

the
LGBTQ GUIDE TO TRAVEL SAFETY



from the editors of **MAN^{ABOUT}
WORLD**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SAFETY & SECURITY +

RESOURCES +



LGBTQ ETIQUETTE +

STAYING CONNECTED +

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT +

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN & GENDER NON-BINARY +

TRAVELING WHILE TRANS +

ADVANCING THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY +

ABOUT OUR SPONSOR +

MASTHEAD CREDITS +

THE LGBTQ GUIDE TO TRAVEL SAFETY



LGBTQ people visit all of the same places we live: everywhere. And while travel has inherent risks for everyone, LGBTQ people face additional risks — particularly in places where sexual orientation or gender identity are criminalized or marginalized, but also in places where laws protect and recognize their equal rights. Whether we choose to go, or have to go — for business, family or other reasons— LGBTQ travelers face additional layers of complexity when travel can be challenging and stressful under the best of circumstances.

This guide is designed to help LGBTQ travelers navigate those layers, including some that are specific to lesbians, or gay men and/or transgender and non-binary travelers.

We have gathered the most reliable and current online resources, and collected insights, anecdotes and recommendations to help you travel more safely, comfortably, confidently, productively and enjoyably. Our contributors are among the most important and influential voices in the LGBTQ business and travel worlds: leaders in LGBTQ rights, nationally-acclaimed journalists, CEOs and business leaders, celebrated travel pioneers and other influencers in the political, business, and travel worlds, who bring their decades of experience travelling around the globe to inspire all of us to be safer, better connected, and more engaged with local cultures in a way that feels personally, politically and culturally sound.

We have asked this list of accomplished world travelers to relay personal anecdotes, savvy guidance, and their knowledge and resources to help better guide you through the main issues that face LGBTQ travelers today. The experience of gender, sexuality and personal expression is different for everyone, and our experts' guidance is nuanced and specific to their experiences. Use their best practices not as instructions, but as a map to your own.

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15 DEC 2007

PERMITTED TO ENTER AND
REMAIN IN MALAYSIA
FOR VISIT PURPOSES
SOCIAL VISIT ONLY FROM
DATE SHOWN ABOVE

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27 JUL 2007
90 Singapore and
days for
social visit only from
date
shown above.

26 JUL 2007
Permitted to enter
and remain in West
Malaysia and Sabah
until 24/10/07
REF: 24/10/07



SN

PASS



IMMIGRATION
KOMPLEKS SULTAN ABU BAKAR,
KUALA KUPANG



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

Washington D.C.

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NEXT:
SAFETY & SECURITY



SAFETY & SECURITY



Homophobia has no borders. In these rapidly shifting times, it's important for LGBTQ people travelling the world to better understand the cultures they are stepping into, the potential harms they face, and the resources available to ensure their confidence and safety. The issue of safety always goes beyond LGBTQ rights to the much broader topic of human rights. You will enter these countries with a responsibility to be mindful of their citizens as well as the circumstances of their lives, and to respect the local culture.

Travelers to LGBTQ-unfriendly countries usually don't face the same discrimination, harassment and persecution that locals do. As someone with "tourist privilege," you may make things better or worse for the local LGBTQ community. There are 76+ countries where homosexual behaviors are against the law. But even legal issues aren't black and white. In some places, like Singapore, there are laws on the books that are no longer enforced, while in other countries, like Egypt, the law does not prohibit homosexuality, but public decency laws may be used to harass and persecute LGBTQ people.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CULTURE

Acquainting yourself with local culture, speaking to locals, visiting some of the web resources we list below and reading recent news articles can prepare you to respectfully and safely navigate your way through countries and places where LGBTQ people face unique risks. If you learn how to engage with LGBTQ locals before your arrival, you'll better protect yourself and the locals you may engage with on your trip.

▶ Educate and respect

"The most important thing is to respect the local values. We have to educate people who are hosting us. We also have to educate the traveler to learn how to respect local values without losing their identity or compromising their values. I don't think I lose my identity by wearing a scarf over my head in Iran. As long as I'm a guest I have to respect that." —**Joan**, *An international travel marketing executive*

▶ Broader cultural caveats

"If you're going into strict Islamic countries, you need to be careful. It goes beyond gay issues. I was almost arrested for munching on a piece of bread in a mall during Ramadan in the Persian gulf. You can buy bread, but you can't eat it, and I wasn't aware. Understanding those sorts of cultural caveats can help immensely." —**Geoff "Chester" Woolley**, *CEO of Unitus Impact*

▶ Do your due diligence

"People need to be really cognizant that there are real safety issues, and they should be really smart about who and how we tell our story. Don't assume everybody is going to be as open. On the one hand, coming out to people is important because LGBT people are a part of business and trade. On the other side of the coin, you have to be aware of where you're travelling, do your due diligence, know the laws." —**Justin Nelson**, *Co-Founder, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce*

▶ Don't become a target

"I always say do your due diligence. If it's not the local culture to have public display of affection, then be discreet while in the country. When you leave the hotel, it's even more important to behave discreetly so you don't become a target. If you go to a public spot such as an ordinary restaurant, you might want to be careful. You go to a city to enjoy the tourist attractions, you should respect the culture as well." —**Jack Suwanlert**, *Director of Risk Management, Marriott International*

▶ **Consequences can be severe**

“While it is easy, especially for white Westerners, to live and work in the Persian Gulf as long as a few simple rules are respected, those “simple” rules must be respected, or the price can be severe: No public displays of affection are countenanced, heterosexual or otherwise. Drinking and driving is completely forbidden. No amount is too small to cause trouble, and punishment is severe and without nuance. Any measurable alcohol on one’s breath can easily result in an immediate month in jail - and it’s no country club - along with a US\$10,000 fine and immediate deportation after the jail time has been served. Irrespective of fact, should one get into a traffic accident with a local; chances are the arriving police will cite the foreigner. —**Kile Ozier**, *Global Events Producer*

▶ **Use the resources**

“One of my favorite resources is the CIA World Factbook app. It really has great, concise facts including religions, and all the things you need to function in a country. There are a lot of great guidebooks that have great beginner traveler stuff. Understanding local culture is important. My daughter went to Vietnam this summer and we read advice for Vietnam that said “Don’t touch anybody on the top of their head.” That’s the kind of specific detail you just wouldn’t know unless you took the time to be informed.” —**Julie Dorf**, *Senior Advisor, Council for Global Equality*

▶ **Assess Who You Are Speaking To:**

“In India I mentioned my same-sex partner. It’s not 100% conservative. It was legal at the time. The people I was speaking to were comfortable. When I travel for work in the Persian Gulf, I wouldn’t make it clear to them. They don’t want to make it clear because it’s not allowed and because it’s quite dangerous. I admit that I wouldn’t correct an incorrect assumption. They see I have kids and assume I have a husband. Having kids is important in these cultures and they always ask the question whether to men or women and for some reason it seems more important to ask of women. It also depends on the person you’re talking to. You have to make an assessment about how people would react to it.” —**Joan**, *an international travel marketing executive*

FOR CORPORATE TRAVELERS

Are you protected by your company? That is an important question every LGBT person must ask themselves before travelling to a country where it is illegal to be gay. What rights and protections does your company offer? And how do you open that dialogue with your employer? When is it appropriate and when should you refrain? This category tackles these questions with expert opinions.

▶ **How much are you protected?**

“It’s going to depend how much you’re protected by your company. ‘If you work for a global multinational, you should have that conversation before you go, but you absolutely have to deal with your employer before you leave the country. ‘You asked me to go to Tehran, what safety precautions and resources are in place for me? Is there a contact or organization available for me if I feel unsafe?’ I don’t think it’s asked enough. And it’s not just something gay men should do. Women will experience the same issues in a lot of these countries. ‘You’re sending me to Cairo, and I want to do well by the company but where is the support network?’ It pushes the envelope and forces the company to ask, “What are we doing overseas?” —**Charlie Rounds**, *Mossier Social Action and Innovation Center*

▶ **Raise concerns, be respectful**

“It depends what your company’s perspective on gay rights are. I expect most large American companies have some policies in place. From the business traveler perspective, you’re going there to do work. If you’re concerned about safety, there are places in the Middle East, for example, where it’s riskier for LGBT travelers, and I would raise that concern with my company. Above all, be respectful of the culture and learn about the country and the local community. —**Regan Taikitsadaporn**, *Chief Human Resources Officer, Asia Pacific, Marriott International*

▶ **Do you have internal resources?**

“One thing people should look at is the company they work for. Is it a multinational company with inclusive policies? And is there someone you should check with in the US office, a point person, that can explain what rights and protections are available to you. Having those conversations is important before you leave.” —**Justin Nelson**, *Co-Founder, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce*

▶ **Conservative vs. Progressive Employers**

“If you work for a global petrochemical company and you don’t have any protection for yourself, and you’re going to Kazakhstan a conservative country, you may want to take the most conservative route — maybe you don’t tell your employer, maybe you don’t seek out LGBT life. If you’re going to a more progressive country, and you work for a more liberal financial institution and you have non-discrimination protection, than yes, come out and ask and start that dialogue with your employer. Bigger corporations who genuinely care about LGBT employees, care about those issues.” —**Julie Dorf**, *Senior Advisor, Council for Global Equality*

▶ **Stand up for your Safety**

“Raise the issue to your company. They’re blissfully unaware. It takes LGBT employees standing up and saying something. Say: My safety and family are at risk. They need to know and you need to be protected.” —**Todd Sears**, *Founder of Out on the Street*



NEXT:
RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ TRAVELERS



RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ TRAVELERS



There are a wide-range of resources available to LGBTQ travellers to educate them on safety and to acclimate them with local cultures. Local LGBTQ organizations, State Department data, CIA Factbook, multiple apps and even a gay dating app, using these resources can help you better understand the political climate and cultural nuances of a country before you leave home.

