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IGLTA CEO Talks 2021 Convention, LGBTQ Travel Trends and More

LGBTQ | PAUL HENEY | MAY 09, 2021



A gay couple holding up a rainbow flag at sunset. (Photo via iStock/Getty Images E+ /D-Keine)

The [IGLTA](#), the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association, is gearing up for its [2021 Annual Convention](#), which is a mere four months away, and scheduled for Atlanta from September 8–11.

We spoke with John Tanzella, the group’s President/CEO, about what’s on tap.

TP: What are you most excited about for this year’s event?

JT: Bringing the members and allies of IGLTA together in person for the first time in 1.5 years. Atlanta is a great city for a reunion in these challenging times,

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Georgia's capital city is a LGBTQ center of the southeastern United States, and Atlanta will be the host city for the IGLTA Convention in September 2021 (Photo by Paul J. Heney).

TP: What sort of feedback have you gotten from your members/prospective attendees on the event? Are people holding back until summer before committing or is there already excitement?

JT: There is definitely excitement building! We had more than 250 people register for a recent Zoom panel focusing on the Global Convention. It was part of our ongoing Members Connect series to provide free education and insights about LGBTQ+ tourism and ranked among our best attended. Our convention participants always tend to register late, so we've been happy with progress to date. Our members really want to connect again in person, travel permitting. That's the wild card, which countries are able to travel to the U.S.

TP: How will attendees find this year's event compared to, say, the 2018 or 2019 conventions? What will Covid have made different at the event?

JT: Our conventions have grown exponentially in geographic diversity, but this one will inevitably have a larger percentage of attendees from the U.S. than in 2018 or 2019. We will, of course, follow all recommended safety protocols and are closely monitoring the changes with our meeting planners. Atlanta is home of the CDC, after all!

It's also important to mention that the convention will have a strong message around equity, diversity and inclusion. It's always been woven into the fabric of our content, but the BLM movement brought racial injustice to the forefront in the last year, and we'd be remiss if we didn't speak to those issues within our industry and within the LGBTQ+ sector.

TP: There are a lot of predictions that travel will explode among Americans in the summer months, after more people become fully vaccinated and have

plenty of free time to burn. What do you expect on this?

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and two-thirds of them said that trip would be in May, June, July or August. It's also worth noting that 85% of our U.S. respondents have a passport, considering the U.S. Department of State's last report said just 42% of U.S. citizens are passport holders.

TP: Specifically for queer travelers, what do you think the rest of 2021 will look like? What about 2022?

JT: Domestic travel is definitely rebounding first, with a strong interest in hotels and resorts—because people just want to get away and be pampered—similar to the traveling community at large. Also, LGBTQ+ travelers have really missed the connection, support and celebration of LGBTQ+ Pride events and festivals and those will be even more popular when they can resume safely, hopefully next year.


TP: Are there cities or regions that will attract more LGBTQ travelers in the coming year? Will smaller towns fare better than popular queer cities? Will outdoor escapes, like national parks continue to be the answer?

JT: In our 2020 LGBTQ+ travel sentiment survey, we asked respondents if they would change the types of destinations they choose post-pandemic and nearly half (46%) said they would not. 25% of respondents were undecided, and only about 28% said they would change their destination choices. People have their favorite places, and they've really missed them in the pandemic. The LGBTQ+ market has incredibly diverse destination interests, which certainly includes national parks and smaller towns, but the popular queer cities will still have great appeal. Ultimately, the cities or regions that attract more LGBTQ+ travelers in the competitive re-opening of tourism, will be those that do the best job of making those travelers feel safe and genuinely welcome.

TP: How do you see varying Covid vaccination rates in different countries playing out? For the next few years, will we have "have vs have-not" countries, say Israel vs. Thailand, where one is economically advantaged in winning over queer tourists?

JT: Given the government involvement in tourism management, there will be


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because they feel safe themselves, even if their chosen destination doesn't lead the vaccination race.

TP: What other LGBTQ travel trends do you see as important now?

JT: With constantly evolving regulations and health issues to navigate, there is renewed appreciation for using a travel advisor to plan the ideal trip and be on hand to assist if things go awry. We're also hearing from so many LGBTQ+ travelers that there's "no time like the present" and they aren't waiting any longer to plan their dream vacations or to celebrate milestones in more elaborate ways. When there's a lot of emotional investment in a trip, it really benefits from the expertise of a trusted advisor who understands LGBTQ+ safety concerns. There were also many delayed weddings and honeymoons, so the same-sex marriage market is destined to boom!

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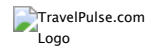
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