



An IGLTA Global Partner Strategic Forum Report

22 September, 2026

Executive Summary

The International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) hosted the annual Strategic Forum as part of its Global Partner Summit in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, on 22 September 2026. The discussion convened thought leaders from global brands and destinations supporting LGBTQ+ travel and tourism.

The forum provides a trusted global table where travel leaders can exchange candid insight, test ideas, identify shared challenges, and turn a commitment to LGBTQ+ travelers into practical action. The two-hour discussion addressed a range of questions, including:

- What are you seeing from LGBTQ+ travelers and employees that is different from prior years, and how is it changing what earns their trust and respect?
- Where do you feel the most pressure right now — e.g. leadership, consumers, employees, the market, the political atmosphere — and how is it shaping your choices?
- What does “showing up” for the community look like inside of your organization today?
- What are some ways that IGLTA could better support you through our global partnership program and platforms?

At the 2026 Strategic Forum, partners helped shape priorities for IGLTA’s dynamic agenda. Participants were invited to identify research needs, recommend priority audiences and topics, and propose new ways for IGLTA to amplify community voices.

5 Key Takeaways

- ✓ Maintain stakeholder and customer loyalty through consistent messaging.
- ✓ Find creative ways to sustain business with new strategies around inclusion.
- ✓ Adapt to and accommodate local market needs and inclusive messaging.
- ✓ Invest in growth opportunities with underserved segments and future travelers.
- ✓ Collaborate with IGLTA Global Partner network, connect with peers beyond the annual summit, and use IGLTA resources.

The current state of the travel industry has undergone seismic shifts prompted by changes in U.S. and global politics, economics, conflicts, and communications. Through it all, international travel continues to expand, and the LGBTQ+ community remains a key demographic in that growth.

At this gathering of global brands and destinations, participants reaffirmed that IGLTA partnership is more than visibility or affiliation. It is an invaluable means to authentic, continuous community ties now and for years to come. Common values build strong partnerships with mutual benefits, while consistent, inclusive strategies bolster collective progress.

The forum closed with a challenge designed to create forward momentum. The moderator invited each participant to take one idea into the real world, test it, and bring lessons back to the 2027 Global Partner Summit, creating a pathway from discussion to action.

Introduction

The summit began by acknowledging the legacy of late IGLTA President and CEO John Tanzella (he/him), and the association's commitment to honoring his leadership and advocacy for LGBTQ+ travel. Under his inspiring stewardship, IGLTA and its partners, members, team, allies, and the global LGBTQ+ community grew stronger and more resilient. His vision and work live on.

The 2026 strategic forum was led by IGLTA Board Chair Meg Ten Eyck (she/her), who posed targeted questions addressed to all participants attending the forum both in person and virtually. Responses led to revealing discussions about the state of U.S. and international travel and tourism in 2026, as well as insights about partners' particular corporate and geopolitical challenges.

IGLTA serves members in 75 countries, with strong representation in North America, Europe, and South America, and ever-expanding membership in Asia, Africa, Central America, and Australia-Pacific regions. The majority of global partners attending the 2026 summit are U.S.-based, along with representatives from Canada, Mexico, and multi-national travel and hospitality brands.

Generally, participants used this year's forum as a chance to evaluate their brands' positions during a challenging time. The U.S. political landscape is increasingly contentious and divisive, and brands that have endured decades of economic and social fluctuations are recommitting to core values. Despite changes to government regulations and DEI mandates, many brands still affirm that diverse talent strengthens business, and inclusion leads to customer growth.

Because IGLTA Global Partnership is a working alliance, it is a place for travel leaders to exchange firsthand insight, strengthen one another's work, and help move LGBTQ+ travel forward together.

The Strategic Forum was held under Chatham House Rule, so this report serves as a summary and analysis of the discussion, including unattributed quotations.

IGLTA is grateful to all of its Global Partners and to everyone who participated in the strategic forum. We also want to thank Los Cabos Tourism Board for hosting this international gathering, along with our host hotel, Breathless Cabo San Lucas Resort and Spa.



