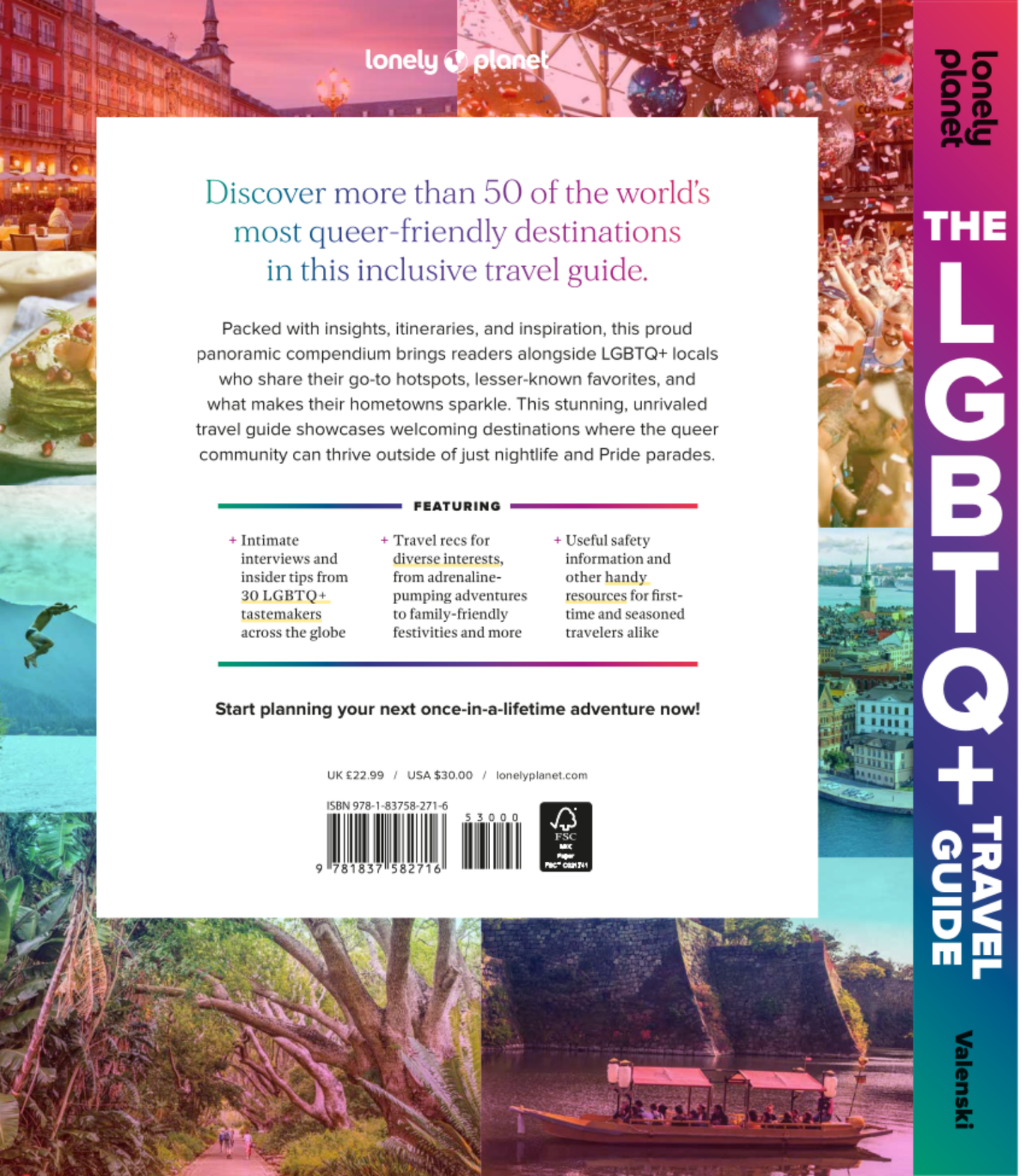


Discover more than 50 of the world's most queer-friendly destinations in this inclusive travel guide.

Packed with insights, itineraries, and inspiration, this proud panoramic compendium brings readers alongside LGBTQ+ locals who share their go-to hotspots, lesser-known favorites, and what makes their hometowns sparkle. This stunning, unrivaled travel guide showcases welcoming destinations where the queer community can thrive outside of just nightlife and Pride parades.