[Ilga.org](https://ilga.org)

A worldwide federation that campaigns and supports LGBTI rights, providing annual reports to help LGBTI people better understand the legal and cultural landscapes of countries around the world.

[US State Department](https://www.state.gov)

The State Department website has fact sheets for all countries, even highlighting the many countries where being gay is criminalized, and a special travel section for practical information.

[CIA World Factbook](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook)

The Factbook maintains country profiles with extensive data on all aspects of foreign nations.

[Geert Hofstede Center for Cultural Insights](https://www.geert Hofstede.com)

The Geert Hofstede Center publishes background information for most countries, using a 6-dimensional model to help understand the cultural context. While not LGBTQ-specific, it's very useful for understanding the cultural norms that surround understanding of LGBTQ issues, and interactions between locals and visitors.

[Alturi.org](https://www.alturi.org)

On the Alturi website, you can learn about the current challenges faced by the international LGBTI community, search by country or issue, learn about the organizations doing work in that country or on that issue, and then support that work by donating, signing petitions, volunteering, or signing up for news.

[SCRUFF](https://www.scruff.com)

The "Venture" tab of this social dating app encourages locals to answer travel questions for visitors as ambassadors for their cities, and allows users to post upcoming trips, so that they can connect in advance with locals and other travelers. Scruff alerts and push notifications provide information from ILGA.org, when the App is opened in places where homosexuality is still criminalized, so travelers can be aware of LGBTQ laws in those countries.

[IGLTA.org](https://www.igltatourism.com)

The International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association is the oldest LGBT professional association representing travel and hospitality providers on six continents. Their weekly email newsletter is a good resource for news of interest for LGBT travelers.

[HSBC Expat Explorer](https://www.hsbc.com/regions/asia-pacific/hsbc-expat-explorer)

These country guides are written for relocating employees, and contain no LGBTQ-specific information, but they offer a very good overview of the culture and cultural challenges faced by foreign visitors.

[Luxe City Guide](https://www.luxecityguide.com)

These sassy and snappy city guides provide chic recommendations and overviews to educate you on local cultural customs.

[Kiss, Bow, Or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More Than 60 Countries](https://www.kissboworshakehands.com)

A fantastic book focusing on the practices, customs and philosophies of doing business in foreign countries, with tips of protocols and a trove of helpful tips and resources.

▶ Search for local LGBTQ groups

“One of the best annual compilations of human rights reports, country by country, are the State Department’s reports, at HumanRights.gov. You can search by sexual identity, and look at the most recent reports that our embassy prepared. The other place I’d look is ILGA.org, which has searchable maps and translations. The Internet is pretty easy to search these days – you can find LGBT groups and activists. They might be too busy to respond but you can get a general sense of how open a society is.” —**Julie Dorf**, *Senior Advisor, Council for Global Equality*

▶ Scruff Alerts

“We’ve built a resource that shines a light on more than 90 countries where it is dangerous to be gay to help teach people what the laws are.” The app has alerts with the most salient laws and their details, including excerpts from actual legal code based on research done annually by ILGA. “What we have done is taken this excellent research and we’ve deconstructed it and built a comprehensive website and we’ve created these simple, condensed alerts.” Silverberg said their information is in the public domain and anyone can take the work that they’ve done to build their own public advisory service. —**Eric Silverberg**, *CEO, SCRUFF*

▶ Sources in the LGBTQ World

“I always go to the U.S. State department. I find out the geopolitical climate. When I went to Malaysia, I had never been there, didn’t know what to expect. Then, I’ll call our in-country contacts. If your employer has offices in the country you’re visiting, use those resources. There are also great resources in the LGBT world: IGLTA website has up-to-the minute feed. In the early days, Out & About was one for me. To understand the cultural nuances, it can be as simple as Google sometimes. Just type: “What’s the appropriate greeting in Malaysia” into Google, and you’ll get an answer. I went to Africa in 1993 and I had to use Lonely Planet. You were definitely flying more blind back then. There’s just so much out there nowadays with the Internet.” —**Brian King**, *Global Brand Officer, Marriott International*

▶ Google is your friend

“I follow the Washington Blade, and they always have an article about what’s going on in other countries. Google is your best friend. The Human Rights Campaign has a lot of information, and the U.N. has a good website too. I usually tell friends and family to try and find a specific website.” —**Jack Suwanlert**, *Director of Risk Management, Marriott International*

▶ Register with the State Department

I always read the State Department reports, and you should register with the State Department, too, and in these volatile times, that is very important. This way, they know to look for you. It puts the State Department in a position to demand your release or return should anything happen. —**Michael S.**, *Investment Banker, based in Dubai*

NEXT:

LGBTQ TRAVEL ETIQUETTE

LGBTQ TRAVEL ETIQUETTE



◉ [BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

Traveling as your authentic self isn't always easy. Even in countries with non-discrimination laws and suppliers that have been trained in sensitivity, many LGBTQ travelers hide their sexual orientation and gender identity. In countries and cultures where protections and acceptance are not the norm, personal authenticity is even harder.

Every circumstance is different, and only you can decide what feels right at any given time, in any given situation. But you're not alone in struggling with these issues. Whether you're choosing to reveal yourself to locals, fellow travelers or work colleagues, or trying to avoid conversations and situations that would do so, the experiences and anecdotes of those who have navigated this path before you may be helpful and instructive.

COMING OUT WHILE TRAVELING

Coming out while traveling can be powerful, but when is it the right time? You have to be able to gauge the climate, really understand who you're coming out to, whether it's best for you to do so, and if the reward is worth the risk. If a colleague asks a gay man about his "wife," does he correct them? What about in cultures where it's illegal to be LGBTQ, or within conservative business environments? It is important to respect local cultures, especially when doing business. So when is it time to come out, and how do you do so in a professional and respectful way?

▶ A Personal and Powerful Thing to Do

"Coming out in a business context is a very personal thing. I believe in the power of coming out – when the foreigner is in a privileged and safe environment, it's worth doing. Only that individual employee would know if negative ramifications could come of their career. People should use their best judgment. If the risk seems low, you can't underestimate how powerful it can be that competent professionals are openly gay and comfortably so. That changes hearts and minds. When people can they should be encouraged to." —**Julie Dorf**, *Council for Global Equality*

▶ Trust First

"I would only come out on a very personal basis. I would just say no. You never know who you could offend. If I'm working with somebody shoulder-to-shoulder, and there is trust, then I could." —**Kile Ozier**, *Global Events Producer*

▶ Be Mindful of the Social Context

"When you're talking about it from a business standpoint, it would be a function of the rapport you build with your colleagues, and the degree to which you think they would be understanding of your sexuality without necessarily putting them in an untenable situation with their manager. It's one thing to come out as a force of social change, to say "I'm here, I'm queer!" But in a business context, you're not "here," you're just travelling through. It's harder to make a social and political point when your purpose is just business. While I do think it's critical to increase visibility globally but I would be mindful of the social context." —**Eric Silverberg**, *CEO of Scruff*

▶ Avoiding the Question

I don't proactively bring it up in more conservative situations. In India, for example, I wouldn't walk around talking about my sexual orientation until I've developed a good relationship with the people I'm working with. Once I know the people I'm working with well, I introduce them to my partner. It's not something I would bring up, however. If someone assumed something about me, I wouldn't lie, but I would find a way to get around the question. I've been in business meetings and people assume I'm married with kids. In that situation, I corrected her without coming out. I will say something like 'Oh, no, I don't have a wife.'" —**Regan Taikitsadaporn**, *Chief Human Resources Officer, Asia Pacific, Marriott International*

▶ **Ambiguity may be best**

“I suggest you only reveal the truth after you know someone for a while because this middle-class notion of ‘I have to tell the truth’ is nonsense. The risk you take is disproportionate to the reward you receive. If I were traveling to the Caribbean, where it’s extremely conservative and highly intolerant, you don’t come out until you have established some rapport. Better to say, ‘I wish I had a wife,’ or some other ambiguous statement.” —**Michael S.**, *Investment Banker, based in Dubai*

▶ **Trust Your Gut**

“You can’t place enough emphasis on your gut instinct in these cases. I want us to be as authentic as possible, but we can’t be naive and the world in a lot of places has not evolved, or has not evolved as quickly.” —**Bruce Rohr**, *Senior Director Global Brand Management for TownePlace Suites, Marriott International*

▶ **Educate the Locals by Being Yourself**

“I am a firm proponent of taking a moment to educate people. As LGBT businessmen and women, we’re like everybody else. But people need to be really cognizant that there are real safety issues, and they should be really smart about who and how we tell our story. Don’t assume everybody is going to be as open. On the one hand, coming out to people is important because LGBT people are a part of business and trade. On the other side of the coin, you have to be aware of where you’re travelling, do your due diligence, know the laws.” —**Justin Nelson**, *Co-Founder, National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce*

▶ **Respect The Local Culture**

“If they ask me directly I answer them. It’s not the culture of most of those countries to ask a lot of questions. By culture, they’re taught not to. Even when certain friends of mine are comfortable with me and my sexuality, they have a little bit of a hesitancy. I feel comfortable to come out only once people have led you down that path. Let it be their choice to go that direction. Countries all have human rights issues, not just for gay people: religious people, women, minorities of all kinds, and I’ve always taken a look at the overall perspective of how free a country is. A lot of what I’ve always done is find the overall culture of the people, and instead of impose the culture I come from, I try to respect theirs. In an ideal world, it’s great to be and open, but the reality is, you can’t be doing business in these countries without accepting the terms they lay down for you. You don’t lay over and play dead, but you if you go against the norm, you basically have an uphill battle.” —**Geoff “Chester” Woolley**, *CEO of Unitus Impact*

