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How the Private Sector Can Drive LGBTQ+ Tourism Development in Emerging Destinations

**A 2023 International LGBTQ+
Travel Association Foundation Report**

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The IGLTA Foundation continues to advance the interests of people and organizations that work to make destinations more welcoming to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other tourists. Founded in 1983, IGLTA is the global leader in advancing LGBTQ+ travel. The association and its philanthropic foundation provide free travel resources and information while promoting opportunity, equality, and safety within LGBTQ+ tourism through education, research, and leadership initiatives that increase understanding of LGBTQ+ travel within the tourism industry and help to develop future LGBTQ+ tourism leaders.

In conjunction with the 2022 IGLTA Global convention, we invited 20 C-suite tourism leaders from all over the globe to the IGLTAF Leadership Think Tank to discuss a fundamental subject for the IGLTA Foundation: LGBTQ+ tourism in emerging destinations.

We are truly appreciative that they shared their expertise, which allowed us to develop this report as a tool to help advance the situation of the LGBTQ+ community as well as to raise awareness of the importance of this type of tourism in destinations that are not LGBTQ+ accepting.

At the end of this report are the names and titles of those involved in the Leadership Think Tank; none of them have been quoted directly since the purpose was to generate discussion and forward thinking and to produce a collaborative report that shared key insights across the industry.

The IGLTA Foundation thanks our generous sponsors **Simpleview and Google** for their support and benevolence during the execution of this successful third edition of the IGLTA Foundation Think Tank.

Our appreciation to **Bocconi University** for their support in the conception of this report; their commitment helps all of us create positive changes in the tourism industry.

Introduction

The private sector plays an important role in furthering LGBTQ+ tourism and benefits from it. Below are the findings and methods used to come to this conclusion.

The third IGLTA Foundation leadership Think tank explored the important role of the private sector in advancing LGBTQ+ tourism, specifically in emerging destinations where the LGBTQ+ infrastructure is not present. Through a fruitful conversation, this invitation-only roundtable discussion examined the growth potential of LGBTQ+ tourism with the support of large corporations. This edition of the IGLTA Foundation Think Tank combined technical aspects with economic and political aspects. The session was scheduled for about 90 minutes as an open conversation between the moderators and the attendees.

This report is a free resource for all IGLTA members as well as for public and private tourism stakeholders, presenting concrete expertise and elevating the voices of businesses in territories lacking LGBTQ+ infrastructure.

Participants recognized the importance of including the private sector in developing LGBTQ+ tourism and especially its impact on local LGBTQ+ communities. The discussion centered around the fact that, far from being solely related to individual experiences, discrimination reveals a collective and sometimes cumulative character that multiplies the risks of marginalization and stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community in countries where the social norms and the legislation are anti-LGBTQ+.



One thing to consider is that there is no single way to advance LGBTQ+ tourism in emerging destinations. Instead, each destination must seek the strategy that best suits its reality and capacity for action. We must underline that multi-sector support plays a key role in building this strategy as LGBTQ+ tourism must be incorporated into the production, planning, and tourism management processes of destinations. That can not be achieved without the expertise of stakeholders.

This report will serve as a practical guide for the development of LGBTQ+ tourism by gathering the different perceptions and expertise of the 20 participants of the IGLTA Foundation Think Tank, held on 26 October 2022, in conjunction with the IGLTA Global Convention in Milan.

Objectives

This leadership discussion focused on strengthening the capacities of the private sector in emerging destinations for the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights in order to optimize the promotion and growth of LGBTQ+ tourism. It is in this perspective that the round table has set out to know:

- How improving LGBTQ+ travel is a private sector need
- How pro-private sector growth in emerging destinations sets the path for growing LGBTQ+ travel programs
- How we can keep LGBTQ+ travel and private sector employees informed and safe in emerging destinations
- Navigate LGBTQ+ travel in emerging destinations
- The role of tourism in improving the situation of LGBTQ+ human rights in emerging destinations
- How can the private sector advance LGBTQ+ tourism in emerging markets

The Importance of Corporations in Advancing LGBTQ+ Tourism

Before addressing the major role of the private sector in advancing LGBTQ+ tourism or even measuring the impact of this development on the local LGBTQ+ community, it is useful to clarify the concept of emerging destinations.