FEATURING

+ Intimate interviews and insider tips from 30 LGBTQ+ tastemakers across the globe
+ Travel recs for diverse interests, from adrenaline-pumping adventures to family-friendly festivities and more
+ Useful safety information and other handy resources for first-time and seasoned travelers alike

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THE LGBTQ+ TRAVEL GUIDE

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Interviews, Itineraries, and Inspiration from Queer Insiders in 50+ Proud Places

ALICIA VALENSKI

lonely planet

THE LGBTQ+ TRAVEL GUIDE

Interviews, Itineraries, and Inspiration
from Queer Insiders in 50+ Proud Places

ALICIA VALENSKI

DEDICATION

To my middle school English teacher, Mrs. Zeigler,
who encouraged me to pursue writing and
made me promise I'd dedicate my first book to
her one day—this one's for you, Mama Z.

Contents

FOREWORD 6
Paula Akpan

INTRODUCTION 8
LGBTQ+ Travel: How It's Different (and Why It Matters) **10**
How to Use This Guide **11**

QUEER-FRIENDLY TRAVEL DESTINATIONS 13
Cape Town & Johannesburg, South Africa **14**
Bangkok, Thailand **21**
Amsterdam, Netherlands **28**
Edinburgh, Scotland **35**
Lisbon, Cascais & Porto, Portugal **42**
London, England **49**
Madrid, Spain **54**
Milan, Italy **63**
Stockholm, Sweden **70**
Valletta, Malta **77**
Anchorage, USA **82**
Austin, USA **91**
Brooklyn, USA **96**
Portland, USA **103**
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico **108**
Richmond, USA **115**
Saugatuck & Douglas, USA **122**
Vancouver, Canada **131**
Melbourne, Australia **136**
São Paulo, Brazil **143**

THE ULTIMATE LGBTQ+ TRAVEL HIT LIST 151
Adrenaline-Pumping Adventures **152**
Awe-Inspiring Art **160**
Family-Friendly Festivities **170**
Inclusive Island Escapes **178**
Leisurely Locales **184**
Seaside Sanctuaries **190**
Trailblazing Travels **198**

THE FUTURE OF LGBTQ+ TRAVEL 208

LGBTQ+ TRAVEL ESSENTIALS 213
Know Your Rights **214**
Practical Safety Tips **215**
In Case of Emergency **216**

ADDITIONAL LGBTQ+ TRAVEL RESOURCES 219
Worldwide Pride Calendar **220**
LGBTQ+ Travel Agencies, Tours, Publications & Apps **224**

Index 230
Acknowledgments 236
Photo Credits 238
About the Author 239

Foreword



All too often, 'word of mouth' is understood in the language of the market, advertising, and communications.

We think of it less as a tool of survival: a whispered historical narrative from the lips of an elder into the ears of their curious descendants; a fiercely guarded tip that opens doors for new community members that have been brought into the fold; a method of vetting, a system of safeguarding, an act of remembering.

For many of us—historians, writers and record-keepers—these spoken exchanges hold as much weight as the written documents we've long been taught to prize above all. We see it as a personal responsibility to capture the fleeting and commit it to the record—records that have often consigned our communities to the footnotes.

Of course, translating the spoken word to the page is never quite the same. Sometimes you lose the gossip, intonations and wonderment that carry the oral traditions that have sustained so many of our overlapping communities. The offhand comments, the spicy anecdotes, the prized folklore are well-known to those of us who are queer, trans, Black, Brown, Indigenous, Muslim, Jewish, disabled, sex workers, refugees and asylum seekers, rough sleepers and countless other maligned identities. From time immemorial, it is how we have kept one another safe.

But arguably, preservation is also a form of safety and safeguarding; a refusal to let anything slip through our fingers. Part of sustaining our collective memory is committing to permanence in whatever form we can. For Alicia and I, that is through the written word.

The work you hold in your hands is another contribution to the global mapping of queer life. Across the pages that follow, you'll hear from queer people detailing their own lives and communities on their own terms.

In each location, what it means to be queer is laid bare. What it means to live in defiance of the margins we're expected to occupy. How we carve out spaces that can hold love, lust, joy, hardship, and heartache. How we claim the contours of our cities for ourselves, spurning the systems that demand our silence and invisibility. How bricks and mortar cannot contain our queerness and, rather, our presence infuses every space, whether we have been established at the center or not.

From bookshops to restaurants and cafes, from local natural sights to strips of clubs, from archives to waterfronts, we seize them all as ours. Spaces where we can commune, connect and extend our network of global queers. Dance floors that have had queer rhythms beaten into them over centuries. Rooms where desire and belonging usurp fear, even if only a momentary reprieve.

This book is but a glimpse of the queer alcoves we have carved out. It is by no means exhaustive, but rather, a mere hint at how numberless queerness is. It is an indicator of how far queer liberation has brought us and how much work still remains, as our queer and trans siblings around the globe continue to live under—fight against and sometimes, die under—homophobic and transphobic colonial legacies on their lands.