▶ **Country vs. Company**

It is absolutely critical to understand the country you’re working in. Take off the LGBT hat and put on the good global professional. I really hope people who are working abroad are taking the time to learn the cultures. Even if you get the broad strokes. I used to go to the Persian Gulf and the people there knew I was gay. I would talk about my partner Jim the exact same way I would my wife. However the Gulf is a horrible place to be gay. But there is a difference between the country as a whole and the microcosm of your company within. —**Dionysios Bouzos**, *Pharmaceuticals Executive*

▶ **Safety First**

“I don’t think there’s a good rule of thumb. Safety first. Even as someone who does this for a living, who strongly believes coming out is a big deal and of massive importance, if it’s going to put you at risk, it’s not worth doing. There are a lot of cultures where it’s not illegal to be gay. In much of Asia, for example, the locals don’t always care if you’re gay, but they don’t want it rubbed in their face. For many Asians, it’s about family; it’s a fraternalistic culture. If you stay within the confines that are acceptable to that culture, you’ll be fine.” —**Todd Sears**, *Founder of Out on the Street*

▶ **Being True to Yourself**

“Coming out in a work environment is an individual decision. If somebody assumed I’m straight, I will correct them in a way that is not defensive. I’ll say, “My partner’s name is Chris, thank you so much for asking.” As a business professional, you have to make that decision for yourself. For some people, the business mission is more important, and they don’t want to derail that by getting too personal. For me, I’ll always be true to myself. In regards to when it’s appropriate, my rule is: only if I’m asked. If the person asking the question wants to know, I’ll answer. You need to consider how comfortable the relationship is, how long you’ve known the people.” —**Brian King**, *Global Brand Officer, Marriott International*

▶ **Is Your Work Environment Gay-Friendly?**

The work environment at my former employer was different, not as sensitive. I didn’t come out when I first got there. I got close to a woman very quickly and during our travels we would always go out, and the environment is a lot of beer drinking, and they’d ask straight jock questions like, “Who would you want to sleep with?” I’d laugh it off because I didn’t want to make an issue out of it. It’s a case by case basis. I never felt like I was in harm or being judged. For me, it’s about “Am I being harassed or threatened?” —**Robert Suarez**, *Director of Product Management, TUMI*

▶ **Don’t Force it**

“Every time I have a business meeting, people look at my wedding ring and assume I have a wife. Or they look at my new born baby, and assume I have a wife. I try to say “partner” and leave it at that. Some places do not get it. In some countries, I try not to force it.” —**Jack Suwanlert**, *Director of Risk Management, Marriott International*



NEXT:
STAYING CONNECTED



STAYING CONNECTED



Staying connected to home has both its technical and emotional challenges. We live in a technologically advanced world, where it's easier than ever to stay connected through video chat or through affordable international plans for texting and calls. You may already know them, but we'll discuss a range of services Skype and Whatsapp, international SIM cards, and apps that remove many of the barriers to communication with your loved ones back home. Be sure to check with your wireless carrier about pricing before you leave the US. If you don't have an international calling or data plan, you can easily rack up hundreds of dollars of charges, especially from data-heavy applications running in the background.

And those problems that can't be fixed with an app? Having the ability to stay connected 24/7 can exacerbate or create problems with miscommunications and expectations. LGBTQ solo travellers struggle with time zones and schedules, along with deeper, more complex emotional issues such as jealousy and loneliness. We'll delve into those personal issues with suggestions and examples from our experts and experienced travelers.

THE TECHNOLOGY

International roaming on your wireless device can get very expensive, very quickly. Check with your carrier for options before leaving, and check out these essential services that savvy travelers rely on. Many travelers to countries like China are surprised to find out they can't access services like Facebook that are blocked in the country. A Virtual Private Network service is the easy and affordable fix. These products and services have been recommended by our contributors, but their inclusion here is not an endorsement by ManAboutWorld or the sponsors of this guide. We list them as examples and for guidance, and recommend you review their terms of service before use.

SKYPE

The original "Voice Over IP" service, Skype is still one of the best ways to reliably and inexpensively connect with your contacts all over the world. Skype is notable for its video calling features, and for requiring only an email address, not a phone number to register.

WHATSAPP

WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform mobile messaging app, allowing you to send and receive text/SMS messages without accessing your SMS plan, making it an easy way to message with international friends. WhatsApp Messenger is available for iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, and Windows Phone, allowing all those phones to message each other. WhatsApp uses your existing phone number as your ID, and your existing internet data plan/WiFi connection to avoid international SMS charges. Whatsapp is free for the first year, and 99¢ after that.

VIBER

Like Whatsapp, Viber offers wifi-based messaging and calling between Viber users. Like Skype, Viber offers a desktop client, although it still requires a phone number to register. Viber-to-Viber service is free, but Viber also offers low-rate calling to phone numbers of non-Viber users.

T-MOBILE

For US-based travelers, T-Mobile offers the most advantageous global data roaming, included free with most plans. The data is only 2G, but that's enough to update your email in the background, run Google Maps or Uber, or check in on Scruff or Facebook. 3G and 4G upgrades are available for a fee.

LOCAL SIM CARDS

Replacing your existing SIM card with a local card is often the least expensive way to access cellular services abroad. It can be a hassle to set up — a big one in some countries, and especially if you don't speak the language. [The Prepaid Data Sim Card Wiki](#) sorts out the options around the globe.

[GLOBAL SIM CARDS](#)

A few companies offer global SIM cards, with calling plans that cover most of the world. They tend to be pricey, but much simpler than local SIM cards, especially if you're frequently traveling to multiple countries.

[BOINGO](#)

With more than 1,000,000 hotspots, Boingo offers WiFi access designed for global travelers, and some American Express cardmembers get this service for free.

[VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORKS \(VPN\)](#)

Some countries, like the United Arab Emirates, block access to many LGBT sites. Others, like China, block access to Facebook and Twitter. If you're traveling to a country where internet access is controlled, a VPN allows you to circumvent restrictions, and add an additional layer of anonymity to your internet access. We've used [ExpressVPN](#) successfully, and [PC Magazine](#) has a great comparison of various services and an explanation of how they work, including how people use them to access services like Netflix and HBOGo away from home. Using a VPN is as simple as loading the App on your phone, computer and/or tablet, and launching it before accessing the web.

[TRIPIT](#)

Simply forward your airline and hotel confirmations to Tripit (or connect it to your gmail, Yahoo or Outlook account), and TripIt consolidates all your plans into a single itinerary that can be easily or automatically shared with your family or friends, so they'll always know what flights you're on and what hotel you're at.

[THE EMOTIONAL ASPECTS](#)

Some relationships benefit from regular and frequent contact while traveling, but sometimes less communication is better. Figure out what works for you and your partner/spouse/family.

▶ [Plan a regular check-in](#)

"I primarily use Facebook messenger and Skype. In a lot of other parts of the world, I'll use Whatsapp to stay connected to my friends when I'm abroad. I definitely stay in touch every couple days with my family, and I'll also text and email. It depends on what kind of internet access I have. If I'm in a place with greater risk, I would have a plan with my family and to check in because there would be more reason to be worried." —**Julie Dorf**, *Senior Advisor, Council for Global Equality*

▶ [Beware the over share](#)

"My husband likes to check in every day. But rehashing my day just feels like more work. And telling him about my night when it includes something that might make him jealous is really awkward. So we exchange text messages just once or twice a day when I travel. I'll share something that made me think of him, or wish him a great day, or let him know the big meeting went well, or tell him how much I'm looking forward to our reunion." —**Rodrigo Espinosa**, *Global Sales Manager*

▶ [Announce your arrival](#)

"One thing I do is text when I depart and land, to let him know I've made it there safe. We try to email, every third or fourth day." —**Brian King**, *Global Brand Officer, Marriott International*

▶ [Connect often](#)

"I try to connect as often as I can. If I'm in a country where there's been recent attacks against LGBT people, I check in more to let him know I'm safe. You just have to be mindful." —**Jack Suwanlert**, *Director of Risk Management, Marriott International*

▶ **Save some conversation for your return**

The longest [my partner and I] have been apart is one week. I'm not really into Facetime; I prefer to talk on the phone. I will use Google hangouts and Facebook messenger. I want to let her know I'm OK, but I don't want to give her every detail. We were originally very co-dependent, and we just recently started talking about what each person prefers. It's OK to say, "If we talk everyday, we won't have anything to talk about when I get home." But I think in a more dangerous place, I'd probably check in more. — **Talisha Padgett-Matthews**, *Senior Manager, Digital Marketing, Marriott International*



NEXT:
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT



SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT



Solo travel can be isolating and lonely, for anyone, and especially for LGBTQ business travelers who may be uncomfortable in work-related dinners, happy hours and other social activities with customers and colleagues. At the same time, LGBTQ travelers have an advantage when it comes to meeting locals and making new friends. Using the Apps, and recommendations below will help you do just that. Reaching out to local LGBTQ organizations is another strategy.

Safety should always be a top-of-mind concern — not just for yourself, but for the locals who may be outed by your interactions. “Traveler privilege” may allow you greater freedom of expression, but it can be accompanied by worrisome or risky repercussions for the locals you engage with. Use these best practices and recommendations to help guide you appropriately.

If you face the challenge of excusing yourself from work-related social obligations, you’ll benefit from some clever strategies that our experienced travelers use to free up their precious after-work hours without raising suspicions or seeming anti-social.

SAFETY FIRST

Every expert we spoke to emphasized the need for caution, and an imperative to consider safety first.

