

Q&A

## Travel startup Vacaya caters to underserved affluent LGBT+ guests

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*Vacaya offers cruises and resort vacations to LGBT+ travelers. Image courtesy of Vacaya*

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By SARAH RAMIREZ

As affluent travelers seek more personalized and authentic experiences, a new hospitality company is targeting an unappreciated audience: wealthy travelers who happen to be part of the LGBT+ community.

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Vacaya offers vacation packages to LGBT+ travelers that include customized itineraries, services, entertainment, parties and more activities. While larger hospitality groups have worked to attract this lucrative consumer segment, they cannot always fulfill all of the unique needs of LGBT+ guests.

"Vacaya's mission is to fulfill the vacation dreams of all adults who believe 'love is love' while giving back to the community and immersing our guests in the cultures and places they visit around the world," said Patrick Gunn, cofounder and chief marketing officer at **Vacaya**, New York. "Vacaya charters the entire ship or resort so our guests have the freedom to express their individuality, make personal connections, celebrate life, rev up or simply relax, together."



*Patrick Gunn, cofounder and CMO at Vacaya. Image courtesy of Vacaya*

In this Q&A, Mr. Gunn discusses how Vacaya appeals to LGBT+ travelers and what obstacles the community still faces while traveling. Here is the dialogue:

Why did you see an opportunity for Vacaya in the luxury travel market?

With only a few notable exceptions, options for the LGBT+ community have been severely limited over the years, leaving a void in the market as consumer tastes for travel have changed. With unlimited information at their fingertips, they have high standards, want their needs anticipated, seek experiences and crave relaxed luxury where quality meets value.

These guests are redefining travel in the modern age. Vacaya is strategically placed to satisfy the void in the market.

What sets Vacaya apart from other luxury travel companies?

We're rewriting the playbook to deliver quality, novelty, exclusive access, relaxed luxury, technology that makes lives easier and ways to give back while on vacation. With Vacaya's maniacal focus on the customer experience, we have an opportunity to fully captivate the exponentially-powerful emerging consumer segment.

How does Vacaya differ from other travel and hospitality companies that cater to LGBT+ audiences? Now, LGBT+ travelers have a rock-solid new choice. Vacaya is the first U.S.-based large-scale full-ship/resort LGBT+ vacation company exclusively for adults to launch in decades, and we're the first and only large-scale travel company on the planet built to serve the entire LGBTQIAPK community.

Vacaya puts a maniacal focus on the guest experience and will be the first large LGBT+ vacation company to offer a full-resort takeover from The Leading Hotels of the World's Unico 20 87 ; offer included perks like spa treatments, salon services, excursions, SCUBA, golf and more at Unico 20 87 ; sail the largest ship in history into Provincetown Carnival; sail on Celebrity Summit following her multi-million-dollar refresh; offer guests opportunities to give back to the communities they visit and offer online booking 24/7/365.

Consumers have waited a long time for a guest-focused company like Vacaya to come along, and we can't wait to share all we have in store.

What challenges do LGBT+ travelers face when vacationing, and how does Vacaya combat those obstacles?

With the advancements in acceptance over the past five years, conventional wisdom had concluded that the need for "safe space" vacations for LGBTQ travelers had been declining. LGBTQ travelers were gaining confidence being themselves wherever they went on vacation.

But a recent global survey of 58,000 LGBTQ people found that 76 percent of respondents fear a rollback of recent equality gains. Eighty-five percent of respondents believe supporting companies that support LGBTQ equality is more important than ever.

The need for LGBTQ safe space vacations is on the rise again, and LGBTQ consumers will favor companies that offer them.



*Vacaya's first all-inclusive resort vacation will be in Riviera Maya. Image courtesy of Vacaya*

What upscale accommodations can guests expect aboard your cruises?

There are three main proof points regarding the relaxed luxury that Vacaya plans to deliver in 2019.

Our inaugural cruise will take place on the newly-revolutionized Celebrity Summit. After a multi-million-dollar investment from Celebrity, Summit will offer our guests stunningly redesigned staterooms across the entire ship, exclusive new sanctuaries, luxuriously updated restaurants, bars and lounges and the exclusive Retreat Sundeck and The Retreat Lounge for suite guests.

At Unico 20 87 Hotel Riviera Maya, our inaugural all-inclusive resort vacation, guests will appreciate a full-resort takeover with groundbreaking included perks like spa treatments, excursions and more.

Our European river cruises are one of the most elegant and worry-free ways to travel. Onboard the Emerald Star-Ships, all meals are included, as are standard cocktails, beer, wine, coffee, tea and soft drinks.

And with only 182 guests on the ship, not only is the Vacaya Luxe river cruise a great value, but it offers a truly intimate cruising experience, as well.

How were Vacaya's destinations selected?

To meet the changing tastes and needs of the LGBT+ community, Vacaya stepped outside the box to deliver unique itineraries and new destinations. Our seven-night cruise will not only make history by being the largest all-LGBT+ cruise to ever sail to Ptown Carnival, but it's also the largest ship gay or straight to ever overnight in Provincetown.

Our all-inclusive resort vacation was set in Riviera Maya for its proximity to Tulum, which offers an unfiltered combination of modern and historic Mexico and a deep connection to this magical region. Our European river cruises focus on a unique time of year: the Christmas Markets, which provide Vacaya guests an opportunity to experience Europe like never before.

What inspired Vacaya's ReachOUT initiative?

Vacaya founders are fascinated by culture, history and cuisine. Our travel bucket lists are driven by curiosity, hope for a better tomorrow and the belief we can come to a deeper understanding of a place and its people.

Giving back to the community reflects our commitment to the idea we can all make a difference. Our mission is to ensure we're giving back more to the communities we visit than what's being taken away.

Partnering with local organizations, we offer our guests an opportunity during their vacation to give back to the communities we visit either with a bit of sweat equity or financially. It's our way of sharing a positive impact on the world as we fulfill the travel dreams of our guests.

Vacaya's trips will launch next year, but what has been the feedback thus far?

Reaction to Vacaya from the LGBT+ community has been extremely positive. In our first week in business, thousands of fans flooded social media pages to express their enthusiasm for a new choice in LGBT+ travel and many of those booked more than one trip in our inaugural season.

That level of support was humbling, to say the least. Couple that with the fact that over 98 percent of those bookings were processed through our ecommerce engine and you have a feat that the major cruise lines can't match.

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