Drink in the words committed to these pages as queer people around the globe, experts in their own right, take you by the hand and pull you into their worlds. Together, they issue a promise: we are queer, we've been here and we are simply everywhere.

—Paula Akpan, author and historian

Introduction

I needed a friend.

I was hunched over my phone, nursing an overpriced and mediocre mimosa at the airport in Charlotte, North Carolina, and feeling very alone. I'd spent the last 20 minutes rephrasing Google searches in dozens of ways, trying to learn anything about the queer scene in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, where I was headed. And I had nothing.

I sulkily sipped my breakfast booze, wondering if I should have declined this travel-writing gig. I couldn't find any trace of a gayborhood in Playa del Carmen, so how did I know if it was safe for me to go there as a queer woman? I mean, I knew Mexico wasn't one of the many countries where homosexuality was illegal (or punishable by death—hi and bye, Iran, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen), but that didn't mean there wasn't a stigma around LGBTQ+ culture there. Hell, look at the United States, where same-sex marriage was legal and yet queer people faced discrimination, harassment, and violence all the time. Would it be like that in Mexico, too?

I had no idea. So I, like millions of queer people before me, would have to venture into the unknown on my own, finding out for myself if it was safe to be me. It took a couple of late nights out on Quinta Avenida for me to make a few LGBTQ+ friends who finally spilled the tea on the cool, under-the-radar spots in their city. But it took frustration, anxiety, and feeling othered to find out that Playa del Carmen is one of Mexico's most gay-friendly beaches.

On my flight back to Charlotte, I thought about the new queer friends I'd made during my trip. They seemed so happy to give me the inside scoop, and I was just as happy to receive it. But there was another emotion beyond joy that I couldn't quite put my finger on. I thought about all the times I had gushed about my favorite gay-friendly spots in Charlotte to other queer folks who were visiting or new to the city, and tried to name how it felt. I smiled as I found the word I was looking for—conspiratorial.

I had been given privileged information: an inside look and all-access pass to the way others in the community live in their



corners of the world. Sharing knowledge with this level of authenticity elicits the same thrill as telling a secret—one you only get to know if you're part of the queer kids' club. Whether you're the one offering inspiration or the one looking for it, this kind of conversation is support in action; it gets the word out about LGBTQ+ experiences that are not just safe but also comfortable, enjoyable, and spectacular.

But on the other side of that coin, these exchanges feel conspiratorial because finding out where queer people actually like to hang out in a city is so damn hard. Sure, it's easy to find the tourist traps or the annual Pride parade or the rainbow-washed suggestions from the corporate sponsors. But it's nearly impossible to find out where the community gathers on any ol' day of the year to connect or unwind or let loose; the cool spots they'd bring their own queer friends if they came to visit or recommend to a gay person who had just moved to town. And most importantly, the places where they felt safe to be openly and unapologetically themselves.

Not only that, but I couldn't even find a safe space in a book to indulge my wanderlust and daydreams about trips I might never take and alternative lives I might never live. I couldn't find a place where I could feel connected to the global LGBTQ+ community, to the big picture of what we're all fighting for on so many different frontiers.

I wrote this book to offer an intimate look at the people and places that shape and define the global LGBTQ+ community, creating a safe space where our voices can be heard and our wanderlust satiated.

And it isn't just a travel book with an LGBTQ+ spin on it. It's a proud, panoramic compendium of what it really means to live like a queer person around the world. It centers around people, not just places, with LGBTQ+ locals in each place offering personal portraits, in their own words, of what makes their destination sparkle.

Packed with practical information on what to see and do, and sprinkled with dozens of insider travel tips and inspiration, *The LGBTQ+ Travel Guide* is for readers who don't let their gender expression or sexual orientation hold them back from seeing all the beauty in the world.

In the following pages, queer community members from different backgrounds and walks of life offer honest, helpful insights for LGBTQ+ travelers planning to visit their city, along with inspiration for armchair travelers around the world.

Welcome, dear (queer) readers, to a curated window into the good life, from LGBTQ+ locals who are living well and living whole all over the world.

LGBTQ+ TRAVEL: HOW IT'S DIFFERENT (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

This is the question I've gotten most often as I've been writing this book. As it turns out, I'm not alone in that. Even longtime LGBTQ+ tourism veterans like author and educator **Ed Salvato**—who has been in the industry since 1998, and even leads courses at NYU's Jonathan M Tisch Center of Hospitality about tourism through the lens of queer travelers—continue to get similar comments to this day.