▶ Err on the side of caution

“In countries that are not democratic and are kind of known to be more hostile, you can pretty much guarantee it’s not going to be a safe place for gay people. With that said, you should always consider the locals, ask if they are out, and use common courtesy and seek permission to take photos and tag. You should absolutely use caution with how visible you are with local LGBT people. You might not suffer the consequences, but the punishments for the locals could be much more severe. A visitor needs to take their cues from the locals, and err on the side of caution. There are a lot of places where foreigners are followed, the government keeps an eye on who you’re with and may visit the people you’ve hung out with after you’ve left the country. That can definitely get people in trouble.” —**Julie Dorf**, *Senior Advisor, Council for Global Equality*

▶ You may be under surveillance

I use a VPN: a virtual private network. It enables you to use the Internet and email without the country monitoring you., In the Persian Gulf, for example, they control the press and it is far more restrictive than China. China is the East Village compared to the Gulf. You need a VPN to protect your privacy. Would it be dangerous if you didn’t do that? Yes, I would say so. My better half is very fond of SCRUFF, and it depends on how you use it, but we have met a lot of very nice people through that. It is not necessarily dangerous to use grindr and Scruff but use a VPN. —**Michael S.**, *Investment Banker, based in Dubai*

CONSIDER THE LOCALS

There is privilege extended to first world travelers, who are mostly insulated from the discrimination that affects locals in places where sexual orientation and gender identity are criminalized. Many of these nations depend on tourism dollars to help sustain their country, so while they may not accept LGBTQ people comfortably, they also are unlikely to offend or accost foreign tourists or business travelers. This is especially true for travelers from North America and Western Europe, who are generally treated with the additional privilege that is afforded to more affluent visitors. The local LGBTQ community will experience a much harsher level of reprimand. When travelling to countries where homosexuality is illegal, you need to look outside yourself and consider the locals.

▶ **Tourist dollars buy privilege**

“I think it’s more dangerous for the locals than for the tourists. If a culture is anti-gay, there is a margin of acceptance with tourists because it’s bringing in a little money. The locals don’t have that same acceptance.” — **Todd Sears**, *Founder of Out on the Street*

▶ **Locals can suffer consequences**

“The first thing I would say is, you need to think about the safety of the people you are with, who are native, as much as your own. You can be outing locals who are with you, and putting them in even greater jeopardy. And it’s more likely, they’ll be the ones to suffer the consequences. If you’re a visitor in a country where homosexuality is criminalized, you might be asked to leave the country, but their punishment may be much more severe. Consider that perspective first.” — **Eric Silverberg**, *CEO of Scruff*

APPS & SOCIAL NETWORKS

From Facebook to Scruff, travelers have many more ways to connect with locals. Reaching out to friends for introductions to their friends before you leave on your trip is the best way to make new friends and get the most current and local take on the social environment for your visit.

▶ **Use Apps, But Be Careful:**

“The apps like Grindr make it much easier to meet locals, whereas it can be difficult in bars. I find the apps work quite well. Once again be respectful to the culture. I prefer to have coffee rather than meet them at the hotel – meet at a public place first. And remember apps differ in the different countries - certain countries prefer certain apps. Some countries, an app will be very popular, and then you can cross a boundary and another will be more widely used. For example, GayRomeo is really popular in India, though not so much elsewhere, so understanding which apps to use in which countries is helpful.” — **Geoff “Chester” Woolley**, *CEO of Unitus Impact*

▶ **Leverage your network**

“The only thing I would say is, leverage your network. Use Facebook, ask for introductions. That’s how I’ve met most of the folks I know. Connecting with LGBT resource groups is something to consider. I jokingly say Grindr, but I was in Singapore for my first meeting, and the apps are global and everywhere. I would definitely be afraid of entrapment, though, so use caution.” — **Todd Sears**, *Founder of Out on the Street*

▶ **The friend of a friend is your friend**

When it comes to LGBT’s looking to meet local LGBT’s I would give those people the same advice I’d give a non-business person. If you’re in Moscow and you meet some really cute guy, that’s fine, but don’t hold his hand in public. I would never ask my host or business counterparts for gay places. I would never ask for a gay bar. Part of that is because it puts them in an awkward situation. Utilize the wonders of the web, instead. The best thing would be to find friends who have friends. And given the global nature of our world, I’d like to think it wouldn’t take a lot. That’s the absolute best way, connecting on Facebook, etc. — **Dionysios Buozos**, *Pharmaceuticals Executive*

▶ **Avoid secluded meetups**

“I say meet in person. Meet in public first, meet in places where it’s not too sketchy. Do not go to secluded places.” — **Jack Suwanlert**, *Director of Risk Management, Marriott International*

LOOK UP LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Local LGBTQ organizations can often provide an introduction to the local community, and a better understanding of the issues they face. A small donation made locally can have great impact and is always appreciated.

▶ The Power of LGBTQ Organizations:

“People are going to talk about Grindr and Scruff, but I would highly recommend people look up the local LGBTQ organizations. Just call them up and say, “Hey, could I come over, I’m here visiting.” And then you leave them \$25. I talked to a guy in Marrakech and he said we’d love for people to reach out to us. Meet the local communities, get real, authentic information, and leave some money when you can.” —**Charlie Rounds**, *Managing Director of OutThink Partners*

TALK TO LOCALS & OTHER VISITORS

We’re all human. And the chance to interact with locals can often be the most memorable part of any trip, business or pleasure. Nobody knows the city better than the people on the ground and if you can unplug and meet people face to face, you’ll meet real locals and begin conversations. How to do this? Here’s some advice

▶ Culture starts with food

I often ask my local colleagues to take me out. Eating is huge in Asia, so it’s not uncommon to schedule meetings and social activities around meals. Ask them to take you to a local meal; not where the tourists go, but where they would eat with family or friends. And then you can ask a lot about the culture, society, religion, politics, etc. in a more relaxed atmosphere. I don’t use any LGBT apps. Each country generally has a social app that is popular among the locals. Utopia Asia is a good resource to learn about LGBT friendly places in the different countries in Asia. The one thing we have to be careful of as travelers, is to be mindful about who you meet. Your safety comes first. It’s not just LGBT who has to be careful, but all travelers. —**Regan Taikitsadaporn**, *Chief Human Resources Officer, Asia Pacific, Marriott International*

▶ Beyond the Concierge

I’m going to look up gay neighborhoods, gay restaurants, and a nice brunch. In the Dominican Republic, I definitely sat at the bar and tried to talk to people beyond the concierge. Somebody local. A security guard or bartender. Somebody who knows the city and knows what’s cool. —**Talisha Padgett-Matthews**, *Senior Manager, E-commerce, Marriott International*

▶ Easy Ice Breaker

“Offering to take a photo for strangers who are struggling to take a selfie is an easy ice-breaker, and almost always appreciated.” —**Billy Kolber**, *Founder, ManAboutWorld*

▶ It helps to go with a friend

“Find local guides in the country and talk to locals before you get there using online forums or apps like Scruff, and once you arrive. That’s going to be the most accurate and the most rewarding way to learn about a culture. We live in interesting times. What is acceptable is changing rapidly in this country and globally. The advice you got a few years ago may not be accurate anymore. Refresh your knowledge. If you’re going in cold and just arriving at the gay bar, you’re really not going to understand the culture. Go with a friend who knows the culture and can teach you. Some of these communities really operate underground, in house parties and private parties, and it helps to have somebody who grew up around it.” —**Eric Silverberg**, *CEO of Scruff*

If work-related social activities cause stress, finding a polite way to excuse yourself can be invaluable.

▶ **The Little White Lie**

“When I want to get out of dinner with colleagues, I use a little white lie, saying that I’m having dinner with an old college friend who lives in the destination. People of all cultures seem to respect that without feeling insulted as they might if I said I needed to work” —**Leslie H.**, *VP Sales Europe/Middle East for a large pharma corporation*

∨ **NEXT:** **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN & GENDER NON-CONFORMING TRAVELERS** ∨

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN & GENDER NON-CONFORMING TRAVELERS



Travel + Leisure has a great list of [50 Tips for Female Travelers](#) that offers excellent safety advice for all female travelers. But lesbian and bisexual women — and gender-nonconforming people — face additional concerns when traveling. Their trip can be impacted by their circumstances: whether or not they are out, traveling with partners and children, pursuing a connection with the local LGBT community, their appearance and demeanor. While many lesbians and bisexuals pass as straight while traveling (unless they are masculine presenting or visibly queer) gay women who travel together or with children may find their enjoyment, or even their safety, compromised by the discrimination of locals and fellow travelers. Below is a brief guide to help make your trip safer and more enjoyable.

▶ [“Are you two sisters?” Coming out as a couple](#)

This is a very common question asked of lesbian couples who travel together for romance and relaxation. Sexual orientation is not immediately readable without the context provided by a partner, but even then, a romantic attachment may be interpreted as familial. If you feel safe and in non-threatening company, by all means correct misperceptions and come out. But if you think your honesty will inspire hostility or harassment, you might want to prepare a different response. If you do feel more secure traveling with your partner, “introduce them as a friend, a roommate, or without any kind of description of your relationship,” suggests defense attorney Jenna Ard.

“We went to India for vacation last year and we were going about the country with the help of a friend who is a local, but even without them I don’t think we would have felt any discrimination or trouble. I say this from a position of knowing we don’t fit the world’s stereotype of what lesbians looks like. Most people assume we’re sisters even though we don’t look anything alike.” —**Cheril & Monica Bey-Clarke**, *Publishers & Entrepreneurs*

“If asked I will never lie—unless I am in a country where it is safer for me to stay in the closet. In Egypt it was a bit uncomfortable having to hide my sexuality and say I was single, even though I was in a relationship.” —**Mona Elyafi**, *Entertainment Publicist*

“My girlfriend is quite androgynous and I worry that we will be targeted for being LGBTQ together, and that she’ll be policed in women’s bathrooms because she’s androgynous.” —**Alex Berg**, *Producer & Host The Huffington Post*

“While traveling, I am rarely affectionate with my partner in public, because I fear the possibility of backlash, negative attention, and possible dangerous confrontations.” —**Christine Johnson**, *Digital Media & Search Marketing Professional*

“If I feel like my safety could be in jeopardy, I don’t share anything about my sexuality, my wife, or our children.” —**Kirsten Palladino**, *Author & Publisher of Equally Wed*

▶ [“Where’s the father?” Traveling as a lesbian family](#)

Two women traveling with children may inspire questions from curious locals regarding who is who. Whether this interest in your family structure is nosy or nice, you need to decide whether it’s worth explaining your family arrangement to complete strangers. Being honest may create a hostile environment for your vacation—especially if you are confined to a resort or a cruise with small children. While in an ideal world it would be beneficial to promote LGBT families, you will need to balance your duty to teach your children honesty and keeping them safe!