A destination making progress in tourism is not synonymous with progress in LGBTQ+ tourism. Emerging destinations can be defined as destinations with no established LGBTQ+ infrastructure.

Including local LGBTQ+ travel businesses in the dialogue is essential. However, implementing LGBTQ+ tourism can be challenging in emerging countries where being LGBTQ+ is sometimes punishable by law.

The Think Tank dialogue launched with remarks about the importance of LGBTQ+ tourism and its effective, influential role in the development of the rest of the economic sectors, as it is considered an interface reflecting inclusive social and economic evolution.



When considering the role of tourism in improving the situation of LGBTQ+ human rights in emerging destinations, there are some key variables:

- Local politics and religion
- How strictly discriminative laws are enforced
- How much tourism already supports the local economy
- Studies on LGBTQ+ tourism are often limited to a regional scale rather than national, as parameters and socio-economic factors can vary, even within the same country

We should highlight that in the last decade, there has been a great shift from marketing destinations for tourists to marketing places for people. Travelers have wanted to become known less as tourists' and more like "temporary locals". **Terms like 'living like a local', 'local stories', and 'authentic local experiences' have become hallmarks of a rewarding, unique travel experience.**

An important question arises here, What happens when there's very little acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in the local community?

Do we really want to live like a local?

To ensure that a destination is truly inclusive, it's important to avoid creating two distinct communities — one for locals and one for tourists. Instead, destinations should aim to develop a strong international reputation for diversity and inclusivity. This can be achieved by promoting innovation and entrepreneurship that benefits both the local community and visitors. By doing so, a destination can become truly welcoming and attractive to all, while also supporting the growth and development of the local economy.

Given this reason, it is essential to learn from local small businesses, as they are at the front row and the pioneers in opening up very challenging destinations. The most eloquent example of that is the COVID-19 crisis; small businesses proved to us that they are compassionate, flexible and often lead the conversation ahead of governments.

"Great places for people to live, make great places for them to visit."

The general impression among the roundtable participants was that big corporations can create a safe environment for the local community as well as workers and team members, especially in countries where the LGBTQ+ community feels marginalized by the government. There is a need for more corporations operating within the regional and local levels, to share their best practices so that they can be replicated by small businesses in developing countries.

To promote change in LGBTQ+ inclusion in tourism, it's important to understand and implement best practices that can serve as models for other corporations to follow. Big changes often start with small steps, so it's essential for companies to take a leadership position and drive change from within.

However, that doesn't mean we should start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. The question of which model is best suited to strongly represent the interest and voice of the LGBTQ+ community remains open; nevertheless, it is necessary to include the local community and LGBTQ+ organizations in the process, as they are actors in direct contact with the territories, they know perfectly the local realities and their needs.

“Don't do something for me without me.”

The debate has been clear on this point: Improving LGBTQ+ Travel is a private sector need in the logic of the “The LGBTQ+ community has always been on a vanguard: where we go, we make things better”. The concept of accountability that the LGBTQ+ community brings helps not only LGBTQ+ tourists but also all the other underrepresented tourists, the queer community does things in a very conscious way that will eventually lead corporate policies to progress. In order to achieve that, the conversation needs to be brought to already existing LGBTQ+ organizations and led by the executive level of the corporation in question in order to have an inclusive voice that will be reflected on the brand and the social media which is an effective tool to get the message out and help improve advances.

One discussant highlighted the role of partnerships in this process, as sometimes the private sector runs the risk of implementing strategies that communities do not

actually need, it is therefore important to get instant feedback and different insight in real-time in order to develop relevant policies. The case of emerging countries is very delicate because corporations will be in the dilemma of whether to boycott or not to boycott, especially in countries where human rights are violated. In that scenario corporations should be strategic, instead of boycotting and impacting the local LGBTQ+ community, we can find civil society organizations to support and help fight the oppression in the country in question.