"I hear that a lot: 'Why do you have to segregate yourselves? Everyone's welcome in this place or that place, so why do you have to be different?'" Ed said. "The simple answer is because as LGBTQ+ travelers, we can't assume that 'everyone's welcome' includes us. We just can't, based on our lived experience."

Since 2015, global search interest in topics pertaining to LGBTQ+ travel has skyrocketed. Queer travelers across the world are desperately trying to figure out which countries are safe for us to travel to, and what to do when we get there. And right now, there's not much information to be found—and of that, little of the information actually comes firsthand from other queer travelers.

Likewise, many websites and travel forums don't address the specific concerns of queer travelers, like finding queer-friendly accommodations, bars, or restaurants, or identifying potentially dangerous or discriminatory neighborhoods. Not to mention, sometimes LGBTQ+ travelers are hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity on public travel websites or forums in the first place, out of fear of online harassment or discrimination. The internet is basically shrugging its shoulders back at us and saying, "Sorry, you're on your own."

This means that, for millions of people, the thought of a vacation is tinged with a spike of anxiety: they don't know where to turn to find support, strength, and safety to navigate through that anxiety so they can have a relaxing getaway; and they often have to go it alone.

"When people think of things queer people like to do while traveling, they seem to think, 'OK, we'll put the queer travelers we host near where the parties are because that's what they're going to want to do.' But what if you're sober and queer and you want to go do something? If you want to go to the artsy places and not just bars and clubs?" said **Yasmin Benoit**, an award-winning asexual activist, writer, public speaker, and one of the UK's most prominent Black alternative models. "I think we need to expand the perception of queer travel because most of the marketing you see around it is always focused on Pride and partying, and those aren't every queer person's goals for traveling."

Not only that, but LGBTQ+ tourism overall tends to cater to the young, thin, able-bodied, white, cisgender, male, gay experience.

"We're such a big group of people that have such different experiences with traveling and do tend to need extra provisions. But I find that when companies do tap into the queer travel stuff, it often doesn't get very intersectional," Yasmin said. "When you have multiple intersectionalities, there aren't as many resources you can fully depend on for a well-rounded picture of what a place would be like for you to visit. There might be things for Black travelers, and there might be things for queer travelers, but there probably won't be anything for Black queer travelers. There might be something for men or there might be something for women, but not something for nonbinary people. It gets complicated."

In short, the LGBTQ+ community deserves the same range of travel options as anyone else. Having a diversity of experiences, destinations, and voices is essential for promoting visibility, safety, and acceptance.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

For LBGTQ+ adventurers who may feel isolated or marginalized during their travels, let this book serve as a reminder that you're not alone. Let it act as a reassuring friend, sharing incontrovertible proof that there are welcoming and safe spaces all over the world for you to explore, whether it's from the comfort of home or on the road.

I know firsthand that modern queer adventurers are ready to explore the world beyond just the usual tourist destinations, and we're all seeking authentic, unexpected experiences that cater to our interests and needs. It's time to celebrate the voices that make our community so diverse, as well as to highlight the lesser-known attractions and off-the-beaten-path destinations that are inclusive and welcoming to LGBTQ+ travelers.

And so, I present to you an inclusive collection of authentic profiles covering 20 of the world's most dynamic queer-travel destinations—the places where the LGBTQ+ community thrives outside of just Pride parades. These are places that reflect the diversity in expressions and passions of LGBTQ+ culture, and offer inspiration for the modern queer traveler who is ready for something less stereotypical and more genuine and wide-ranging.

It's my dream for this book to delight curious LGBTQ+ readers and travelers alike by highlighting unique and surprising experiences, and to leave them feeling in awe of the wonderful people and places that exist in the worldwide LGBTQ+ community, regardless of whether they ever get to venture there firsthand.

Most of all, I hope this book will inspire adventurous queer readers to see the world around them—a world that has largely been designed for a heteronormative culture—in a new light.

QUEER-FRIENDLY TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

Cape Town & Johannesburg,
SOUTH AFRICA

RECOMMENDATIONS BY
Yoliswa Moleboheng Mqoco



Between the vibrant vistas of Cape Town and the eclectic energy of Johannesburg exists model and creative consultant **Yoliswa Moleboheng Mqoco** (she/her), whose essence illuminates the very soul of South African style.

"Fashion is a cornerstone of everything I do… and it's not the easiest industry to navigate as a fat woman, a queer woman, and a Black woman," Yoliswa said.

Yoliswa's journey through the fashion world extends well beyond her wardrobe. It's a testament to reclaiming space, amplifying voices, and embracing the beauty of intersectionality.