“One year we were vacationing in Puerto Rico, our daughter was 12 at the time. She was happy to meet a girl the same age at the resort until the girl wanted to know who [my wife] was. Our daughter lied and said she was my roommate. She told us she felt terrible that she lied and she avoided the girl after that. But we explained to her that it was okay that she did what made her feel safe.” —**Angeline Acain**, *Owner at Gay Parent Magazine*

“When my wife and I travel together—with or without our twin 6-year-olds—we are more careful because she is masculine. We make even more carefully thought-out decisions, especially on road trips. It’s me who takes the kids to the bathrooms at gas stations, not her.” —**Kirsten Palladino**, *Author & Publisher of Equally Wed*

“I will not knowingly take my daughter on a trip that could be dangerous for her. Traveling with my wife and daughter together, there’s no way we’d be able to hide our lives, nor would we want to do that anyway. Would I take my wife and daughter with me to the Middle East or Africa should the opportunities arise? That’s a definite no. When imprisonment or death are consequences for holding hands or speaking freely in public, that changes the game for me when deciding to travel with my family.” —**Sarah Toce**, *Owner The Seattle Lesbian*

▶ **Traveling while gender non-conforming**

Butch lesbians are often chased out of women’s bathrooms, both in the U.S. and abroad. “Without a doubt, gender non-conforming women have a much harder time when they travel,” says lesbian events promoter Christine Johnson. “I am privileged to pass as straight, which dramatically reduces my risk of being the target of a hate crime, and makes traveling a lot less complicated.” Erin Berg, a transman, agrees. “My main concern when traveling is before I even get to the gate for my flight—getting through TSA. It is always an anxiety-producing experience.” And yet in a foreign country where men are first class citizens, transmen who have transitioned and are accepted as male will acquire a privilege queer women forsake upon leaving home.

“My worries have definitely changed since physically transitioning. I don’t have to worry as much about accommodations, bathrooms now. Prior to transitioning, I was constantly worried about if I was going to be safe, especially in places that are not as friendly as the United States to the LGBTQ community.” —**Erin Berg**, *Co-Founder Kipper Clothiers*

“I’m not out very much [as trans or lesbian], except for perhaps at gay bars. Some places can be very homophobic/transphobic...typically certain Third World and developing nations with bad records on these issues.” —**Alessandra**, *Marketing Executive*

▶ **Suggestions for business travelers**

Frequent high-end business travelers with pre-clearance and luxury accommodation may escape scrutiny while traveling, insulated by corporate accommodations and understanding colleagues. Robyn Streisand, founder and CEO of marketing agency Titanium Worldwide travels up to six times a month and says she is “100 percent out,” citing good service, comfort, and safety—in that order—as her top priorities. If you are out to your employer and colleagues, you will then need to decide if you will come out to locals. Making a statement about equal rights may need to take a backseat to safety, especially if you are there for work. Asked to travel to LGBTQ-hostile destinations for work, Alex Berg, a host and producer for The Huffington Post says, “Being queer wasn’t an issue, but only because I hid my authentic self.”

“I am not generally out during international travel. Sometimes I even ask colleagues to not bring up my family in public spaces. This happened in India with a driver who referred to my spouse as ‘he’ rather than ‘she.’ I try to avoid putting myself in a position where I will face blatant discrimination.” —**Kerry Branon**, *Media Relations Manager at International Fund for Animal Welfare*

“If I meet someone and my gaydar goes off, I may subtly come out to them, if I perceive it to be an appropriate conversation and a comfortable, safe environment.” —**Christine Johnson**, *Digital Media & Search Marketing Professional*

“I do not live in a closet anywhere. I believe having this transparency also allows for others to look out for me as well.” —**Nenna Joiner**, *Founder at Feelmore Holdings, Inc.*

▶ **Accept the local culture even if it may not accept you**

Acquainting yourself with local laws and customs is essential to enjoying your trip, but remember that the 76+ countries that are intolerant of homosexuality are also countries in which women's rights are suppressed. In some countries, the privilege gained by passing as a straight single woman or as sisters might not necessarily be an advantage but instead might mark you as "fair game." And while your natural style at home may be to dress like a tomboy, you could be confusing your host country. "When I was in Istanbul with my girlfriend and we visited a mosque, she got put in the line for men even though she is not male-identified. We caused a scene trying to get her out of that line and into the women's line where I was," says Rachel, a student.

"I am generally more concerned for my safety as a petite cisgender woman, more so than being queer."

—**Christine Johnson**, *Digital Media & Search Marketing Professional*

"I would love acceptance, but my primary concern is ensuring that I'm physically safe." —**Alex Berg**, *Producer & Host The Huffington Post*

"Service and safety are our priorities. Acceptance is often an afterthought. We travel to experience the best of where we're going, not so much to be out and visible." —**Cheril & Monica Bey-Clarke**, *Publishers & Entrepreneurs*

▶ **The benefits of staying gay**

If you are traveling for work you are more likely to stay in a corporate environment where personal behavior is not the focus. But if you are embarking on a carefree and romantic vacation, you may wish to seek out an LGBTQ-friendly accommodation — also a good way of supporting LGBT locals. The [IGLTA](#), [Tag-approved](#) and [Purple Roofs](#) are three resources available to locate them.

"As an LGBTQ small business owner, I make it a point to stay in LGBTQ-owned and friendly accommodations. Go to a gay travel site to help you plan your trip so that you can have a stress-free vacation or work trip." —**Erin Berg**, *Co-Founder Kipper Clothiers*

"Staying with properties that are headquartered in the U.S. or profiled on top-rated travel blogs helps. Many U.S.-based hotels will have a better understanding of questions U.S. nationals may have." —**Nenna Joiner**, *Founder at Feelmore Holdings, Inc.*

▶ **Extra precautions you should take**

Research the destination and its attitudes toward LGBT people and women. Pack the right clothing for assimilation, keep copies of your travel documents, sign up for the free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to enroll with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate and receive warnings and alerts. Seek out 'gayborhoods' but consider how the local culture may read your gender expression. Nenna Joiner, a masculine-presenting lesbian of color notes, "My short hair may signify sexual preference in the U.S., but it might rather be seen as Buddhist in Vietnam." Be aware of the law, which may not always align with the customs, and of local prejudices around class and race. "Recently, I was stopped walking through Bogotá, Colombia by a female police officer for no reason other than being of darker complexion," says Joiner. She also advises you learn some simple phrases, for example how to state your gender, if you think you may have to defend the gender you are traveling under.

▶ **What to Do If You're Harassed**

Ignore the taunts and avoid a confrontation, if possible. Try to put some distance between you and the individual or group that is bothering you. If that's not possible, shout for help, use your mobile device to call for help and if it's safe to do so attempt to record or snap a photo that will help investigators if necessary.

TRAVELING WHILE TRANS



Whether they be lesbian, gay or bisexual, many travelers carry along something extra when they leave home: an abundance of caution, some well-founded worries and concerns, and all too often, fear. Magnify that ten times for “T” travelers: those who identify as transgender, non-binary or genderqueer.

When it comes to presenting in public, it’s been said acceptance is 75-percent self-confidence. But these times require more than just belief in oneself. Interactions with strangers, screenings by authorities, and even the simple human task of using a bathroom can make traveling while trans a burden that can overwhelm even the most self-confident gender non-conforming individual.

This section is designed to equip trans travelers with solid information, authoritative anecdotes from well-known community leaders, travel insider advice and reliable resources to make every trip as trouble-free as possible.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

► *Should I Drive, Ride the Bus, Train, Ferry or Fly?*

Whether you’re getting behind the wheel, boarding a plane, taking Greyhound, Amtrak or regional rail, or even a ferry or cruise ship to reach your destination, you still need to carry some form of legal identification. Whether someone checks it depends on how you go. And if you feel like more people are flying, you’re right: airline industry insiders say a record 823 million passengers flew in 2016.

More than 88 percent of trans travelers drive [according to AAA](#). Unless you’re pulled over, driving provides the least risk of encountering anyone in authority to question your gender presentation. Of course, it’s not always feasible to drive, nor as fast as rail travel. Rail travel is more scenic, and while passengers must still present legal identification matching the name on the ticket, the good news: nobody will check the gender marker.

Having both a driver’s license and a passport is advisable. And because rules for making changes to a driver ID vary from state to state, getting a passport is a smart option even when your travel is within the U.S. [The State Department’s rules](#), as of now, can be less stringent than the automobile license authorities in some states.

► *Do I Have to Out Myself?*

The short answer is: “no.” However, trans travelers should always be prepared to disclose that they are transgender.

Author, Activist and Professor Jennifer Finney Boylan: “I think the biggest danger for trans people, whether in the air, or on the ground, is disclosure. Whom to tell, and when? For some of us—those with passing privilege, especially those who have been through gender confirmation surgery— disclosure is a decision that can be largely left up to us. I rarely talk about my identity with strangers— because it’s hard to know when I’m safe, and also hello, it’s none of their business. I think lots of trans people have this sense of themselves.”

Greta Gustava Martela, executive director of Trans Lifeline: “I get flagged and patted down every time. There is nothing in my documents to indicate I’m trans. I guess it’s my height? The machines don’t think I’m the right shape.”

