LGBTQ+ travelers. The island nation of Taiwan is very open to LGBTQ+ travelers but other Pacific nations are less accepting.

Some countries, such as India and Indonesia, do not explicitly criminalize LGBTQ+ identification (apart from Indonesia's Aceh province, which is governed by Sharia law); however, LGBTQ+ individuals lack various legal protections. Additionally, Indonesia bans sexual activity and cohabitation outside of marriage, which disproportionately impacts the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ individuals also face risks of harassment and violence.

Countries such as Brunei, Bangladesh and Malaysia have religious laws criminalizing LGBTQ+ relations. However, these laws are not consistently enforced, and travel by LGBTQ+ individuals is possible if discretion is practiced, and orientation is not discussed or disclosed. These countries are religiously conservative, so in general, public displays of affection are not well accepted.

This is also the case for Asian countries such as Japan and Vietnam. These locations are generally more accepting, but cultural stigmas remain, and people often refrain from discussing their LGBTQ+ identity. The LGBTQ+ community may be more underground in these countries, but travelers have reported few instances of discrimination.



Middle East and North Africa

In this region, there are some locations, like Tel Aviv, the capital of Israel, and Istanbul, Turkey's most populous city, with thriving LGBTQ+ scenes. However, many countries in the region have laws against identifying as LGBTQ+, and these laws vary in scope and application.

While laws in countries like Egypt and Jordan focus on public decency and not specifically on the LGBTQ+ community, they have nevertheless been used against LGBTQ+ individuals. In Egypt specifically, authorities have raided LGBTQ-oriented nightlife venues, for example. Both authorities and criminal groups have also attacked and publicly exposed LGBTQ+ individuals after using online apps and forums to arrange meetings.

Other countries in the Middle East-North Africa region, such as Saudi Arabia, have instituted the death penalty for identifying as LGBTQ+. Travelers to Saudi Arabia would be more likely to face detention, however. In the United Arab Emirates, LGBTQ+ travelers may be deported upon arrival, though authorities do not apply these policies consistently. In Morocco, same-sex activity is illegal and punishable by imprisonment, but that does not apply to non-Moroccan couples visiting the country.

A number of countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan and Algeria, have additional policies for HIV-positive travelers. Individuals may simply be refused entry and deported in some cases. Some countries require an HIV test when applying for a visa or during the customs screening process, and HIV-positive travelers could be denied entry. Countries may also place restrictions on the length of stay for HIV-positive travelers. Further restrictions can apply for individuals entering with HIV medications.

In countries with strict religious laws, all travelers should avoid public displays of affection due to the cultural norms. Additionally, locals may engage in entrapment activities to lure LGBTQ+ individuals to an isolated area and attack them. To avoid an incident when traveling, carefully research the laws for both men and women and try to adhere to them, keep a low profile and take great care when interacting with locals.



Africa

Identifying as LGBTQ+ is illegal in many African countries, and in some places, LGBTQ+ locals and travelers face significant dangers.

One exception is South Africa, which has anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ+ individuals. Cape Town is considered one of the most LGBTQ-friendly cities on the continent, though travelers should note that less populated areas may still be more conservative.

In some African countries, same-sex activity may be illegal, but there are human rights laws that protect all individuals, such as Namibia. In other locations, it is extremely dangerous to be openly LGBTQ+.

One of the most prominent countries in terms of LGBTQ+ laws is Uganda, which has incredibly restrictive LGBTQ+ laws, with punishments that include imprisonment and the death penalty. As a result, the

country presents an extremely hostile environment for LGBTQ+ individuals. Local members of the LGBTQ+ community may be disproportionately targeted in comparison to travelers, but traveler safety cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, interacting with locals who are within the LGBTQ+ community can put them at great risk of both legal action and community-led violence. It is very important to remain discreet to protect the safety of others as well as your own.

Similarly, some countries like Nigeria, Tanzania and Cameroon prosecute LGBTQ+ individuals, and authorities have engaged in entrapment campaigns by targeting LGBTQ+ meeting locations. Locals have also targeted the LGBTQ+ community with harassment via social media and text messages and in vigilante executions.

Conclusion

This is a brief overview of some of the cultural attitudes and security situations you may encounter as an LGBTQ+ traveler. By no means is it meant to be a comprehensive profile of each region. Given the significant variances in cultural acceptance within regions, countries and cities, it is important to research the specific locations you will be visiting to understand the risks you may face there.

General Security and Safety Tips and Recommendations

✓ Consider your risks

Remember that not every LGBTQ+ traveler faces the same risk, and there is no “one size fits all” set of advice. Consider your own profile, such as your gender presentation, your presentation versus the name and photo on your travel documents and your specific health concerns. Also think about the sort of experience you want to have during your travels and determine if a particular destination is right for you.

