

## TEEN TRAVEL – ISSUES FOR LGBT TEENS



Let's face it – travelling as a teenager on your own or even with friends can be fun and a bit nerve-racking. It can be scary too – you have to check and find out what is safe and where to go and not to go amongst all of the other things you need to learn. For many teen travellers this is the first time they are travelling on their own without their parents along to make all the decisions. You are now in charge of finding out what you need to know, making all of the arrangements and making sure everything goes smoothly during your trip.

Now what if you are a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender young adult? There are many places where it is not safe to go as an LGBT teen. You may want to travel with groups that are specifically with other LGBT teens or you just want to go on a trip where you are free from homophobia and can have a good, safe trip, and let's face it – we all want that kind of trip.

There are a few tips that an LGBT teen needs to have before travelling:

- 1) When travelling overseas try to familiarize yourself with the local culture and how it relates to homosexuality. What is considered 'gay' behaviour is not necessarily a homosexual act in another country. For example in India two men can walk down the street holding hands and not

- have a sexual relationship between them at all.
- 2) Do not rely on 'gaydar' to locate the right venues for those that are safe for LGBT individuals. Try to find Gay publications that list safe places to stay, visit and travel.
- 3) When deciding whether it is a good idea to come out in the new host country, it is best to acquaint oneself with the laws and understood social mores surrounding homosexuality. In some countries it might be illegal, but socially acceptable. In other countries, although homosexuality may be legal, it can be dangerous to be "out" in general society. Similarly the place that you are residing in might have different rules for westerners than local nationals. If there are any possibility of being "out" in an area, questions of the politics surrounding orientation should be a part of your pre-departure orientation.<sup>11</sup>

Those safety tips are just some of the important tips for an LGBT teen travelling out on their own, either with other LGBT teens, themselves or with your partner. These additional tips were provided by the "Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Project" in Halifax, Nova Scotia:

- Meeting people online and travelling to meet them in person can be very dangerous. If you

<sup>11</sup> University of Toronto. "Safety; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Travellers." *Diversity*. July 29<sup>th</sup> 2003. <[http://www.utoronto.ca/safety.abroad/Guide/diversity.html#lgbt\\_header](http://www.utoronto.ca/safety.abroad/Guide/diversity.html#lgbt_header)> (2005-04-06).

choose to do this, agree to meet them in a public place, have arrangements to stay in a hotel and not at their house as this wouldn't be safe. Whenever possible, take a friend with you or have someone you know close by.

- Unfortunately, sometimes we run into intolerant and homophobic people. If someone gives you a hard time, put your safety first. Standing up for yourself is important, but if this will cause a risk to your safety, there is nothing wrong with walking away.
- If you are going to engage in sexual activities while on vacation **ALWAYS** use safety measures. Lubrication and condoms or other latex barriers for oral sex reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections; bring these things along with you in case they aren't readily available where you travel to.
- If you run out of money remember that you **never** have to exchange sex for food or a place to stay. There are hostels, youth shelters and drop-in programs in every major city that can help you find what you need in terms of accommodations.
- If you are physically or sexually assaulted make sure you receive immediate medical attention and support.<sup>12</sup>

A few extra points here - It is guaranteed that what is available in a foreign country in terms of contraception and health materials will not be what you are used to. It can be a real adventure just finding the type of toothpaste you prefer, let alone special health items.

Remember not all cultures have the same standards of health and safety in manufacturing. There are also many cultures that do not view sexual morals in the same more manners as Canadians, in some cases it is more conservative and in others more liberal. Always check out the landscape before you travel to your destination. Do not get caught without protection.

In terms of having sexual relations with strangers or exchanging sexual favours for food and accommodation, this is absolutely NOT something you should consider doing. The fact is that AIDS is rampant throughout the world and as are other diseases. Do not engage in risky behaviour of any sort with someone you do not know. There are many places that will help you if you run into trouble and don't forget with your passport the Canadian consulate can and will help you out if you run into trouble. It is better to be safe than sorry.

The following list is different types of publications and websites that provide travel information for an LGBT individual. The list is primarily American focused but many should be available in Canada.

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Thornhill, Jackie. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Project, 2281 Brunswick St, Halifax NS B3K 2Y9. (902) 429-5429 email: [youthproject@youthproject.ns.ca](mailto:youthproject@youthproject.ns.ca) or their website : [www.youthproject.ns.ca](http://www.youthproject.ns.ca).

## Publications

- The *Advocate* is the nation's leading GLBT magazine. It features a small but decent travel-related advertising section at the back of each weekly issue. More resources online at [www.advocate.com](http://www.advocate.com).
- *Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe* is an excellent travel resource and available in our [online bookstore](#).
- **Our World** ([www.ourworldmag.com](http://www.ourworldmag.com)) is a monthly magazine featuring in-depth articles
- *Out and About* (tel. 800/929-2268 or 415-644-8044; [www.outandabout.com](http://www.outandabout.com)) offers guidebooks and a newsletter 10 times a year packed with solid information on the global gay and lesbian scene.
- *Spartacus International Gay Guide* and *Odysseus* are good, annual English-language guidebook focused on gay men, with some information for lesbians. You can get them from most gay and lesbian bookstores, or order them from **Giovanni's Room** bookstore, 1145 Pine St., Philadelphia, PA 19107 (tel. 215/923-2960; [www.giovanisroom.com](http://www.giovanisroom.com)).



## The Pride Library

### Web sites

- **BluWay** ([www.bluway.com](http://www.bluway.com)) is an online portal providing gay and lesbian travellers links and tools, including their travel companion finder called "Road Buddies."
- **Circuit Noize** ([www.circuitnoize.com](http://www.circuitnoize.com)) lists an extensive calendar of events for American and international dance circuit parties so you'll know when to travel where if this is your sweating-til-the-sun-comes-up cup of tea.
- **Damron** ([www.damron.com](http://www.damron.com)) is the original gay travel guide publisher, in business since 1964.
- **Gay Jet** ([www.gayjet.com](http://www.gayjet.com)) gay-specific travel planning site featuring booking capabilities and a travel newsletter.
- **Mi Casa Su Casa** ([www.gavhometrader.com](http://www.gavhometrader.com)) offers a members-only network for planning home and hospitality exchanges.

- **Planet Out**  
([www.planetout.com/travel](http://www.planetout.com/travel))  
and **Gay.com**  
([www.gay.com/travel](http://www.gay.com/travel)) are  
multipurpose portals. You'll find  
details for vacation guides, event  
listings and booking engines.
- **Purple Roofs**  
([www.purpleroofs.com](http://www.purpleroofs.com))  
features bimonthly late-  
reservation deals, vacation  
planning, newsletter and more.<sup>13</sup>

Before you embark on your trip do your research and find the best places to have a fabulous trip. Knowing what is safe before hand is a thousand times better than kicking yourself after you find yourself trapped in the wrong place. If you are not sure where to start, you can contact the local LGBT organization in your community or your local youth organization for assistance. Don't forget your local library can be of great assistance in finding the right place, the right trip and the right information.

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<sup>13</sup> The Frommer's Staff. "Gay and Lesbian Travelers: A Compendium of Trip Planning Resources." Frommer's Online. December 27, 2005.  
< <http://www.frommers.com/> >  
(2005-04-06).