

The Guardian



LGBT travel index puts Sweden top, and warns against some popular destinations

Canada and Norway make top three of new ranking for gay and trans travellers, which also warns of ill-treatment in some countries favoured by tourists

Antonia Wilson

Fri 22 Nov 2019 22.00 AEDT

Sweden has been named the most LGBT-friendly country in the world for travellers according to new research into gay rights in 150 countries.

The LGBTQ+ Danger Index was created by ranking the 150 most-visited countries using eight factors, including legalised same-sex marriage, worker protection and whether, based on Gallup poll findings, it is a good place to live.

Canada ranked second-safest, followed by Norway, Portugal and Belgium. The UK is sixth safest on the list, but the US does not make the top 20. The researchers, American couple Asher and Lyric Fergusson, who blog about staying safe while travelling, said one reason the US is only at number 24 is because gay rights vary from state to state.

Lyric Fergusson said: “There are no constitutional or broad protections for LGBTQ+ rights under federal law in the US. Also, in some states, LGBTQ+ youth do not have access to helpful information, because of so-called ‘no-promo homo laws’. The US may have come far, but it has a long way to go in terms of LGBTQ+ rights, especially for young transgender people.”

The couple acknowledge that some of the indicators they looked at, such as worker protections and adoption recognition, do not affect travellers directly, but point out that rights enshrined in law are a good overall indication of a country’s attitudes. Fergusson said she and her husband were inspired to compile the list to help the LGBT community and raise awareness of the often horrific treatment of LGBT people in many parts of the world. They have also included tips from gay, lesbian and trans bloggers.



Reported levels of homophobic violence are high in Jamaica.
Photograph: Holger Leue/Getty Images

Same-sex relationships are illegal in 38 of the countries on the list and punishable by death in five (Nigeria, Qatar, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iran). Some of the countries where it is illegal to be gay are also popular tourist destinations such as Jamaica, where in a 2013 survey of 71 LGBT people conducted by Human Rights Watch, more than half said they had been victims of homophobic violence. The study says: “Those looking for trans- and gay-travel-safe countries should reconsider popular vacation destinations like Malaysia, Singapore, Morocco, Myanmar and Egypt, as well as beach destinations in the Caribbean such as Saint Lucia and Barbados.”

They also pointed out that in some countries where homosexuality is not actually illegal, treatment of LGBT people is so bad that caution or complete avoidance is advised. These countries include: China, where certain groups and events have been banned, and censorship laws have frequently been used to remove online LGBT content; Russia, where activists have died or gone missing, and individuals who followed Russian gay marriage laws to the letter have been forced to flee the country; and Indonesia, where LGBT rights are increasingly considered a “moral threat” and homosexuality can result in public humiliation and arrests.

The couple acknowledge that even in some of the 70 countries in the world where same-sex relationships are illegal, certain cities, tourist areas and resorts can be LGBT-friendly. “In all

cases, do your research, check official government data for up-to-date news and if you feel apprehensive, consider travelling to a more LGBTQ+ friendly country.”

Earlier this year, a report from the California-based Williams Institute analysed attitudes towards LGBT people in 174 countries to produce the Global Acceptance Index (GAI), ranking countries from least to most accepting based on historical survey data. It showed an overall positive trend towards greater acceptance in 131 of the 174 countries over a 36-year period.

It said: “The most accepting countries have experienced increased levels of acceptance; Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada and Spain are estimated to have the highest levels of acceptance between 2014-2017 and all have increased in their levels of acceptance.”

However, of countries historically the least accepting, 16 were seen as having increasingly negative attitudes to LGBT people: “The countries that were the least accepting in 2014-2017 were Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Senegal, Tajikistan and Somaliland, and they each became less accepting since 2000.”

Travel website Gay Cities recently ranked Brazil as the top place LGBT travellers should avoid travelling to, based on violence against LGBT people in the country - a factor not included in the LGBTQ+ danger index, in which Brazil was ranked 28th safest. In 2018, 445 LGBT people were reported to have died in anti-LGBT hate crimes in Brazil, and in 2018, 167 trans people were murdered there.

FIVE TIPS FOR LGBT TRAVELLERS

Check out Misterbnb

Try Misterbnb for LGBT-friendly accommodations. The service is similar to Airbnb, but it caters to the LGBT community. Hosts are usually members of the community themselves and can offer great tips on where and how to safely experience their city. The site itself maps out the gay nightlife areas where applicable. There are hosts available in most destinations, even in countries where the LGBT community is less visible.

Derek and Mike of robe-trotting.com, an American couple living in Copenhagen

Be careful with the location feature of dating apps

On gay apps like Grindr and Scruff, turn off the location feature. Even in countries where your rights are protected, gay-bashing can be an issue. In Ukraine, for example, the “how far away” location feature is disabled because of past incidents, even though there is a thriving gay culture. Always exercise caution and meet strangers in public spaces.

Andrew Dobson of Dobbernationloves.com

Negative LGBT laws may not reflect tourist areas

Remember that just because a country’s government may have negative LGBT policies, doesn’t mean it isn’t a great gay holiday destination. The Maldives, for example, has laws in place for locals, but during our visit to the Four Seasons Maldives, the majority of the guests at the resort were gay couples. Research hotel and resort brands before you book.

Meg and Lindsay Cale of dopesontheroad.com

Find LGBT-friendly businesses before you leave

Consider using the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association for finding LGBT-owned and -affirming businesses in countries where you may have more concerns. Knowing that a business is owned by LGBT people or specifically seeks out LGBT accreditation may offer some peace of mind.

