



Insider intel on the most welcoming spots for a worry-free, so-gay vacay

by **Doug Wallace**

**I'm gay, so every time I think about travelling somewhere,** I first check out the rating of the country in question on Equaldex.com, a website that explores the global progress of LGBTQ2I rights. It monitors censorship and employment discrimination laws, along with those on marriage, adoption and gender identity, even polling public opinion as well. I'm not a fearful traveller, just pragmatic, and curious about how enlightened the destination will be — or not.

While there's no real difference between what heterosexual and LGBTQ2I travellers will find fun and exciting in the long run, sophisticated or not, feeling welcome is important. Nobody wants that whiff of prejudice or intolerance to ruin the holiday buzz. These nations are just a few that showcase the best of themselves, scoring high on the Equaldex and proving they're not just merely tolerant, but accepting.

### Costa Rica

With the best rights record in Central America, Costa Rica is an LGBTQ2I favourite destination. And while most may favour the south coast's Manuel Antonio region and surrounding national parks, Guanacaste in the north plays an excellent host. This tourist hub connects eco-adventurers to the rainforest, parkland or beach via the airport at Liberia. Expect an incredibly diverse terrain, volcanic hot springs and mud baths, horseback riding and nature reserve treks.

**Where to stay:** Andaz Costa Rica Resort at Peninsula Papagayo has a series of infinity pools designed to mimic an afternoon along the riverside. Be sure to have a massage in the treehouses of the hilltop Onda Spa. Search "Andaz Costa Rica Resort At Peninsula Papagayo" at [hyatt.com](https://www.hyatt.com).

### Spain

Madrid and Barcelona are two of the most LGBTQ2I-friendly cities in the world. Spain is a leader in human rights with a culturally liberal attitude, welcoming and accepting despite the strong arm of Catholicism. Both cities also have world-class Pride festivals, Madrid's being the largest in Europe. Outside the city centres, the coastal towns of Sitges (south of Barcelona) and Torremolinos (a suburb of Málaga) have long been the gay hubs of the Spanish Riviera, bastions of the international gay scene. Better bring along a few new swimsuits.

**Where to stay:** Palacio de los Duques Gran Meliá mixes Old World splendour with modern magic, particularly with regard to the decor. Do not sidestep the courtyard restaurant, Dos Cielos.

[granmelia.com/en/hotels/palacio-de-los-duques/](https://granmelia.com/en/hotels/palacio-de-los-duques/)



## Argentina

Argentina scores extremely high on the Equaldex, with green checkmarks for everything: gay marriage, non-binary gender recognition, housing non-discrimination, blood donation, banned conversion therapy, the works. Not only that — the tango! Nights are just as steamy as the humid afternoons in Buenos Aires, the capital city. The Malba art museum is well worth checking out, filled with contemporary Latin American works. Explore the bars and restaurants of Palermo and Palermo Hollywood, and chow down at the upmarket steakhouses. Shopping here is great because everything is boutique-unique. Brush up on your *Evita* tunes.

**Where to stay:** The trendy Fierro or CasaSur hotels in Palermo have everything you need, rooftop pools included. [fierrohotel.com](http://fierrohotel.com), [casasurhotel.com](http://casasurhotel.com)

## Iceland

The arts-oriented culture, amazing food, other-worldly topography and healing waters are just four of the many reasons I adore Iceland. Another good reason is the high hip factor and the warm welcome, thanks in part to the steady stream of visiting Europeans of all stripes. And like that of many small cities, the gay scene in Reykjavik is scattered among the tiny bars and restaurants on its main strips. Iceland's geographical oddities are a major draw: sprawling waterfalls, volcanic lava fields and geothermal spas. Anchor your visit to Iceland Gay Pride, usually the first weekend of August.

**Where to stay:** Formerly the city's main apothecary, the Apotek Hotel by Keahotels yields modern-historic chic in the heart of town, with slick rooms and a stylish lounge.

[keahotels.is/apotek-hotel](http://keahotels.is/apotek-hotel)

## Portugal

I like Lisbon more than Paris. There, I've said it. Truly, you can't beat the extraordinary architecture, black-and-white mosaic-tiled public squares and colourful buildings. The old Alfama enclave; the fado music halls; the boho Baixa, Chiado and Bairro Alto neighbourhoods — it's all so pleasant and charming, the food authentic and reasonably priced. Laid-back Porto, too, is postcard-perfect, as is the south coast's Algarve, with its dramatic landscape and seaside escapes.

**Where to stay:** Hotel da Baixa presents good value, extraordinary Pombaline architecture and total comfort across 66 rooms.

[hoteldabaixa.com](http://hoteldabaixa.com)

## The Netherlands

Amsterdam has always been first out of the gate when it comes to liberal attitudes; the first bars for men opened there in the 1920s. The Netherlands was also the first country in the world to recognize same-sex marriage. Reguliersdwarsstraat, the heart of Amsterdam's LGBTQ2I community, was developed in the 1980s, one of the first gay streets in Europe. Young and hip, tourist-friendly and romantic, the city is as free-spirited as it has always been.

**Where to stay:** The Dylan along the Keizersgracht canal is close to the gay 'hood and all the local landmarks. Make time to book a table at the Michelin-starred Restaurant Vinkeles.

[dylanamsterdam.com](http://dylanamsterdam.com)

## Curaçao

This tropical paradise at the south end of the Caribbean, a constituent country of the Netherlands, takes a live-and-let-live stance on its LGBTQ2I community. The prime minister regularly speaks at the island's September Pride events, an effort unheard of in most other Caribbean nations. The capital city of Willemstad enjoys a culture of cool, due in part to the Dutch tourists who visit year-round. Your vacation checklist includes 35 white-sand beaches, fun beach clubs, incredible scuba diving, great restaurants and eclectic museums — including the excellent Kura Hulanda Museum. Blue Curaçao margaritas? Yes, please.

**Where to stay:** The Pietermaai Boutique Hotel is within a stone's throw of the hip bars, top restaurants, chic beach clubs and Willemstad laneways.

[pietermaiboutiquehotel.com](http://pietermaiboutiquehotel.com)

