

Pinq Travel's Jason Fiddler talks marketing LGBTIQ+ travellers

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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According to the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA), the visibility and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/ transexual, intersex, queer/questioning and other minorities) in society - which are approximately 6% to 10% of the world's total population - have increased globally over the past decade due to political pressure from civil society, the spread of social media and increased corporate advocacy; however, the underrepresentation of gay and lesbian travellers in the tourism sector still exists.



Jason Fiddler

During his talk at this year's WTM Africa 2019 event, which took place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre between 10 and 12 April, Pinq Travel founder and CEO Jason Fiddler explored what drives these two large groups in the LGBTIQ+ tourism market and the expectations you can deliver on as you market your product to them.

Here, Fiddler lets us in how he got involved in the LGBTIQ+ tourism community, the challenges that the community faces and how the industry can make a proactive difference to burgeoning misconceptions:

 ***Tell us more about what you do and what your job entails?***

I'm effectively a travel 'solutionsmith', helping clients plan their travel based on personal and referral knowledge of destinations and their attractions. It's really a hybrid of a travel agent, destination marketer and concierge advisor.

My focus is on gay travellers, as this is the market I'm most specialised in.

▣ ***How did you get involved in LGBTIQ+ tourism?***

I've been in tourism for about 25 years, starting in my matric year of high school when I sat on an advisory committee to the then Durban visitor's bureau, Durban Unlimited. In 1997, I met and befriended a Johannesburg tour operator who encouraged me to do some intern work with him.

I helped develop their first gay travel brochure and in 1998, I went to my first Tourism Indaba in Durban (in 2019 it'll be my 22nd consecutive attendance of that show!). From the very start, I'd identified, as a marketer, the importance and underrepresentation of gay and lesbian travellers in the South African tourism sector.

For two decades, I've been championing the pink travel cause, as it's evolved to be known as LGBTIQ+ travel (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other minorities). It's been a long road, often quite lonely. But today we don't experience the kind of mainstream resistance of the early 2000s.

▣ ***What is it that you most enjoy about the work that you do?***

I'm very gregarious by nature. To travel is a marvellous means of meeting people, experiencing new cultures and expanding one's worldview.

Apart from that, both the trade-side and the customer-side have introduced me to countless wonderful people from all over the globe, many of whom remain good friends to this day!

▣ ***Why does LGBTIQ+ tourism matter so much? Why has it grown?***

Tourism is *THE* game changer. It brings about economic growth, it reduces nationalistic stereotypes and educates people about the positive – and yes, some of the negative – aspects of other cultures.

So taking that into account, tourism helps to open the minds of people still labouring under prejudicial views of LGBTIQ+ people.

Having us visit your land, spend good money with you, share your meals and perhaps laugh at some special shared experience, helps break down barriers and diminish ignorance that could lead to intolerance or worse.

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As the world becomes freer, so to do LGBTIQ+ people. They tend to be more wanderlust and keen to travel, often taking financial risks – basically debt – to finance trips abroad or locally.

There's an important [buyer behavioural characteristic research](#) has shown us that: LGBTIQ+ travellers, especially gay and lesbian tourists, are more determined travellers who tend to seek out more value from their journey and their destinations, and they tend to pay more for that.

In travelling, they further empower themselves, gaining confidence and building new relationships with people as they go. This is a win-win for all concerned.

■ **What are some of LGBTIQ+ tourism challenges?**

Though tremendous gains have been made in the past 20 years for human rights, and consequently LGBTIQ+ equal access to those rights, there remains tremendous global conservatism that in liberal countries, is embarrassing, but in authoritarian nations is downright deadly.

We can't be naïve and assume that everything is just peachy now. Whilst attitudes continue to evolve in a positive way, and laws improve, and access to new spaces opens up, fundamental resistance to these developments can often express itself as definite homophobia, transphobia and bigotry, unfortunately, the threat of violence too, remains.

“ Look into the needs of LGBTIQ+ travellers, which are actually quite simple: we seek welcoming and inclusive environments first and foremost. ”

It's very important to remember that LGBTIQ+ tourists are not all wealthy, white and western. They hark from all walks of life and this means that often people are coming from places they can't easily be themselves.

Ensuring that destinations that welcome LGBTIQ+ travellers, including hotels, B&Bs, restaurants, for example, are themselves welcoming, inclusive and have sensitised their staff remains an ongoing challenge.

■ **How can the South African tourism industry poise themselves to be a more inclusive destination for the LGBTIQ+ community?**

Consultation. Education. Training. Effort. Understanding. Five words that speak to most businesses, but in our instance, have even greater resonance and importance.

Consultation is really where it all starts. The industry needs to not only do its homework, but engage with those in the know who can correctly help guide and inform.

Ongoing education of the travel trade, management and workers as to the intrinsic value of the LGBTIQ+ market and the consumer needs must be priority one.

Training will stem from that, including essential sensitivity training of especially line staff such as housekeeping, reception, drivers, guides and servers who interact the most with all manner of guests and whose behaviour can make or ruin a guest experience.

The effort by individual businesses, associations, tourism bodies and government to seek supportive, inclusive and well thought through strategies, campaigns and activations that send the best messages of welcome and inclusivity to LGBTIQ+ travel buyers and potential tourists.

Understanding requires the rest to be in place and leads to a fundamental mindset shift towards genuine market engagement, sustained market growth and ultimately benefits for consumer and provider alike.



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■ **What can the industry do to adapt?**

Drop the assumptions. Lose the cavalier attitude that their existing marketing messaging covers all. Look into the needs of LGBTIQ+ travellers, which are actually quite simple: we seek welcoming and inclusive environments first and foremost.

After that, it boils down to existing consumer needs and what individual products offer in their own respect.

■ **What can government proactively do for LGBTIQ+ tourism – what could be incorporated?**

Speaking as chair of KwaZulu-Natal Gay & Lesbian Tourism, from our perspective we feel that we seem to be doing all the reaching out, keeping the torch lit and seen as best we can. We note that from local to provincial to national level, for years, priorities have been elsewhere and the lack of consultation with us is deafening.

So going forward, there really needs to be a broader consultative effort, where government acknowledges the experienced LGBTIQ+ members of the tourism sector who have real value to offer in terms of insight and practical guidance. We are, after all, the stakeholders in this process and not the spectators thereof.

■ **What do you hope to gain from the work that you do?**

Three things:

- Growth and recognition of the LGBTIQ+ travel market – this will lead to socio-economic gains for all concerned, that in turn positively transforms society.
- Recognition for the efforts of my associates and colleagues in the sector, from associations to practitioners, for these efforts, were often made as sacrifices of time, money and energies that go unrewarded, but lead to better conditions for the sector.
- Success for my business, so that I can start being rewarded for my own efforts, through my own initiative. Fair and level playing fields with true market access to an ever-increasing demand won't happen without the first two taking serious shape.

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ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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