Rebecca Kling, Community Storytelling Advocate at the National Center for Transgender Equality: “I’m a trans woman, and have always had the best luck traveling when I’ve been polite, but direct. For example, before I had gender reassignment surgery, I’d occasionally get sent through the fancy scanners and have an ‘abnormality’ flagged at my crotch. [The TV show *Transparent* has a painful but funny episode dealing with this subject called “[Groin anomaly](#).”] I’d volunteer that I’m transgender. This usually cut out any awkward conversation about what might be happening or why the scanner flagged me. To be clear, it’s ridiculous that I had to do this, but I preferred cutting right to the point.”

► *Preparing for Airport Security Check-In*

Besides making sure you wear shoes you can easily slip on and off, that your [toiletries are properly stowed](#) and that you have some form of ID that matches the name and gender on your ticket, even if it does not match your gender presentation, trans travelers should review the [Transportation Security Administration guidelines](#). The TSA posted a roughly [90-second video](#) summarizing what is supposed to happen on YouTube.

Jennell Jaquays, illustrator, owner of video game company: “Attitude can be a biggie. When I go through I’m ‘Miss Sunny Disposition’ and will chat and joke with agents if they seem receptive. Also done this enough now that I know the drills.”

Kristen Browde, attorney and politician: “TSA Pre, or any way you can become a ‘Known Traveler’ is the first line of defense in traveling while trans. It helps avoid the full body scanners at airports; besides, the lines are shorter. That having been said, it’s not infallible - some airports don’t have Pre lines.”

Rebecca Kling: “As a trans person, I am a huge fan of TSA Pre. I’m conflicted about the ethics (and efficacy) of allowing some people to pay for shorter lines and lighter screening, but going through the metal detector instead of the fancy scanner means there’s no chance that my body will pop up as having ‘abnormalities.’ If you travel even once or twice a year, and can afford the cost, TSA Pre is totally worth it.” [Note: [Global Entry](#) includes TSA Precheck with its expedited immigration clearance.]

Robin Knauerhase, Research Scientist: “There was a period of time when my appearance didn’t match my ID. As much as I dislike TSA, they were actually been really good about everything. I actually once got a deliberate “thank you, ma’am,” and an unintentional but flattering ‘Is this you?’”

► *ProTip: Getting Where You’re Going Without Drama*

Jennifer Finney Boylan: “If the alternative [to disclosure] is public embarrassment or scuzzy strip-searches, there are at least two things a person can do. One is to have a letter from a therapist or other caregiver— a so-called “safe letter,” [also known as a “carry letter”]. In the early days of my transition, I had my social worker type one of these up— it said something like, “Jennifer Boylan— also known as (dead name)— is under my care for gender dysphoria. She is under a regimen of hormone replacement and other therapy in order to help her complete (sic) her transition in the next year. She is appearing in public en femme not in order to defraud anyone but as part of a carefully monitored treatment.” She signed this letter (which was on letterhead) and it provided contact information for her. The idea that I would need the gender equivalent of a note from the principal in order to go about my business was another form of annoyance, but I figured it was worth bearing this around in order to ward off trouble. I can also say that in the two years before surgery, no one ever asked for it, and I never used it. Still, like Dumbo’s magic feather, it was good to know I had it.

“The other thing you can do is prepare your statement explaining your situation in words that are straightforward, unashamed, and clear. In other words, you may wish to rehearse a couple of sentences that sum up the situation. Talking about yourself in public, especially to judgmental strangers, is yet another mortification awaiting people who deserve to be left alone— but once again, it can help stave off danger. And it’s harder than it sounds— I remember the utter fear I experienced the first time I tried to even use the word “transgender” in a sentence (referring to myself.) Still, like anything else, it gets easier over time. So it may be worth trying to practice the words you’d have to say if you were ever in a tight corner. Like, “You should know I’m transgender. I’m under the care of a doctor and I’m in the heart of transition. I know I don’t look a lot like the photo on my ID, but I’m going to get a new one when my transition is complete.” Or words to that effect. I can tell you I have no particular interest in having to divulge all of this, but here is another true thing: I am proud of being trans, and I have no shame in my identity. And so looking people in the eye and telling them all of the foregoing—which is actually a very polite way of saying, Back off— is something I’ll do with pride.”

▶ *What Is An Anomaly? What's An Alarm?*

A trans woman who is an award-winning Hollywood producer made international headlines in 2015, when she [live-tweeted her ordeal](#) at Orlando's airport. TSA agents detained her because of what the agency then called an "anomaly:" the Advanced Imaging Technology scanner used to detect potential threats to the airport and airline was not able to differentiate her penis from an explosive device.

The outrage that followed her story among others motivated the TSA to adopt what it considered more trans-friendly procedures, and [ditch the term "anomaly" in favor of "alarm"](#) when the scanner detects something unexpected. That [decision won the agency praise](#) but the fact that this still happens remains the source of much anger among transgender rights advocates and supporters alike.

The problem is the one thing that hasn't changed: [determination of gender is made by an agent](#) who decides in a split-second whether the passenger about to be screened is male or female; the only other option is a thorough pat-down, which the [TSA announced](#) early in 2017 would be "more aggressive" than in the past.

▶ *Not Every "Alarm" Ends in Tears*

Don't panic. The vast majority of trans travelers will not become embroiled in an incident that sparks headlines.

Kristen Browde: "When flying SAS out of Newark last summer, I found myself with no option other than the full body scanner, and the TSA agent said those dreaded words, 'It alarmed on your groin.' My response immediately defused any possible tension: 'Yeah, that happens sometimes - I'm transgender.' Oh,' said the agent, 'No problem. Would you prefer to be checked by a male or female agent, and do you want a private area?' 'I don't need a private area, and, whatever you guys are more comfortable with is fine with me.' Result: A female agent did a quick and gentle search right there, and we ended up talking about nail polish.

▶ *Reacting to Being Outed or Misgendered*

Former Navy SEAL [Kristin Beck shared her horrible experience](#) with her [Facebook friends](#) and followers, when she was misgendered by TSA agents in late 2016:

"They call me 'him' and ask if TSA Dude can pat me down? I say I'm 'her' and I don't want 'dude' groping my boobs. Yes, They are 'real' boobs and by the way the state of Maryland says I'm female. They call supervisor over and the supervisor says just pat 'him' down. Damn (I'm in tears, my inside voice). Ten minutes later, a female under duress (disgust) pats me down. I'm sad, for TSA, our country, our future... Why is this so difficult?"

Beck met with the **TSA Deputy Administrator** following the incident and received an apology. She proposed solutions to these kinds of encounters, which included production of training videos — for both the public as well as their officers —and launched a program she dubbed ["TSA Ambassadors:"](#) a civilian, non-governmental accounting system that would rate how security officers treated the flying public. Thus far, it's only a [Facebook page](#), but Beck continues to [work with the TSA](#), hosting webinars and pushing for further sensitivity training for new hires.

Writer Meredith Talusan: "My go-to strategy if I'm in a situation where there are questions about my gender and I don't want to reveal I'm trans out of fear is to think to myself, "What would a cis woman do? How would a cis woman react in this situation?" If I'm misgendered, I just correct the person like it's no big deal. I stay calm and not let the situation get visibly rattled; I wait until I'm alone to feel whatever it is I feel."

Tuesday Meadows, retired: “A Cincinnati TSA agent checked my ID before I had my legal name change. He looked at my pic (updated to look like me) and name on my drivers license, then he looked at me and said, ‘well that certainly is an unusual name for a woman.’ I looked back and smiled and said, ‘I think my parents were hoping for a boy.’”

▶ *What happens if you’ve lost your ID?*

One trans man’s wallet was stolen before a return flight home, and the [harrowing tale](#) of how he was allowed to board without ID is one worth reading. It was told by writer **Jacob Anderson-Minshall**, who was that trans man.

The TSA also offers passengers who have [disabilities or medical conditions](#) a way to pre-register for support in the screening process via a special hotline. A [special card](#) is offered to these passengers to identify that they have special needs.

BEFORE THE TSA GETS INTIMATE, KNOW THIS

▶ *What the Full-Body Scanner Sees*

Transportation Security Officers are trained to look for “anomalies:” something that is different than what they expect. And because the agency functions in a traditionally binary world, what they expect are men with penises and flat chests, and women with vaginas and developed breasts, no exceptions. The Advanced Imaging Technology full-body scanners allow TSA agents in separate screening rooms to see all your body contours under your clothes; they direct the agents in the security area where they should look for foreign objects, and alert them to what could be guns, explosives, drugs, etc.

The problem for trans travelers, as explained by [The National Center for Transgender Equality](#), is that they can also see — and overreact to — binders, packers, wigs, and breast forms. Any of these things, while completely legal, may attract undesirable attention and lead to increased scrutiny.

▶ *Trans Men and Packing/Binding*

The NCTE advises that if you are wearing a packer (prosthetic penis) or binder on your flight: “Some packers are likely realistic enough not to be regarded as an anomaly in a pat down, but not in the scanners... You might as well ask for a pat down since going through the whole body scanner with those or any foreign object will almost certainly cause TSA agents to request they do a pat down on you anyway... The pat downs are themselves surprisingly invasive, including the TSO actually making significant contact with your genitals through your clothes... During the pat downs, they will likely find any chest binder you might be wearing and ask you about it, likely asking to see it.”

▶ *Trans Women and Breast Forms/Wigs*

“Wigs and breast forms,” [cautions the NCTE](#), “while completely legal to travel with, may attract attention of TSA agents and lead to increased scrutiny of your person... You might as well ask for a patdown since going through the whole body scanner with those or any foreign object will almost certainly cause TSA agents to request they do a patdown on you anyway... The patdowns are themselves surprisingly invasive, including the agent actually making significant contact with your genitals through your clothes. This of course can be extremely traumatic to transgender and other people who have good reason to react strongly to such invasiveness.

▶ *Great Responses to the Nightmare of Dilator Discovery*

You made it through the scanner but now another agent is opening your luggage because the officer x-ray your bag saw something... unusual. This is one reason why packing some things in checked baggage can make things easier at the security line. But post-operative trans women typically pack vaginal dilators — which they need to use several times a day — in their carry-ons, like any item that is prescribed by a medical provider.