One

Maintain stakeholder and customer loyalty through consistent messaging.

In 2026, Global Partners continue to navigate changing economic, legal, and reputational challenges tied to the U.S. political landscape. Erosion of corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies under the current administration prompted brands to re-evaluate priorities in 2025. While some rolled back DEI commitments, other brands and destinations moved forward with revised strategies to maintain them.

During the forum, participants generally agreed that “showing up” consistently to support LGBTQ+ travelers is vital to success. Since turbulent years occur in business regardless of political leadership, a brand’s foundation preserves stability and trust. In return, it wins stakeholder and customer loyalty.

One global partner “kept its diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments, framing them as merit-based talent and human-capital strategies...rather than explicit demographic quotas.” **According to one participant, executive leadership stated “that DEI is critical for business performance and talent management,”** framing the approach as consistent with company culture and business needs.

In return, the brand successfully maintained its existing programs “without financial penalty,” in direct contrast to some other organizations pivoting away from DEI in the face of federal pressure.

“In a climate like this, organizations that win the lasting support of LGBTQ+ people are not the loudest,” said one participant. “They are the ones that are visibly strengthening community foundations and showing up consistently when times are hard. That’s not charity. That’s a loyalty strategy, and it’s smart business.”

Throughout the changing business landscape, LGBTQ+ tourism remains consistent and travelers continue to value brands that have reliably supported the community. One participant said about its diversity initiatives, “If you are looking at our marketing content, you will see your face, your voice, your perspective in there, along with other marginalized voices and other people who are different within the world. So yes, it’s consistency and it’s care [that resonates with] people who also travel and spend money.”



Two**Find creative ways to sustain inclusive business practices in light of legal changes.**

Maintaining corporate culture and brand consistency is key to success, but some companies still must address changing laws and regulations in their own markets. In the U.S., legal language is being examined more than ever, especially for companies with government contracts.

“We always have lawyers in the picture,” said one participant. “And now they’re much more in the picture than ever before just because they have to be, and they scrutinize a lot of the legal implications of choices made and language used.” It can be helpful to have the lawyer point of view as a filter, however, “to figure out where the boundary lines and trip wires are going to be.”

This legal layer of control forces brands to be both cautious and creative, “having to walk the line between what’s part of their DNA and part of their commitment to the community, but also what is legally viable,” said one.

Another participant noted that their business has significant long-term LGBTQ+ community investments, from content and outreach, to local partnerships and long-term brand positioning. As part of the 2026 evolution and contending with oppositional sociopolitical forces, leadership at one company asserted, “We just have to outsmart them.”

To that end, finding new ways to “navigate around the storm” summons creativity. Rather than diminishing efforts to support visible DEI initiatives and LGBTQ+ travel marketing, some companies have found inventive ways to share their stories. For example, one brand reframed some of its LGBTQ+ marketing outreach by inviting media to cover diverse local programs, businesses, and events.

Some global partners also are hiring LGBTQ+ contractors and other inclusive entrepreneurs and allies that support the community. One participant said that their company’s senior executives volunteer on boards or actively contribute to nonprofit organizations such as PFLAG, SAGE, and HRC.

Another intentional B2B approach is choosing queer-owned or -allied banks, travel agencies, or other businesses. “Certainly there are a hundred ways to put their money where their mouth is,” said one participant about redirecting spending in meaningful ways.



Dynamic note-taking provided by Ink Factory

Three

Adapt to and accommodate local market needs and messaging.

Some global partners found that local collaborations and outreach can be invaluable both to fulfilling B2B needs and instilling brand loyalty. One participant shared that for a recent fundraising event, the host elected to use an LGBTQ+ owned venue, and prioritized using “performers, artists, photographers, and other folks from our community...So then money goes back to the community and uplifts entrepreneurs in local areas.”

