

Need to know

Gay travel

Maximise your chances of a hassle-free holiday with tips from **John Malathronas**

Gay rights may have galloped ahead in the UK lately, but that doesn't mean the rest of the world has kept up. Some destinations have gone backwards — India reinstated a ban on homosexuality last year. So how can you make sure you'll feel relaxed and safe on holiday?

Pick your destination

Time in jail, or even the death penalty, is the prospect facing gay people in some countries. So if you're LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender), you'll likely want to avoid much of Africa, several islands in the Caribbean, Russia and chunks of southeast Asia and the Middle East. The International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) has a useful map highlighting LGBT rights worldwide (see iglta.org). And do westerners really get imprisoned? Yes — in 2012, a 24-year-old Belgian man was jailed for a year in Dubai for consensual sex with another man.

Suss out local attitudes

Even if the law is on your side, the locals might not be. The results of the useful 2013 Global Views on Morality survey, in which people in 40 countries were asked whether homosexuality was morally acceptable, are revealing (pewglobal.org). The majority of respondents in Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa (among others) thought not. The most accepting nations included Canada, Spain, Germany, Australia and the Czech Republic. But homophobic attacks happen even in liberal countries.

Look before you book

Decent tour operators and hotels will be happy to address any concerns you have before you book. Chris Wright, the managing director of Sunvil, says: 'It is important to be open with the customer about travelling to countries where it's

illegal to be gay. Some are still happy to travel, but we've never had any issues with LGBT clients in the hotels we use.'

Reputable websites catering to LGBT travellers include rainbowtourism.com and travelgayasia.com, as well as ebab.com — the gay equivalent of Airbnb. IGLTA has a handy search facility for gay-friendly operators on its website.

Some hotel chains, such as Preferred Hotel Group (preferredhotelgroup.com/preferred-pride), woo the LGBT market. Others, including InterContinental, have policies against discrimination. But Dorchester Collection hotels have been boycotted by many (including celebs) since the group's owner, the Sultan of

375%

That's how much car-hire 'extras' can add to your bill, according to Skyscanner.net. In a test booking, a week with Hertz jumped from £110 to £522 with additional driver, child seats and excess-waiver insurance.

Brunei, made homosexuality a capital offence in his home state.

Avoid the pitfalls

Trouble occasionally crops up with police — in which case, don't sign anything you don't understand. In 2012, a Scottish teacher was sentenced to three years in prison in Dubai after signing a confession in Arabic to having had sex with another man in public.

For most LGBT travellers, though, the biggest problem is the bed. In a survey by Travel Gay Asia, 20 per cent reported they'd had trouble at check-in, such as being refused a double. So make a point of requesting a double when you book.



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

GOGGLE-EYED

Prescription sports masks and goggles can cost a packet. Sportviz.co.uk has a nifty solution: purchase an insert from £40 to £95 (depending on your prescription), then pop it into any of its sports-specific eyewear, such as ski goggles from £39.95, and snorkel masks from £29.95.



Clean suite Your room looks pristine, but is it? Recent studies have found illness-causing bacteria on taps, remote controls, carpets and bedding. Take antibacterial wipes — and make sure you use them on surfaces.