Photo by @MARKMORINii/markmorinii.com

It is essential to give a greater place to LGBTQ+ rights within the business framework because they represent a key priority in the sustainable growth of the private sector. The IGLTA Foundation has been doing that in a very effective way by connecting local social needs with the policies of corporations through research, education, and leadership development programs. Following this logic, the impact of LGBTQ+ tourism can be measured on a larger scale. The tourism sector has a unique ability to connect different businesses, even outside of the tourism industry. **Engaging in tourism involves diverse activities and experiences, and by focusing on this sector, we can generate significant positive outcomes that extend to other industries. Through our efforts, we can transcend conventional boundaries and connect directly with local communities, creating a powerful synergy between social and economic value.**

Opening up a business in an emerging market has an incredible knock-on effect on the country, quantifying this impact is important to drive the conversation with the government authorities, given this reason, when entering a new emerging market, big corporations should be consistent in constantly adjusting their policies to have a clear idea on what their benefits towards the LGBTQ+ community look like regardless of the anti-LGBTQ+ local policies.

Following this logic, It is essential to look back and think about some of the major events that happened in the past years and try to learn from them. We should not deny the major impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the LGBTQ+ community, especially in non-LGBTQ+ friendly countries:

- Lack of healthcare access
- Closed LGTBQ-friendly spaces
- Lost jobs

Big corporations and tourism professionals have now more than ever the role to make sure that the tourism sector is directly benefiting the local communities. We can achieve that by the following:

- Direct employment of LGBTQ+ people, thus supporting their families
- Connecting LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ welcoming businesses to the community
- Supporting local causes, not necessarily through donations but also through staff skills, mentoring, and staff volunteering
- Providing safe spaces
- Supporting the interaction between visitors and the local LGBTQ+ community
- Creating a safer conversation by supporting the growth of the LGBTQ+ supplier base



Adapting these practices shouldn't be a conversation limited by time and place, it should essentially be an implementation within the core values of every big corporation. One participant effectively identified the importance of tourism corporations in the ongoing creation of an inclusive procurement policy that will enable a growing local economy for LGBTQ+ businesses and improve their quality of life as the major corporations continue driving economic growth. This is also a learning opportunity for smaller and individual companies in a way where they can follow the steps of big corporations and implement these policies in their business models.

It is important to highlight that during the expansion process in emerging destinations, companies may face challenges in providing their employees with specific LGBTQ+ risk assessment reports due to the lack of expertise. To address this issue, collaborating with organizations that can provide the necessary resources is crucial to ensure employee safety, which is essential for driving profits.



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IGLTA and the IGLTA Foundation are determined to expand their members portfolio: finance, banking, tech, retail, and other different sectors that are interlocked with the tourist sector, and that will enable employee experience to be more integral and safe. The importance of opening up beyond the tourism sector cannot be underestimated as it is the lever for the local economy.

Future Agenda

Big corporations and tourism professionals need to recognize on an executive level the importance of advancing LGBTQ+ tourism and be aware of the tangible benefits that it has on the local LGBTQ+ community socially and economically. In order to achieve that, they must also provide welcoming and diverse workplaces when operating in emerging markets, a work environment where everyone has equal opportunities and access to resources to achieve their full potential. Thus, the accession of the local LGBTQ+ community to positions must be a priority. Big corporations must recruit and retain talented LGBTQ+ people, support them, and enable them to develop and move into management positions.

This highlights significant opportunities for development of essential ideas within the IGLTA Foundation:

1. Concentrating on supporting small LGBTQ+ business owners in particular since they can help to underpin this early movement in emerging destinations and they often have direct links to the local LGBTQ+ community
2. Understanding what has worked to advance LGBTQ+ tourism in other emerging destinations in order to create a blueprint for use in emerging destinations that are less far along in this space
3. Expand upon the definitions for 'emerging destination' to allow corporates to support different levels of 'emerging'

In summary, this Think Tank clearly demonstrated that the private sector has a powerful role to play in strengthening LGBTQ+ tourism. By embracing this responsibility, they can ensure that visitor spending reaches the causes of those who need it most.





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