

Rio de Janeiro as a gayfriendly destination: The gay tourists' perspective

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Objectives | The city of Rio de Janeiro is a well-known tourism destination, and has been recurrently appointed as one of the most gay-friendly destinations in the world (Riotur, 2011; Rossi, 2016). The most recent data from tourists expenditure in Rio de Janeiro (Riotur, 2014) show that LGBT tourists are responsible for a revenue of R\$ 400 million and on average spend more during travels than heterosexual tourists. During Carnival, the city tourism revenue surpasses R\$ 1,5 billion, and gay tourists are responsible for 30.75% of that amount. Despite very interesting contributions on gay tourism in extant literature, to the best of our knowledge the gay-friendliness of a destination has been disregarded so far. Destinations known as gay-friendly usually have a high number of gay inhabitants (Hughes, 1997) as well as gay events and venues (Pritchard et al., 1998). Moreover, some destinations develop communication campaigns targeted at gay tourists. Still, word-of-mouth communication is an essential information channel namely because of its high credibility compared to other sources of information. Tourists' satisfaction is essential to trigger recommendations and revisits, and expected to play a very relevant role in the decision process of gay tourists.

Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the understanding and measurement of the gay-friendliness of a tourism destination.

Methodology | A mixed-method approach was adopted. Between December 2015 and April 2016 we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 8 gay tourists with diverse demographics (age, gender and education). The second part of the research comprised a survey of 142 gay tourists visiting or that had visited Rio de Janeiro in the past two years. The questionnaire included variables such as: destination image and travel motivation, adapted from San Martín and Del Bosque (2008); destination gay-friendliness (a newly developed scale based on the results of the qualitative research); satisfaction,

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adapted from Veasna et al. (2013); destination loyalty, adapted from Boo et al. (2009); and intended future behavior (recommend and revisit), adapted from Lee (2009). Data was collected between August 20th and October 12th 2016 both online and in the city's most touristic spots, including Farne de Amoedo Street and its beach, known for their gay tourists' concentration, Ipanema, Copacabana, and the Olympic Boulevard. The online responses (58,5%) were obtained by sharing links to the survey on Facebook and LinkedIn among gay networks and connections.

Main Results and Contributions | The qualitative results provided a rich and interesting view on gay tourists' experiences and views. The participants described their traveling motivations, how they search for information, and their experience with homophobia while on vacation. Their traveling motivations are similar to the heterosexual tourists' reported in the literature. Moreover, sexuality was not considered as a determinant factor for choosing a destination by the interviewees. The respondents stated a growing concern with security, as they are still challenged with harassment because of their sexuality, and their desire to show affection in public is still not met. They agreed that they avoid destinations known for not accepting gay tourists. The participants made clear that a gay-friendly destination is strongly related to safety, the sense of belonging, expressing their identity freely, feeling comfortable and welcome, being accepted by locals, and not being harassed in any way. Gay-friendliness was associated to tolerance and absence of discrimination.

The quantitative analysis that followed focused on one destination, Rio de Janeiro. Considering the set of 16 items we proposed for destination gay-friendliness (measured in a 7-point Likert scale) the median of all items was between 4 and 6, denoting an overall favorable evaluation of the Rio de Janeiro as a gay-friendly destination. Likewise, the median for the satisfaction items was 6 for all items considered. We submitted the destination gay-friendliness items to exploratory factor analysis resulting in the identification of two factors: acceptance and integration. We found a strong positive correlation between satisfaction and intention to recommend the destination to gay peers. The correlation between destination gay-friendliness and satisfaction was positive and moderate.

Limitations | One of the main limitations of this research is the number of participants in the quantitative study (142). Considering the interesting insights provided we recommend that similar studies are performed with different samples in order to validate the results. Moreover, this research initiated the development of a new scale to measure the gay-friendliness of a destination. Still, new data collection is needed to complete this development and to validate the scale.

Conclusions | This study demonstrates that a gay-friendly destination is a place where gay tourists feel welcome, can freely exercise their sexuality, do not fear harassment, and are able to show affection. It is also important that the destination has a gay community. The behavior of the residents is very important for gay tourists' satisfaction. According to extant literature, satisfaction is essential to repeated visits and recommendations to peers. Overall, Rio de Janeiro is portrayed as a gay-friendly destination, considering the results on satisfaction, gay-friendliness and future behavior intentions.

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