Unfortunately, most male TSA agents don't seem to have a clue as to what they are, or what they're for:

Brynn Tannehill, advocate and writer: "TSA, upon finding my dilation gear:

TSA: *<holding up dilator>* 'What's this?'

Me: 'It's a dildo. It goes in my vagina.'

TSA: *<Gingerly puts dilator back like it has anthrax>* 'Ok, we're done here.'"

Rebecca Kling: "After surgery, I've had to fly with my surgical dilators a few times. They were regularly flagged by the x-ray technician, as I'm told the dilators—plastic phalluses--look like they could be sticks of TNT. (Which seems like something the TSA should check out!) It got to the point where I'd proactively remove them from my bag and send them through. When the TSA would inevitably pull them aside for extra scrutiny, I'd say 'I'm a sex educator. They're dildos.' That white lie made the whole process much quicker, and often got a funny reaction from the TSA."

Zoe Ellen Brain, Scientist: "Only had one problem: dilators come up as liquid filled containers, and I was asked by the TSA to open them. Demonstrating they were solid did not change their minds, till a senior supervisor was summoned. They were looking for a drill at one point, but their collective IQs was such that I don't think they could find their posteriors with both hands, map, compass, GPS system and native guide. They weren't unkind or hateful. Just very, very thick."

▶ *Your Rights as A Traveler*

While almost all passengers can decline using the full-body scanner in favor of a pat down, the TSA has since 2015 been able to make that screening mandatory, what it calls "enhanced screening," for those selected. There is no alternative for those passengers.

If you are undergoing a pat down because either you selected it or because the TSA told you that you had to — and they can make this mandatory, also — you have a right to have a pat down by a person of the same gender "as you are presenting." You also have a right to have any invasive procedure, including a pat down, performed in private. If you go to a private area, you have a right to bring a friend or fellow traveler with you.

Jane White, senior trainer in the healthcare industry: "My 'anomaly' gets flagged for pat down 1/3 of the time. Most of the time I tell them I'm transgender and that's probably what is showing up. All but once the agent (always a woman) patted me down and sent me on my way. Once, in Phoenix Sky Harbor Terminal 4, the agent could not clear me and another agent (again, a woman) came over and started asking me some embarrassing questions like "Did you tuck?" and even 'Which direction is it laying?' The last one was a doozy. Who keeps track of that? I took a guess, it was right, and I was sent on my way. I can't imagine what would have happened if I had guessed wrong. Even then, the agent was respectful of my being trans and I've seen cis people treated worse than me."

▶ *Flying While Trans Internationally*

The reach of the TSA ends where our borders begin. Trans travelers, according to the risk management firm [iJet International](#), should recognize that "the way security personnel at airports outside the U.S. treat transgender individuals is inconsistent, leading to situations where transgender international travelers still face insensitivity and confusion. Such incidents can be emotionally difficult and disruptive to travel."

"Scanners are most common in developed countries, and are widely used in Europe. Some airports in Asia use them, including the major international airports in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Bangkok, and Manila. Scanners are less common in non-Western countries and are only sporadically used in Africa."

iJet has these recommendations for international travelers, along with a warning: be prepared for treatment by some foreigners unlike anything in the United States.

- Travelers should ensure that official paperwork – visas and passports -- match each other and match the traveler’s presentation.
- Travelers may want to carry letters from doctors in English and in the local language as insurance.
- Travelers will want to alert the local U.S. embassy or consulate if they encounter harassment.
- Finally, travelers should anticipate that body scanners may lead to security flagging, and be prepared to respond to cross-cultural confusion, which may manifest as rude or callous behavior.

Meredith Talusan: “I’ve traveled to many places in Asia and Europe, both solo and with my partner. If I’m going to a new place I’m not familiar with, I usually check the [U.S. State Department website](#) for any specific travel warnings. I haven’t had any occasion to go to sensitive regions or places where I feel at risk as a trans person.

“One important note especially for people traveling internationally is to pay attention not just to your destination but also to layovers and the owners of the airlines you choose to fly on. I avoid layovers in places I know to be unfriendly towards trans people as well as airlines that are owned by countries that don’t have trans-inclusive policies. It’s important to note that U.S.-based airlines are not an exception here, since there have been trans-related problems with a number of major airlines in the U.S.

“I’m fortunate to pass as a cis person most places I go, so I can’t speak to the experience of being more visibly trans. Though I have traveled internationally with male identification and that’s a situation where it’s important to be prepared with name change documents, doctor’s letters, etc., because you want to clearly establish your identity, I’m not sure I would feel comfortable traveling to a new place alone without a companion if I’m easily identifiable as trans, just because being targeted in a foreign country where you don’t know the culture isn’t fun.

“If I hear someone say something, as I have on occasion, especially in Asia where it’s more obvious that I’m trans because the women tend to be smaller, I just ignore the person and go about my business. Bullies are only as powerful as we react to them.”

AFTER ARRIVAL

► *You Made it! Now: Where Can I Pee as Me?*

No matter where you go or how you get there, perhaps nothing is more universally understood than a traveler’s need for a toilet. But in some places, the act of using a public bathroom is restricted by law, and a source of much controversy.

I myself learned from my pop the adage, “Any Irish pub on the planet is a fine place to pee.” But that was a long time prior to my evolution from Irishman to Irishwoman, and so that advice might now often require a purchase in order to access their facilities. If a 24-hour mini-market or gas station isn’t handy, check out the resources available at the [Transgender Law Center](#). A trans woman developed the [Refuge bathroom finder](#), which will help you go on the go. And there are apps for your phone, too, like the [Pee in Peace app](#).

Writer **Jacob Anderson-Minshall** is a trans man married to a lesbian who enjoyed joining his wife on a cruise run by [Olivia Travel](#), which markets to the lesbian community. And he found that can be problematic: “There are NO men’s restrooms on the ship. All of them have been re-established as women’s restrooms. which means the only place I can go to the bathroom without sort of making a scene is in our stateroom. Which can be quite a hike from one side of the boat to another.” Another reason to know before you go.

▶ *Returning Home from Over the Border:*

Sign-up with the GOES program to take advantage of [Global Entry](#) when re-entering the U.S., allowing American trans travelers to avoid the risk of encountering human bias when coming home from overseas.

Here's why it's important to make sure you have your papers in order, no matter how you're traveling:

Briana H. Harris: "Biggest problem I've ever had was passing through Canadian customs by car in '05 shortly after going full-time. Forgot to get a letter from my ex before taking my son out of the country and they sent me inside. I had been on HRT for just over a year and passing was questionable. When I got inside the Customs officers sent me from one counter to the next, for no apparent reason except, rather obviously, to give everyone a good look at me. Eventually, after 5 different stops, an officer attempted to call my ex. In the meantime I presented my travel-letter from my therapist and then the officer asked my son, in front of a room full of bikers and others, 'So, this is your father?' My son very matter-of-factly replied, 'yes...why?' and stopped him in his tracks. Eventually we were able to reach my ex and about 40 minutes later they let me go on my way. Since then I've traveled to Ontario annually, sometimes getting asked for the letter from my ex...sometimes not, without a problem. Most (at either US or Canadian customs) simply seem to assume that I am his birth mother and let me go."

BEST PRACTICES

▶ *What to Do If Stopped by Police*

If you're walking or driving, keep calm. Be polite. Keep your hands visible at all times. Don't reach into your pockets, or if you're driving, don't reach inside the glove box or any compartments, without first discussing it with the officer. Present your papers when asked. If there's a discrepancy between your presentation and your government-issued ID, explain it simply and without a long story. It's not against the law to ask for a warning or "a break," instead of a summons, but of course there are no guarantees, and the odds are, if the officer believes you broke the law, you will pay a price.

If you feel you are being harassed or mistreated by police for any reason, the [ACLU does provide apps](#) to record your encounter with a mobile device, which officers may try to convince you is not legal. If you are arrested, say as little as possible until you're joined by a lawyer, or a court appoints legal representation.

▶ *4 Nightlife Precautions*

1. Let someone you trust know where you are, and when you expect to return, even if it's just a friendly front desk manager; this also applies to blind dates.
2. Bring cash as well as a credit or debit card, just in case.
3. If you're a trans woman, be mindful of your drink; what someone slips in when you're not looking can do more than just ruin your night.
4. No matter how you identify, if someone gives you a hard time about how you identify, walk away, find the bouncer/doorman, or consider making enough of a scene that others might come to your aid. That, of course, can also make things worse in some circumstances, so know your surroundings, and your paths to escape. There is never shame in just walking — or running — away.

▶ *4 Things to Consider Before Hooking Up*

1. Do you disclose your trans identity? Do you have a reasonable expectation of how she or he might react? This is a personal choice, and there's no one right answer, especially for pre-op transwomen and transmen who elect not to have bottom surgery. The first priority should be your safety, followed by your consideration for another person's feelings.
2. As with the nightlife scenario, let someone know where you are and when you might return. Even if they are back home, it's best to leave that information with a trusted person.

3. Safe sex is such a misnomer, but consider that STDs are a big price to pay for a few minutes of fun.
4. Trans people are just as free to enjoy sex as anyone else, but if you're away from home be cognizant that the laws vary, especially overseas, and what's fair play in your bedroom can get you sent packing or arrested in some corners of the world. Check with your local U.S. embassy.

▶ *What Every Couple/Family Needs To Know about Traveling While Trans*

It's been said that when a transgender person transitions, so does their whole family. That means the restrictions and obstacles a trans person can face while traveling can also impact them, and some say companionship makes them feel like less of a burden in the sharing of that load.

Meredith Talusan: "I'm not sure I would feel comfortable traveling to a new place alone without a companion if I'm easily identifiable as trans, just because being targeted in a foreign country where you don't know the culture isn't fun."