“It doesn’t always have to be some big marketing spend,” said a participant. “Sometimes it’s just: ‘OK we’re going to buy the donuts from the queer baker down the road for the board meeting.’ It really is that simple.”

Another brand worked with the local chamber of commerce to identify LGBTQ+ partners to spotlight as part of a large annual event. “One of the ways that we are actively helping the community and local businesses is inviting them to be part of our success, if you will,” said a participant.

It may also help to establish systems for local LGBTQ+ businesses and individuals to proactively contact brands and direct marketing organizations (DMOs) to serve as community resources, even through something as simple as making a Google doc form or survey available online.

“Anything involving the community, and the people who are actually affected by the work you’re doing, is a great approach,” a participant said. “It also brings credibility.”

Some non-U.S. brands continue to plan around the DEI challenges and LGBTQ+ opposition occurring in the U.S. and around the world. One brand intentionally “includes queer voices and perspectives within its full ecosystem.” A participant noted, “Looking at the state of the world, and then looking at our destination and how it welcomes people, and knowing obviously that we’re not perfect — we want to make sure that the support of the queer community is being seen pretty clearly.”

Smaller destinations and some that are progressive cities within conservative states or nations have specific challenges. One participant noted that messaging around destination inclusivity is most powerful when it is mindful and intentional. “One thing that we are super dedicated to now is telling the story about how surprisingly welcoming [our brand] is to the LGBTQ+ community, because a lot of people would not expect that in [our region].”

Four

Invest in growth opportunities with underserved segments and future travelers.

While today's political climate brings particular challenges, tomorrow brings opportunities for new customers, collaborations, and storytelling. Forum participants largely agree that there is space for new LGBTQ+ marketing angles, including the underserved lesbian segment.

"We are in an era where 76% of the LGBTQ+ community are queer women, and they receive 5% of budget spend from brand collaborations," said one participant. "Some companies have much larger budgets, more polish, more staff, and are predominantly focused on gay men. So [lesbian-focused enterprises] are held to the same expectations without having the same resources, and it's challenging."

The gay-male travel niche has had consistent events, festivals, and other projects presented to local DMOs for funding, promotion, and sponsorship. As a result, "queer women are a little behind," noted one participant. "I think this is an opportunity to come up with a plan, maybe a yearly plan, with a DMO for funding lesbian projects very much in advance of closing their budget plan."

Strategies to reach future LGBTQ+ travelers was discussed as a smart, resilient investment. "We need to be thinking ahead of time of not only what Gen Z is thinking, but also Gen Alpha," said a forum contributor. "Because some millennials are turning 45 this year. A lot of people still think of millennials as the young kids on the block, but that is not true anymore." (Note that Gen Z birth years are considered 1997-2010; while Gen Alpha birth year begins at 2011.)

Another participant shared, "Partly my conversation with older business leaders is, 'You're the past. The customer you want is the one who is out of high school tomorrow.' Because they're the ones that are changing things. It's their point of view that's going to rock commerce in the future, not what we think today."

¹ Sources:

Gallup 2025 study on LGBTQ+ identification; and Williams Institute 2025 study on transgender population.

Tomorrow's travelers also identify more broadly with the LGBTQ+ community. "When we see the data that supports that 25% of the younger generations identify as something other than straight², it's clear that any brand, any business that is not addressing their messaging to the queer community is going to get left behind by at least 25% of the consumers that are coming into the marketplace," said one contributor.

Earning trust and long-term loyalty among younger generations is a matter of both form and content. Younger people may care more about sustainable tourism, accessibility for impaired travelers, and how brands express respect for diverse employees and customers.

They also obtain news and information differently than older generations. Forward-thinking brands are investing more in video storytelling. "How [younger people] digest information is different. Words don't matter as much. It's going to be images — of course, in digital form — because those are their tools, and they're native to them," said one participant. "And a lot of the storytellers today are including non-binary stories."

Five

Collaborate with the IGLTA Global Partner network, connect with peers beyond the annual summit, and use IGLTA resources.

