

## Toronto Targets High-Value U.S. Gay Travellers

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Tourism Toronto announced a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening Toronto's market position as one of the top international destinations for high-value U.S. gay travellers.

"The gay travel market is one of the fastest-growing segments and is a \$55 billion industry. This represents a major opportunity for Toronto," said David Whitaker, President and CEO of Tourism Toronto. "Toronto offers a great deal to gay visitors, who tend to travel more often, stay longer and spend more in a destination."

Although Tourism Toronto has marketed to gay travellers in the past, this year it increased its investment by 50 per cent to \$300,000 to reach this important segment, focusing on four major U.S. cities - New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tourism Toronto also announced today that Toronto has won the bid to host the 2009 Annual Convention of the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA). "In choosing Toronto, our members sensed a thriving and well-organized community that is making a serious, long-term commitment to the gay travel market," said John Tanzella, Executive Director of the IGLTA.

Tourism Toronto has established a new Gay Marketing Advisory Group that includes more than a dozen local community leaders. The industry association is also helping hotels in the city and region gain accreditation as 'gay-friendly' establishments through Travel Gay Canada.

"This is the kind of commitment to this market we've been waiting for," said Bruce McDonald, co-founder of the CGLCC and member of the Gay Marketing Advisory Group. "The investment in the gay market will have a positive impact on businesses throughout the city."

Toronto City Councillor Kyle Rae, who chairs the Advisory Group, noted that, "this is a great market for Toronto, one that represents millions of dollars in additional tourism for the city."

Tourism Toronto's marketing campaign in the U.S. will include ads in gay restaurants, bars and local publications, as well as event sponsorships and promotional activities. "Our campaign goes beyond ads so that we are truly engaging our customers directly," said Whitaker. "In all four cities we are working with prominent gay organizations to give Toronto a presence at high-profile events such as the Gay Idol competition in Chicago."

Earlier this year, Tourism Toronto sponsored the Queer Lounge at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah, and partnered with a San Francisco gay morning radio show during "Freedom to Marry Week." Toronto was featured on the show throughout the week, culminating in two couples winning a trip to get married in here. Councillor Rae was on the air in San Francisco to speak to Toronto's welcoming attitude.

A critical strategic element of the new campaign is that it markets the entire city and region to gay travellers, rather than simply promoting the gay village. "Our research shows that gay travellers are discerning, mainstream travellers who also enjoy the village as the heart of the community," said Mr. Whitaker.

### **Recent research shows that U.S. gay travellers:**

œ Travel more frequently - 98% have taken at least one overnight trip in the last twelve months, compared with 72% for heterosexual Americans.

œ Stay longer - They stayed a median of 15 nights in hotels last year, compared with an average of about three nights for all U.S. travellers

œ Spend more - Gay men spend \$800 on average per trip, compared to \$540 by non-gay travellers.

œ Are more likely to hold passports - 71% of travellers who identify themselves as gay hold a valid passport, nearly three times the overall U.S. average of 24%. With the rules requiring a passport to re-enter the United States, gays and lesbians are more readily able to travel to Toronto.

œ Travel throughout the year - With an average household income of \$85,000 and a median age of 44, this market tends to travel throughout the year, not just during peak seasons.

Tourism Toronto, Toronto's Convention and Visitors Association, is an industry association of more than 1,100 members established to strategically sell and market the Greater Toronto Region as a remarkable destination for tourists, convention delegates and business travellers around the globe.

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