
Thomas E. Roth
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Opportunities in the Gay & Lesbian Tourism Marketplace

From 1994-2003, Community Marketing, Inc. has conducted tourism market research surveys and focus groups for the gay and lesbian travel market segment. Results show that the gay and lesbian community has more disposable income and a greater propensity for travel than the national average. In addition, online research conducted by CMI from 2001-2003 offers significant insights into travel motivations for gay and lesbian travelers. Analysis of this data reveals specific trends for this demographic, such as frequency of travel, duration of travel, preferred destinations, and preferred mode of transportation. These trends indicate significant opportunities for travel and hospitality suppliers, destination marketers and managers, and other firms interested in reaching this market segment.

Keywords:

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Thomas Roth has traveled in 60+ countries, wrote four "World Passport" travel guides, has conducted extensive gay tourism market research, and presented to over 200 training seminars and workshops on gay tourism marketing. He holds an MBA degree from Maharishi University of Management in Iowa, and a Certified Travel Executive accreditation from The Travel Institute.

In 1992, Tom established Community Marketing, Inc., a tourism research, communications and marketing company dedicated to the gay market, based in San Francisco. Tom and his company develop products and services to assist the tourism industry to reach and serve the gay and lesbian community. Included are strategic planning and market research; the "International Conference on Gay & Lesbian Tourism;" "Best Practices in Gay & Lesbian Hospitality" seminars and speaking engagements at travel trade shows, conferences and travel schools.

Tom volunteers with the AIDS/HIV Nightline, "Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly" and the Permanent Peace project, and lives with his partner of 5 years. He is the globally recognized expert on gay and lesbian tourism. Website: www.mark8ing.com.

Upscale and Traveling

Community Marketing's (CMI) gay and lesbian tourism market research studies of surveys and focus groups from 1994-2003 provide this bottom line perspective: The gay & lesbian community has more disposable income, and has a distinct propensity for travel. Beyond just numbers, we have gained significant insights into their very motivations for travel. We have learned where gays and lesbians vacation, when, why, how frequently and by which means. We know who their preferred travel and hospitality suppliers are and why, which their favorite destinations are and why, where travel opportunities are researched, how travel is purchased, where they live and how to best reach them with specialized and dedicated marketing. Over the past four years alone, CMI has collected and analyzed 10,000 gay and lesbian travel surveys, and we have developed and produced specialized survey, focus group and field research data for destinations as diverse as Australia, Philadelphia and France.

CMI's Gay & Lesbian Travel Profile

Based on national population figures, the American gay and lesbian community represents a US \$54.1 billion travel market, or an estimated 10% of the U.S. travel industry. But considering on the results of CMI surveys, it represents an even *larger* percentage of the overall travel market in terms of gay and lesbian dollars invested in travel. The following is a profile of self-identified gay and lesbian consumers who belong to gay mailing lists, subscribe to gay publications, visit gay websites, etc. and is not represented as a profile of all gays and lesbians. Essentially, this is a valuable profile of consumers *you can reach through your gay marketing initiatives.*

Online research at Community Marketing, Inc. 2001-2003 indicates the following:

Gay & lesbian travelers *in the past 12 months...*

- 97% Took vacations in the past 12 months (national average is 64%)
- 86% Took at least one short (1-3 nights) US domestic vacations, 46% took 3 or more short (1-3 nights) US domestic vacations
- 81% Took at least one long (4+ nights) domestic US vacation; 50% took 2 or more long US vacations
- 37% Took at least one long vacation to Europe; 12% took 2 or more long vacations to Europe
- 17% Took long vacations to the Caribbean, 15% Canada, 15% Mexico, 13% Australia/South Pacific, 9% Asia, 7% Latin America, 3% Africa
- 82% Spent 5+ nights in hotels
- 72% Rented cars, 18% with 15+ days of car rentals
- 20% Took at least one cruise (national average is about 2%)
- 40% Traveled on business, and 57% of those book known “gay friendly” airlines, hotels, etc. when on business trips
- 36% of those who traveled on business flew first class; 39% flew in business class; 47% spent 11 or more nights in hotels

Demographics...

- 76% have household incomes above the national average (\$40,000+)
- 30% have household incomes of \$100,000+
- 84% Hold a valid passport (national average is 29%)
- 67% Belong to frequent flyer programs (national average is about 25%)

- 53% Spent \$5,000 or more per person on vacations in the past year
- 32% Plan to *increase their vacation spending* in the coming year; only 16% indicated a planned decrease
- Only 7% reduced travel over the past year due to terrorism/security concerns, and only 3% due to SARS
- 82% Are college/university graduates (national average is 29%)
- 72% of those who took the 2003 survey are gay male, 23% are lesbian; 61% are in a committed relationship; 5% have children at home
- 55% Hold professional/executive/management positions

References

Gay & Lesbian Travel Surveys, Community Marketing, Inc., San Francisco, CA; American Traveler Survey, Plog Research, Inc. published in Travel Weekly; FrequentFlier.com

Further information on CMI's gay tourism research is located on hte web at <http://www.mark8ing.com/demographics.cfm>

The research was conducted online by Community Marketing, Inc., the San Francisco-based gay tourism marketing and communications firm, in conjunction with Professor Denis LeClerc and Masters degree student Deborah Kuffner, both of Arizona State University.

Link: www.CommunityMarketingInc.com

Permission to use this data is granted on the condition that all gay research references credit "Community Marketing, Inc., San Francisco, CA"

