



Latest LGBT Travel Marketing Research: Train Staff How to Better Serve Gay Market Customers

Most travelers take being able to relax, and feel comfortable being themselves on vacation, entirely for granted. But not so most gays and lesbians, who consistently rate the welcome they receive as a factor critical to the success of their vacation. Now, a new online training accreditation program gives tourism staff the skills they need to understand and allay gay travelers' concerns to experience a truly 'gay-comfortable' vacation.

New York, NY, May 08, 2008 --(PR.com)-- Gay travel consumers are often used to experiencing a certain sense of nervousness at check-in and at other times throughout a vacation.

Gay couples traveling together need to 'out' themselves to travel industry staff at almost every step of a holiday.

Travel staff serving gay market consumers have a direct impact on whether gay customers have a positive or negative experience on their vacations.

The travel industry's leading brands attended the annual convention of the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) in Las Vegas last week. These industry leaders learned of the imperative to better train travel industry staff how to understand the key travel concerns of gay and lesbian consumers -- if they want to maximize their returns from targeting the gay market consumer segment.

Ian Johnson, CEO of Out Now -- a leading global gay marketing agency established in 1992 -- explained to IGLTA delegates that gay travelers often experience travel differently than other consumers.

"Gays and lesbians want what everyone wants on vacation - to relax and feel comfortable," Johnson said. "But gay and lesbian travelers are often unsure about how individual staff members will treat them during their vacation."

"It can take only one staff member to appear uncomfortable around a gay person for the vacation to be diminished for that guest," Johnson said. "With gay travel now worth hundreds of billions in spend each year globally, staff training is a critical market success factor for the hotels, travel agents and tour operators now actively trying to target the gay travel market."

Out Now presented a detailed workshop at the IGLTA convention on its online training, accreditation and marketing system called GayComfort™.

This program address the concerns of gay travelers, and the need for staff to better understand those concerns, to build improved gay travel vacation experiences, and increasing gay travel market profits as a result.

Examples presented by Out Now included how staff best handle bookings for double beds by same-sex



couples, how to react when a customer reveals they are gay, and how to avoid stereotypes when serving gay consumers.

"GayComfort delivers what the industry needs to help staff members do their jobs better when serving gay guests," Johnson told the IGLTA convention delegates.

"Most travel industry workers are not homophobic - but they do need better information on what to say -- and what not to say -- to make their gay guests really feel they can relax and be themselves when being served by that staff member," according to Johnson. "GayComfort delivers a lot of highly practical information; to empower staff to better understand and meet the travel needs of their gay and lesbian customers. It really is a classic win-win: for the gay traveler, for each staff member and for their employer's bottom line."

475 delegates attended the IGLTA convention last week in Las Vegas, with many of the world's largest brands represented there such as Accor Hotels, Hilton Hotels, Marriott, Southwest Airlines, American Airlines and the Intercontinental Hotels Group. Tourism offices and a range of other travel related businesses also attended the convention from April 30 - May 4.

One of the world's leading tour operators -- Air Canada Vacations -- announced during the IGLTA convention that it has formed a new partnership with the GayComfort program. Armando Mendonca, Director, Product Development, said his company is to promote GayComfort™ training to hundreds of its partner hotels.

"Air Canada Vacations is very pleased we can enhance the high quality offerings of our partner hotels by working with Out Now's GayComfort training," Mendonca said. "Better service makes for better business, and we are confident that this is a win-win for all concerned with this program. Most importantly, by improving the consumer's experience through GayComfort, we believe our properties will be rewarded with improved gay market business and consumer loyalty over time."

Berlin Tourism Marketing was also announced as a Platinum Partner in the GayComfort™ program.

Leading gay media products globally are involved in the rollout of this initiative - promoting better training, accreditation and marketing opportunities for the industry to improve service delivery to, and increase profits from, the multi-billion value global gay travel segment.

Media brands such as GT, DIVA, PInk Paper, AXM (UK); GCN (Ireland); PinkGuide.com, LOTL (Australia); Wrapped (South Africa) and Tetu (France) are amongst the global network of gay media partners which inform gay travelers where they can stay at GayComfort accredited properties.

Clark Massad, Advertising Director, Têtu, Paris, France said his publication thought GayComfort was an important development in the continuing growth of the gay travel market.

"Têtu is the leading publication for the francophone community worldwide and has helped pave the way



for a greater acceptance and understanding of gays and lesbians throughout France," Massad said. "We are pleased to be partnering with GayComfort, paving the way in the development of a positive gay travel experience, enabling lesbian and gay travelers to enjoy the freedom to relax and just be themselves when on vacation."

Tom Nibbio, Global Ambassador of IGLTA, responsible for the association's worldwide membership and sponsorship growth, said the new GayComfort™ training program meets a strong market need.

"With literally billions in gay tourism dollars, euro and pounds up for grabs each year, it seems likely this product should find an industry ready and willing to learn how to improve the ways it delivers customer service to the gay travel segment," Nibbio said. "This is history-in-the-making for our gay tourism industry."

About IGLTA and Out Now:

Out Now works globally and was established in 1992. They are a gay market agency developing specialized strategic programs and services to help businesses more effectively understand and reach the gay and lesbian market. One of their core philosophies is stressing that gay and lesbian people are extremely diverse and should be marketed to as such, not in a homogenous way. More information is at www.OutNowconsulting.com.

IGLTA is the world's leading authority, resource and representative of gay and lesbian travel. Membership is in 55 countries around the world and consists of accommodations, airlines, tour operators, travel agents, tourism offices and other key players in the tourism industry. IGLTA works to help the tourism industry attract gay and lesbian consumers and learn more about the gay and lesbian market. For more information visit www.iglta.org.

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