As global tourism evolves, IGLTA resources and support are available in a number of ways. For some partners, it's about expanding outreach into the lucrative LGBTQ+ market. "We know through data that [queer travelers] travel more, they spend more and they're resilient during either economic downturn or sociopolitical challenges," said one participant.

² Source:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2023 survey on Youth Risk Behavior.

For others, it's about building on existing messaging, helping to train team members, or gathering data to share internally. "When you become passionate about something, you're excited and you want to make a difference," one participant shared. "And I was jumping in and going at it alone, and I did not have the tools to do it by myself. I was so thankful to have IGLTA and realize there's just this wealth of resources. And that has been invaluable to us."

Several global partners expressed that IGLTA's archive of studies, research, and statistical data about LGBTQ+ travel are especially valuable to share within their corporations. Some brands have established advisory boards to broaden inclusive operations and marketing, with IGLTA resources helping "to ensure that the customer that you're trying to serve has a voice."

When asked how IGLTA might better serve partners, one participant suggested a focus group that allows businesses "to hear unvarnished truth" about LGBTQ+ travel experiences. "You could convene travel organizers for major LGBTQ+ groups, associations, business groups, nonprofits, and have really robust conversations about successful destinations, hotel partners, and [others to] educate them. You might get some incredibly important information. And I think IGLTA members would be thrilled to see it."

Gathering global partners for the annual summit is invaluable, participants agreed, as are monthly check-ins by IGLTA's engagement team. And IGNITE!, IGLTA's dedicated global partner newsletter, continues to relay brands' industry insights, research, inspiring stories, and opportunities from across the global network.

One participant also suggested having more regular, informal touchpoints among global partners to keep conversations flowing all year. "It could be as simple as a WhatsApp group, so if you have a question or an issue or a challenge, or you have a win that you want to share, it's [an easy] way to communicate day-to-day kind of interactions." Ongoing exchanges invite casual peer access that could help promote practical partner cooperation and creative solutions to issues they arise.



Dynamic note-taking provided by Ink Factory

Conclusion

The 2026 Strategic Forum demonstrated the distinct value of the IGLTA Global Partner community: a space where leaders can speak candidly, learn from one another, lend voices to IGLTA's agenda, and translate shared values into stronger business practices and community impact.

In a rapidly changing global environment, Global Partners are not navigating community challenges alone. Through IGLTA, they have access to peer perspectives, relevant research, pathways from discussion to action, and an opportunity to help shape the future of LGBTQ+ travel.

About IGLTA Global Partnership

The IGLTA Global Partnership program provides our partners with the context, vocabulary and research to **develop a platform for supporting the LGBTQ+ travel community**.

We build **strong brand alliances**, enabling both the partner and IGLTA to elevate each other's voices.

Through our shared values, mutual **commitment to DEI**, and by **promoting LGBTQ+ travel globally**, our combined strength allows us to bring the conversation forward and **walk together as leaders** in the global LGBTQ+ travel space.

By **demonstrating best practices** and **championing our accomplishments**, IGLTA and its valued portfolio of Global Partners represents the **true leadership** of global travel brands supporting the LGBTQ+ travel community.

IGLTA Global Partners

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Gold	 BELMOND	 CARNIVAL CORPORATION & PLC.	 HYATT®	 visit greater palm springs california
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2026 IGLTA Global Partner Strategic Forum Participants

Moderator

Meg Ten Eyck (she/her); IGLTA Board Chair & Founder/CEO of EveryQueer

Participants

Bob Witeck (he/him); President; Witeck Communications (Representing Marriott International)

Stacie Nerf (she/her); Manager, MICE & Global Sales; Delta Air Lines

Dan Rios (he/him); Director, LGBTQ+ Tourism Marketing; Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Julie Stow (she/her); Executive Director; Hello Cedar Rapids

Virtual Contributors

Amanda Rodriguez (she/her); Director of Brand & Creative Services; Visit Dallas

Jeremy Maunder (he/him); Director, Content & Communications; Destination Toronto

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