✓ Research your destination

Do thorough research before your trip to assess the cultural, legal and security issues for LGBTQ+ travelers in your destination. Be sure to research broader cultural and security concerns as well, so that you have a thorough understanding of the location you plan to visit.



✓ If you are traveling with a partner and/or children

Do thorough research before your trip to assess the cultural, legal and security issues for LGBTQ+ travelers in your destination. Be sure to research broader cultural and security concerns as well, so that you have a thorough understanding of the location you plan to visit.

✓ Leave behind contact information

Give your itinerary and contact information to someone at home that you trust. In the event of an emergency, it is helpful if someone back home has contact information for your hotels, flight numbers and a general idea of planned events on your trip. Consider sharing your location with your emergency contact and/or your fellow travelers for added security.



✓ Bring paper copies

There are secure apps to hold digital copies, but you never know what might happen to your phone. Take paper copies of your passport, flight information, hotel confirmations and other important documents with you. Keep these documents safe and out of sight as they have confidential information on them.



✓ Take medical precautions

If you are traveling with medication, ensure they are kept together in a separate bag in your carry-on. Keep all medications in their original containers and carry an official note of medical authorization from your doctor for medications as well as syringes or other medical devices. Obtain a translated copy of your doctor's note if your language is not widely spoken in your destination.

Check beforehand that your medications are legal to carry into the country you are visiting and be aware that certain medications such as HIV drugs may prompt increased scrutiny by authorities or even deportation in some cases.

If engaging in sexual activity, it is advised to bring protection, but carefully research the laws regarding what you are allowed to bring into the country you are visiting. If you are purchasing products in other countries, their reliability may not always be guaranteed.

✓ Use discretion when necessary

Connect with locals online before you travel for some tips to find the best bars and community hangouts but be circumspect when sharing personal information as a general rule. Remember that in some destinations where being LGBTQ+ is illegal, social media, websites and mobile apps that are used in country to connect you to LGBTQ+ people and venues may be used against you by officials or local criminal groups.

LGBTQ+ laws may not be consistently enforced by authorities, and this can include differences in how travelers are treated in comparison to locals. Exercise discretion when engaging with members of the LGBTQ+ community in your destination to avoid exposing others to potential risks of discrimination, violence or legal action.

Be mindful of public displays of affection. Holding hands, requesting a double bed at a hotel, sharing luggage, casual touching and kissing may expose your identity or be considered public displays. Such actions may be culturally inappropriate or even illegal in some countries.

Remember to also practice digital safety. In high-risk destinations for LGBTQ+ travelers remove LGBTQ+ apps and clear your browsing history on all electronic devices. Remove photos or posts that indicate your identity from your devices and social media profiles. In general, it is best to remove social media profile details and posts that reveal political affiliations/opinions, employer details, relationship status and family connections.



✓ Precautions for transgender travelers

Transgender travelers may face additional scrutiny when departing from and arriving at airports and when navigating the cultural and legal landscape of a different country. Cultural attitudes and laws regarding transgender people in conservative societies may present an unwelcoming and unsafe environment.

Research cultural and legal issues for transgender individuals in your destination, as well as the procedures and necessary documentation for airport security in your home country and in your intended destination. Understand if you may face discrimination or other barriers if you need to seek medical care while traveling.



✓ Obey local laws

Even if you do not agree with them, you should still obey the laws and abide by the cultural norms of the country you are visiting. Your personal beliefs will not be sufficient legal defense if you are charged with a crime.

✓ Stay safe

If you are harassed, remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible and do not escalate by confronting your harasser. If you are being followed, find a busy establishment to enter.

If you encounter harassment by officials, remain calm and courteous, request a ticket if you are receiving a citation and contact your diplomatic representation to report the issue. If you are the victim of a crime, contact local authorities and engage with your local diplomatic representation.



Want to find out more?

Contact Travel Guard 24/7 with any travel questions, we are available to assist customers before, during or after their travel.

Visit www.travelguard.com/LGBTQ to view more in-depth information on safety and security tips for LGBTQ+ travelers.

Travel Guard, part of Zurich Cover-More, meets the diverse needs of travelers worldwide through its comprehensive portfolio of travel insurance plans and assistance services as well as a network of experienced providers. With global service centers placed strategically around the globe, our 24/7 multilingual team is always just a phone call away and ready to assist when our customers experience travel issues – from lost luggage or minor travel inconveniences to medical emergencies or life-threatening events. We help customers recover from travel disruptions and enjoy their journeys knowing Travel Guard has their back every step of the way. Learn more at www.travelguard.com and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok.

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