

How LGBTQ Families Are Spurring More Inclusivity in Travel

LGBTQ parents eager to show their kids the world are helping usher in a more diverse and welcoming era in hospitality. **BY DAVID DODGE**

“YOUR KIDS ARE SO SWEET!” a waitress exclaimed while I was vacationing with my family in Oregon recently. “Which one’s your wife?” she then asked, gesturing to the two women seated beside me. For my family, which consists of three kids, their married lesbian moms, and me, travel often means fielding dozens of inquiries from waiters, hotel staff, and tour guides curious how our little tribe came to be. At best, this kind of questioning is invasive, but at worst, depending on where you are, it can be unsafe.

Historically, finding a vacation spot that was queer-friendly often meant sticking to well-trodden LGBTQ destinations like Miami Beach and Mykonos, Greece, that don’t offer much in the way of entertainment for anyone under the legal drinking age. But during the past decade, new options for the LGBTQ parents raising an estimated 2 million to 3.7 million children in the United States have begun to emerge, thanks in part to greater social acceptance. New data also shows that “pink-dollar travel” (a term used to describe LGBTQ travel) is an important revenue source for the travel industry. According to the research firm Community Marketing and Insights (CMI), 77 percent of LGBTQ people have a passport, compared with only 36 percent of Americans overall. Gay parents are also more likely to take family vacations than their straight counterparts. Eighty-five percent planned a trip for their crew this year, according to CMI.

While a handful of LGBTQ-focused travel businesses have rolled out in the

past several decades, the most notable have focused on adults: tour operator **Olivia** (*olivia.com*) in 1973, cruise line **Atlantis** (*atlantisevents.com*) in 1991, and home-sharing marketplace **Misterb&b** (*misterbandb.com*) in 2013. Despite the growing need, few operators specifically targeted the gay parenting community. Gradually, luxury brands have started to change that. In 2011, **Preferred Hotels & Resorts** (*preferredhotels.com*) launched Preferred Pride, a collection of more than 200 gay-friendly hotels worldwide. Participating properties like Arizona’s **Mountain Shadows** (*mountainshadows.com*)—which has family-friendly features like full kitchens and multi-bedroom suites—have taken steps to market themselves to LGBTQ parents.

The goal, says International Travel Management founder **John Clifford** (*john@internationaltravelmanagement.com*;

619-299-2359), a member of the A-List, T+L’s guide to the world’s top travel advisors, is to ensure LGBTQ families are treated like any other. The **Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort** (*fourseasons.com*) has welcomed more such parents in recent years thanks to popular events like **Gay Days** (*gaydays.com*). The staff also makes sure that touches like robes are gender-appropriate.

Parents are even vacationing in places not normally thought of as queer-friendly, such as the African continent. **David Rubin** (*david@davidtravel.com*; 949-427-0199), an A-List advisor whose specialties include this market, said more LGBTQ parents are seeking out customizable luxury experiences, such as tours of Egypt and safaris in East Africa. Over the years, he has cultivated a select group of tour operators and hoteliers in countries with hostile laws to help ensure the security of his clients. These partners know how to avoid minor mishaps, he said—like asking a gay dad which of his lesbian friends is his “wife.” 🍷



► Many resort towns in Italy, including Caorle, welcome LGBTQ families.