



# Travel safety report for

## **LGBTQ TRAVELERS**

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**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 acceptance of LGBTQ individuals can vary significantly, even within countries or cities that are considered to be accepting or unaccepting as a whole. Laws are not always clearly defined or enforced consistently, so the best course of action in most circumstances is to maintain a discreet profile at all times as a precaution and to thoroughly research your specific destination, the local laws and cultural attitudes. Remember that you may encounter areas where the local government and/or the population are more accepting or less accepting when compared to the rest of the city, country or region. With that in mind, AIG Travel has reviewed and compiled information on travel safety for LGBTQ travelers. 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 from location to location. 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 to be 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.

One example of a more hostile environment in the Americas region is the Caribbean country of Jamaica. It 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 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, rural areas may be less friendly to LGBTQ travelers. Additionally, the island nation of Taiwan is much more open to LGBTQ travelers. However, many Pacific nations are less accepting. Countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, 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 still remain and people often refrain from discussing their LGBTQ identity. Additionally, since public displays of affection are frowned upon for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples, travelers should be mindful and respect the local culture. The LGBTQ community may be more underground in these countries, but travelers have reported few instances of discrimination.





## Middle East and North Africa

In the Middle East-North Africa 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.

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 these policies are not applied consistently by authorities. In Morocco, same-sex activity is illegal and punishable by imprisonment, but that does not apply to non-Moroccan couples visiting the country.

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 in order to lure LGBTQ individuals to an isolated area and attack them. In order 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 local contacts.





## 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 to be 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 may be human rights laws that protect all individuals, such as Namibia.

In other locations, it is very dangerous to be openly LGBTQ. One of the most prominent countries in terms of LGBTQ laws is Uganda, which has in the past proposed the death penalty for LGBTQ people. As a result, the country presents a rather hostile environment for LGBTQ individuals. Though travelers may not be targeted by government actions, interacting with locals who are within the LGBTQ community can put them at great risk of both legal action and community-led violence, and it is very important to remain discrete in order to protect the safety of others as well as your own. Similarly, some countries like 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.

Again, this should be considered a brief overview of some of the cultural attitudes and security situations you may encounter as a global 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 and countries, it is important to research the specific locations you will be visiting in order to understand the specific risks you may face.



# General Security and Safety Tips and Recommendations

## Consider your risks

Remember that not every LGBTQ traveler faces the same risk, and there is not “one size fits all” set of advice. Consider your own profile, as well as the sort of experience you want to have in 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.

## Leave behind contact information

Leave your itinerary and contact information with someone you trust. In the event of an emergency, it is helpful if someone back home has contact information of hotels, flight numbers and a general idea of planned events on your trip.

## Bring paper copies

There are 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 that your medications 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. Check beforehand that your medications are legal to carry into the country you are visiting.

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, parties and community hangouts. Remember that in some destinations where being LGBTQ is illegal, websites and mobile apps that are used in country to connect you to LGBTQ people and venues may be used against you by officials.

Be mindful of public displays of affection. Holding hands, requesting a double bed at a hotel, casual touching, and kissing may be considered public displays, and such actions are illegal in some countries.



## 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 toward 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.

## 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.

## Obey local laws

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

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