

An aerial photograph of a crowded beach. Numerous people are scattered across the golden sand, many lying on colorful towels or blankets. Some are sitting up, while others are lying flat, sunbathing. A few people are standing and walking. The scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the sand. The text 'TRAVEL + LEISURE' is overlaid in large, bold, pink letters at the top.

TRAVEL +
LEISURE

SUMMER

ESCAPES

TIPS + TRICKS TO HELP
YOU TRAVEL SMARTER



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INTELLIGENT TRAVELER



The Evolution of LGBTQ Travel (AND WHY IT MATTERS TO ALL OF US)

The way we move through the world is changing—and driving that shift are LGBTQ travelers, who are forecast to spend more than half a trillion dollars a year by 2030. That game-changing influence has destinations, hotels, and cruise lines working to be more inclusive, to the benefit of all. This month, a closer look at what it means to be gay and away in 2024.

The Champions

Meet the companies making the world more accessible to LGBTQ travelers.

By Chris Dong

"I'VE MADE IT MY mission to encourage more Black LGBTQ travelers like me to explore the world," says Michael Henderson. After years of being the go-to trip planner for his family and friends, Henderson launched his own agency, **B.A.G. Travel**, in 2021. Today, he's coordinating group departures to countries including South Africa and Thailand, with an eye to helping his queer clients navigate issues like when and where it's considered appropriate to show affection.

He's also representative of a booming ecosystem of specialist advisors and niche tour operators that are helping specific segments of the queer community find the perfect trip.

For **Brand G Vacations**, which organizes cruises for gay men, group trips are about more than just a good time. "I'm not saying we don't have fun, but the community and the destination are the driving factors for us," says Brian Van Wey, cofounder of the tour operator, which collaborates with lines such as **Atlas Ocean Voyages**. The company also arranges land tours to destinations such as India and Mongolia, which some queer travelers may be skeptical of visiting. "Traveling together gives us the opportunity to bring awareness and acceptance to those destinations," Van Wey says.

One long-established player is **Olivia**, which has coordinated cruises and retreats for queer women since 1990. Over the years, Olivia has hosted more than 350,000 guests on full-ship buyouts, resort takeovers, and other journeys, in destinations from the Maldives to Morocco.



B.A.G. Travel arranges group trips to destinations including Cape Town.

Mainstream brands are following the lead of these specialists. Though **Lindblad Expeditions** doesn't advertise this fact, captains of the line's U.S.-flagged vessels can legally officiate same-sex ceremonies. One particularly memorable union took place in 2018, says Noah Brodsky, the company's chief commercial officer. Lucho Verdesoto, a marine biologist, and Javier Cotin, an ornithologist, met while working for Lindblad and decided to tie the knot aboard the *National Geographic Explorer*.

BIGGER BRANDS MAKING STRIDES

Preferred Hotels & Resorts launched its Preferred Pride program in 2011 to spotlight properties that commit to diversity training for their staff.

Virgin Atlantic updated its gender identity policy in 2022; airport and flight crews can now choose any uniform. Travelers, meanwhile, can select the gender-neutral title Mx. or list their gender as U (Undisclosed) or X (Unspecified).

Delta Air Lines also offers a broader choice of identifiers, including Mx., U, and X.

Lindblad Expeditions seeks out LGBTQ guest speakers, such as an Inuit researcher who talks not only about her climate-change research but also about growing up queer in Greenland.

LEADING THE WAY



A special Belmond train trip in the U.K. to Brighton & Hove Pride.

Belmond may be best known for iconic luxury hotels such as **Cap Juluca** (doubles from \$1,300), on Anguilla, and trains like the **Royal Scotsman** (two-night trips from \$5,055 per person). But the company has also quietly made a name for itself among queer travelers, thanks in part to the 2015 creation of an LGBTQ advisory board.

"We want to be known as a safe space for the queer community," says Parker Smith, Belmond's account director for LGBTQ and entertainment.

To that end, in 2022, Belmond launched a Travel with Pride itinerary on the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*. A 2023 edition helped raise funds and awareness for Not A Phase, a U.K. charity supporting trans individuals. A 2025 edition is in the works.—C.D.