M&L

Remember to bring all your documents

If possible, try to travel with documents that reflect who you currently are (or as close as you can be given the laws where you live). Photo, name, gender marker etc at minimum - make sure your photo reflects how you currently look. If you are on HRT (hormone replacement therapy), always try to bring a doctor's note to keep with your medication in case you have issues with airport security.

Aaron Edwards of lifetravelerstravelinglife.com

The full list of tips is [here](#).

Since you're here...

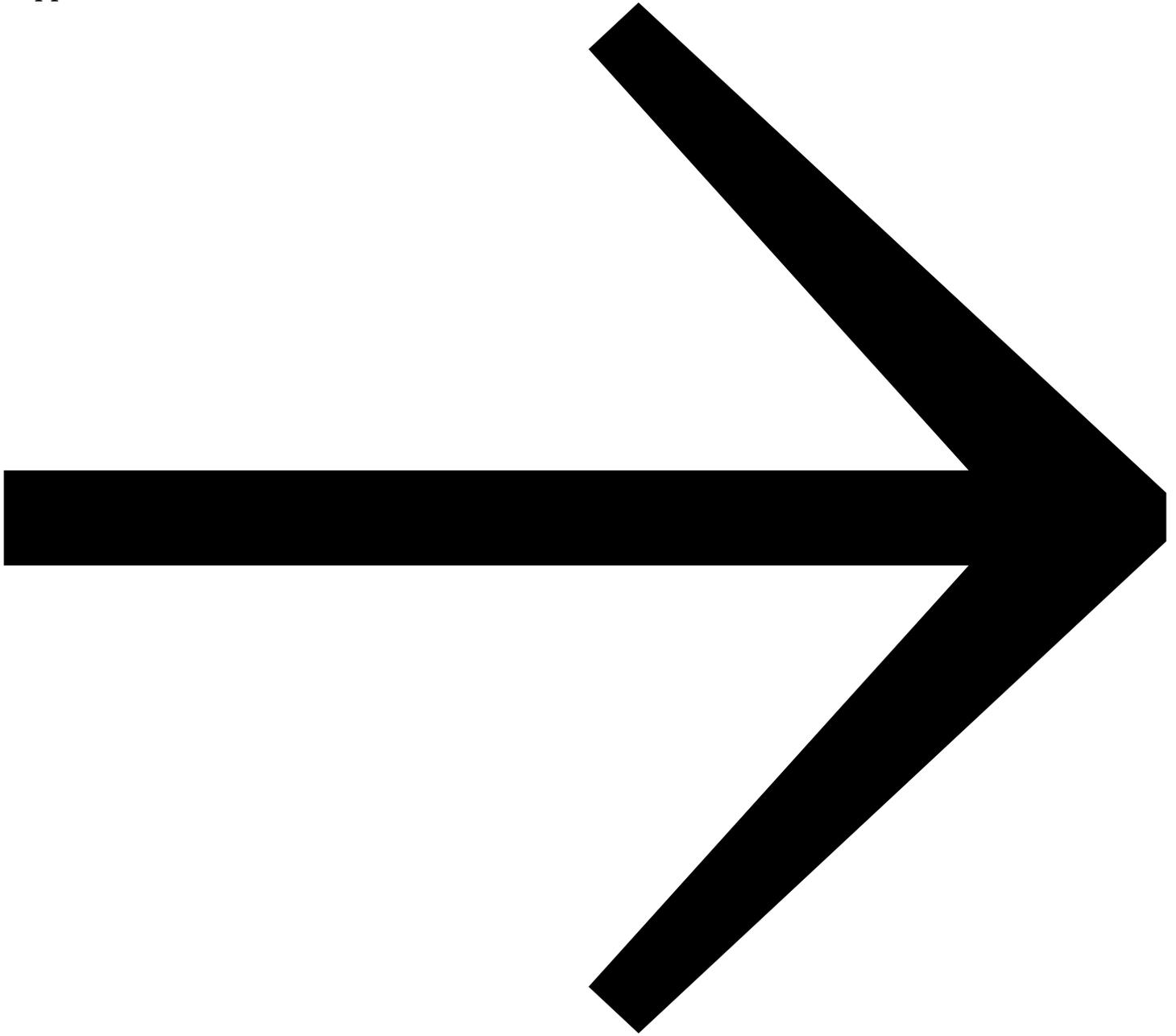
... we have a small favour to ask. More people, like you, are reading and supporting the Guardian's independent, investigative journalism than ever before. And unlike many news organisations, we made the choice to keep our reporting open for all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay.

The Guardian will engage with the most critical issues of our time - from the escalating climate catastrophe to widespread inequality to the influence of big tech on our lives. At a time when factual information is a necessity, we believe that each of us, around the world, deserves access to accurate reporting with integrity at its heart.

Our editorial independence means we set our own agenda and voice our own opinions. Guardian journalism is free from commercial and political bias and not influenced by billionaire owners or shareholders. This means we can give a voice to those less heard, explore where others turn away, and rigorously challenge those in power.

We hope you will consider supporting us today. We need your support to keep delivering quality journalism that's open and independent. Every reader contribution, however big or small, is so valuable. **Support The Guardian from as little as \$1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Gay and lesbian travel
- LGBT rights
- Sweden holidays
- Europe holidays
- news