Briana H. Harris: "For the last 3 years I have traveled to Canada with my fiancée (who is also trans) and her 2 kids without issue."

▶ *Earth's Trans-Friendliest Places*

[PRIDE.com](#) selected Illinois, Colorado, Oregon, Washington State, Vermont and California as the six best states to be transgender, in terms of rights and public accommodations. As far as cities go, you'll be hard-pressed to find one as trans-friendly as [Ft. Lauderdale](#).

Christy Anderson: "The Ft. Lauderdale area has a lot more to offer than Atlanta in the realm of activities, shopping, and cultural happenings. They WANT us there and are doing more than anyone ever has to make us feel welcome."

Find out more by checking out Ft. Lauderdale's travel bureau's own [trans research](#).

If your travels take you overseas, [attn.com](#) says these 9 countries have done more to make trans people feel accepted than any other, far more than even the United States: Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Argentina and Denmark.

RESOURCES

▶ *Trans Travel Emergency Resources*

The [U.S. State Department](#) and the [LGBT Rights Toolkit](#) offer advice, links and phone numbers.

If you want to change your gender marker, visit [this page](#) on the U.S. Department of State's website

▶ *Smart Social Media for the Trans Traveler*

[#Travelingwhiletrans](#) on Twitter

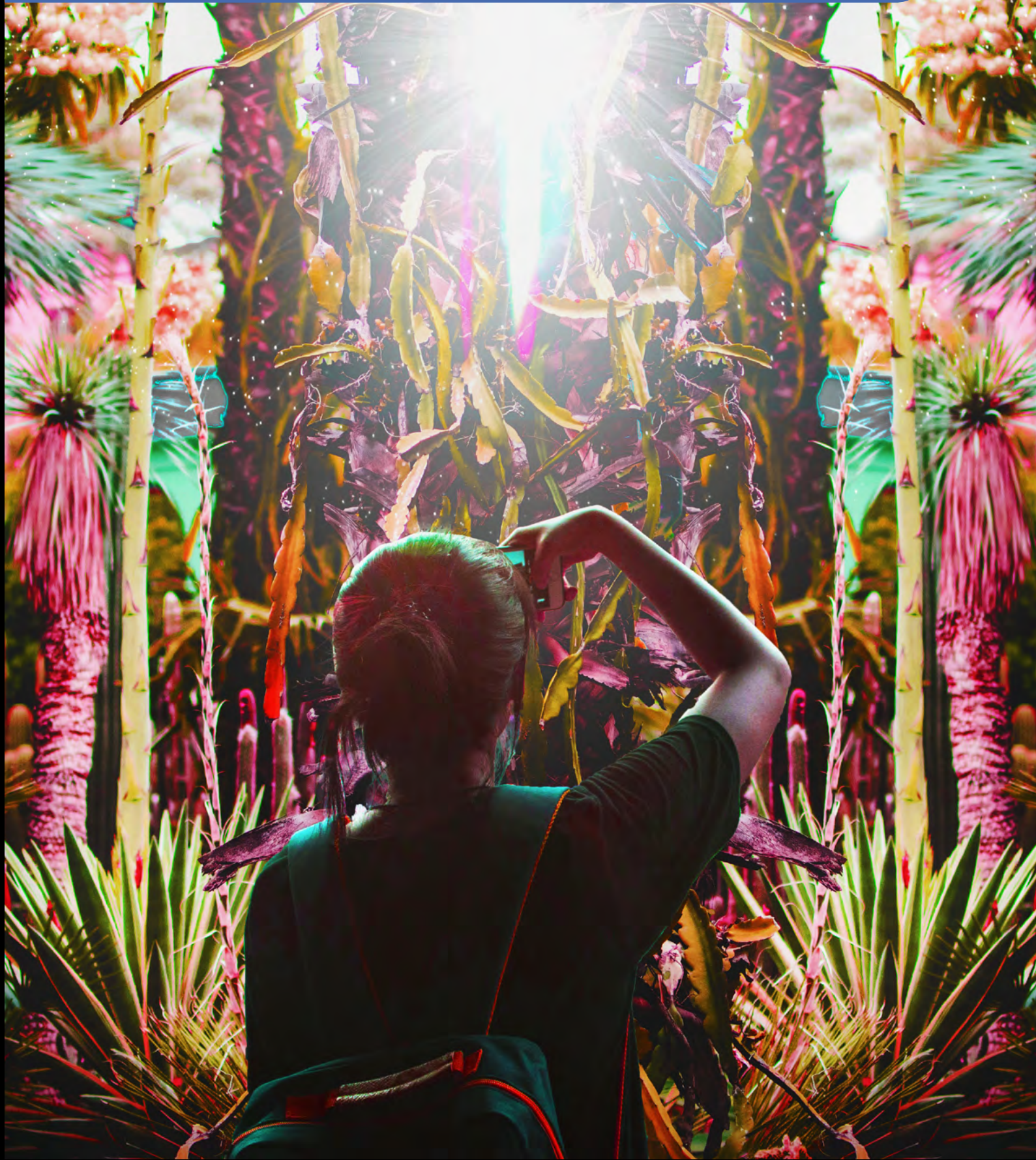
The [Facebook Transgender Alliance](#) has nearly 30,000 members and dozens of admins standing by to assist you or direct you. This is not a site for sharing news or partisan politics, but the FTA can be like a friend when it seems you have none.



NEXT:
**ADVANCING THE CAUSE OF HUMAN
RIGHTS GLOBALLY**



ADVANCING THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY



At ManAboutWorld, we believe that travel—the authentic, personal experience of different peoples, places, and cultures—is transformative. That connecting with local LGBTQ communities allows us to cut through the formalities and barriers that separate most other travelers from the people and places they visit. And in so doing, we experience a profoundly intimate global connection that few others will. We believe that our freedom to travel comes with a responsibility to advance the cause of freedom for LGBTQ people all over the world. But knowing how to do this isn't easy. We've identified some organizations and advice to give you a start.

ORGANIZATIONS

There are many organizations working for human rights and equality globally. Here are two that we believe make a difference.

[OutRight Action International](#)

Known for the first 25 years of its existence as the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, OutRight is a leading international human rights organization dedicated to improving the lives of people who experience discrimination or abuse on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. They are dedicated to strengthening the capacity of the LGBTI human rights movement worldwide to effectively conduct documentation of LGBTI human rights violations and by engaging in human rights advocacy with partners around the globe. They work with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies and civil society partners. OutRight holds consultative status at the United Nations as a recognized Non-Governmental Organization representing the concerns and human rights of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people worldwide.

[ALTURI](#)

Launched in 2015, Alturi enables individuals at all levels to take a stand against the violence and oppression facing the international LGBTI community and provide direct help for LGBTI advocates around the world. On the Alturi website, you can learn about the current challenges faced by the international LGBTI community, search by country or issue, learn about the organizations doing work in that country or on that issue, and then support that work by donating, signing petitions, volunteering, or signing up for news.

PERSONAL ACTIONS

As LGBT travelers, we have a unique opportunity to be ambassadors for our community when we travel. Our personal actions can help change hearts and minds and advance the cause of human rights. Knowing how to do this, without putting ourselves or others at risk, isn't simple or formulaic. So we've gathered some best practices and advice from those who have done it successfully.

▶ [Pushing the envelope](#)

"Forty years ago, who expected to see gay marriage reach mainstream acceptance in their lifetime? It happened because millions of people took the scary and sometimes dangerous step of coming out. Most Americans now have a friend who is gay. Before you travel, do some research about your destination's laws, and the cultural attitudes toward gay people. If we're still second-class citizens in some respects, give some thought about how you can be visible as a gay person, within the context of that culture. It's a balancing act. Many people pushing the envelope will help. Trying to shatter the envelope single-handedly is likely to just leave things worse for those who live there, after you go home." —**Sasha Alyson**, *Volunteer Adviser*, [Big Brother Mouse](#)

▶ [Small donations](#)

"A few dollars donated to an LGBT NGO at your destination can mean the world to them, making an impact far greater than those same dollars could in North America or Europe. Do your homework, but there are some very good ones out there. Here's my favorite: [Lakshya Trust](#)." —**Tom Roth**, *President and Founder*, [Community Marketing and Insights](#)

▶ **Respect and conversation**

“Learn a culture before you visit, and respect it. When visiting a developing nation, or a nation that is developing LGBT rights, you have the power to be an ambassador for LGBT rights and the global LGBT movement. This might sound dramatic, but simple respect and conversation can have such a tremendous impact. We demand tolerance and respect from others and in turn we should treat them with the same respect. By doing so, a line of communication is opened which can prove to be educational and rewarding for both parties. Open the eyes of just one mother or father and they can pass down their tolerance and understanding to their children who will one day contribute to that society. A movement begins with just one single person.” —**Robert Sharp**, [Owner, Out-Adventures](#)

▶ **Be a living example**

“Get educated first and fast. Know the conditions and circumstances in other nations and jurisdictions, and educate yourself and others. When traveling, especially, and when safe to do so, remind your hosts and travel suppliers that you are gay and that you value their respect and welcome — make sure they know that they always are surrounded by other gay people, and to think of them with the same respect and equal welcome. Be a living example.” —**Bob Witeck**, *President*, [Witeck Communications](#)

▶ **Share in a matter-of-fact way**

Let’s say you’re a junior employee, you’re out at work in the US and you’re sent on a three day trip to Moscow. The question becomes, “How out should you be there?” The reality is, even if the headquarters is wonderfully gay accepting, many of the international offices are not. I think there you need to establish a rapport with the people. I don’t like the idea of a gay person having to hide himself. I go back to the company culture and where you’re working. You work for Google or Levis any of the many companies with very open accepting cultures for LGBT, I would be more aligned with the strategy of ‘be yourself.’ Share with other people in the same way they share with you, in a very matter-of-fact way. —**Dionysios Bouzos**, *Pharmaceutical Executive*

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