

ICHRIE Research Report

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Translating Research Implications to applications: Industry's commentary

Preferences of LGBT Tourists Traveling to Smaller Cities

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Small cities and LGBT Tourists

The global lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population accounts for about 450 million people, with \$3.7 trillion spending power per year². With the rise of the “pink economy,” LGBT tourism destinations and suppliers have found ways to attract the LGBT tourist through increased target marketing, unique product offerings, and a welcoming environment. Most marketing campaigns targeting LGBT tourists have focused on acquiring LGBT tourists to larger cities with established LGBT communities. Thus, this study discusses the tourism preferences of LGBT tourists traveling to a smaller, regional city. LGBT consumers form their own unique subcultures, and consumption activities reflect their unique lifestyle and identity. These attributes are evident in the gay “servicescape,” which can be defined as physical spaces, such as restaurants, hotels, and events that LGBT consumers often seek while traveling. This report starts the discussion of how smaller cities can reap the economic and non-economic benefits of attracting the LGBT tourist.

Data were collected using online-survey procedures in which 208 LGBT local (from the state of the study destination) and regional (from neighboring states) participated. A series of linear regressions analysis was used to examine the relationships between small city destination attributes and LGBT segment intentions to visit the study destination.

Reaching out to the LGBT Market

Results indicate four motivational dimension on how small cities may trigger LGBT tourists’ travel intentions: (a) LGBT-destination friendliness, (b) safety, (c) LGBT events, and (d) websites that provide up-to-date information about LGBT events and tourist information. LGBT tourists often seek out and support those businesses, hospitality services, and tourism destinations that are perceived to be LGBT-friendly. In this regard, small cities can create an LGBT-certification program that signifies that a hospitality business is LGBT-friendly and has received training and education appropriate of the needs to the LGBT community. Furthermore, small cities could use testimonials of LGBT residents and repeat LGBT tourists to showcase the friendliness of the city. Safety and security is a great concern for the LGBT segment, especially since local and state laws, such as anti-discrimination and hate laws, vary across jurisdictions. Small city destinations should communicate up-to-date information regarding local laws and ordinances and partner with local police, emergency response organizations, and hospitals to provide inclusiveness training. Small destinations could also promote anti-discrimination proclamations and ordinances. The LGBT community has long been organizers and attendees of LGBT events, such as Pride festivals, arts and culture festivals, sporting events, and rallies. Small cities could also proactively seek out LGBT meetings and conferences. These cities should also partner with local and state LGBT community organizations to create LGBT-friendly events and festivals. Many smaller cities are creating local Pride festivals or events that focus on inclusion; these events should be proactively communicated to the LGBT community. Lastly, the LGBT community often seeks out online information to find up-to-date information about potential tourism destinations. Local websites sponsored by a city or destination marketing organization could act as a source for LGBT-information, such as providing information about

the destinations and give recommendations on LGBT-owned and LGBT-operated hospitality providers. Local websites could serve as a catalyst for LGBT tourists by providing information pertaining to local LGBT community groups, LGBT networks, and destination information.

This report provides initial tactics and ideas on how small city destination marketers may tailor their marketing strategies to attract LGBT tourists. Results from this report indicate LGBT-friendliness, safety of the LGBT community, LGBT events, and websites that provide up-to-date information were the four most important factors that a small city destination should focus on to attract LGBT tourists. We hope the findings will start the conversation of how smaller destinations can pave the way to develop new tourism marketing efforts and to create product offerings to attract LGBT tourists.

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