"A huge part of why I'm still doing this is because the representation I give others means so much," she said. "I didn't have anybody to look at who was like me 10 or 15 years ago. So, I recognize the importance of what I do, and I'm very thankful for that."



Originally from **Pretoria** [near Johannesburg], Yoliswa began visiting Cape Town regularly back in 2015. "I loved the lifestyle here versus back home," she said. "I was inspired by the fashion and how people dress here."

Yoliswa officially moved to Cape Town in 2018. But, as she put it, "Living here versus

Below: *Camps Bay Beach near Cape Town, overlooked by the Twelve Apostles range;* ***Opposite:*** *Eating the rainbow at a Bo-Kaap brunch spot in Cape Town.*



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

LANGUAGES
Afrikaans, English, and Xhosa in Cape Town; Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, Sesotho, and Setswana in Johannesburg

CURRENCY
South African Rand (R, ZAR)

PRIDE CELEBRATIONS
Late February/early March in Cape Town; late October in Johannesburg

WHEN TO GO
South African summer (December–March) for hot and sunny weather, or during shoulder season (March–May or September–November) for moderate temps and fewer crowds

visiting here, they're two different things... It's a beautiful city when you look at it, but it's so flawed when you actually live in it."

In addition to experiencing racism and exclusion from established cliques in Cape Town, the search for other queer people of color to build friendships and relationships with has proven challenging for Yoliswa. So, she has started splitting her time between Cape Town and Johannesburg instead.

"That way I can still see all my friends from back home, have that sense of community, and have a rich life in that way that I don't have in Cape Town," she explained. "It's such a fun city. As a creative—and also being queer—in Johannesburg, it feels different. It feels more freeing. It feels like there's more of me."

Although her time as a Cape Town resident hasn't been perfect, Yoliswa still doesn't dissuade travelers from visiting the city. Far from it. "If you are coming to South Africa as a whole, please do give both cities a chance," she emphasized. "Do not go to one without the other. You won't have a true, authentic experience."

WHERE TO BEGIN

"If you're coming from outside of the country, it definitely makes sense to start in **Johannesburg** because the main international airport is there. Begin there and end in **Cape Town**, which is about a two-hour flight away. Start with the place that has the most welcoming spirit, I would say, then end in Cape Town for a more beautiful experience in terms of aesthetics, food, and relaxing.

"If you're into a more artisanal, curated lifestyle, you'll have a good time in Cape Town. And also if you lead a quite healthy lifestyle, like if you're into hiking and are very active: Cape Town.

"But if you're wanting to really get to know the South African person—especially the South African queer person—and build community, and meet people you could have a possible lifelong bond with: Johannesburg. Johannesburg is much like New York. New York is this melting pot of people from all over the world, and Johannesburg is like that, too. You'll find people from all over the country, sometimes all over the world. And it really is the perfect place to find community, to really have a good time when it comes to socializing and getting to know people."





Above: *Strolling the trails at Cape Town's Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden;* ***Opposite:*** *Oceanside dining in Kalk Bay, Cape Town.*

WHAT TO DO WHERE

"In Johannesburg, there are queer-centered events led by queer people. They create these spaces so that week after week, or month after month, there will be a place where a bunch of queer, Black people will be in one room. I find myself traveling to Johannesburg to go to those events and find more people who look like me.

"My three favorite events are **Pussy Party**, **Same Sex Saturday**, and the **Rainbow Social**—and I'd follow those events' media accounts to keep up with when and where they're hosting things. They're doing so much for our community. Pussy Party also teaches people stuff like how to DJ, and there are many other entities under their umbrella that are useful to queer people. They're an amazing organization of queer-led and women-focused groups.

"In terms of pure relaxation, Cape Town is definitely the place to go. Swim, go to the spa, visit the **Winelands**, go into the city...there are so many beautiful things to do. And you can do them solo or with someone else, and you don't have to spend a lot of money to have a good time. Walking on the **Promenade** and **Sea Point** in Cape Town is free, and it's just such a beautiful experience. Getting ice cream, watching the sunset... **Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden** is a beautiful thing to do solo, or [go] to the **Norval Foundation** art museum; they're

both in the Southern Suburbs...the **Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden** is, too."

WINING & DINING

"To get the full Cape Town experience, go to the **Bo-Kaap** area, where you can really have an authentic taste experience from a lot of Capetonians in terms of the people that have Malay descendants and the Malay Muslim community.

"I would 100% recommend the **Cellars-Hohenort Hotel**. They put up this huge LGBTQIA+ logo saying that they were queer-friendly, and I almost never see anything like that at hotels. I saw so many people of color that were queer and looked like me. They [the hotel] really are who they say they are in terms of being open to us.

"**Blondie** has delicious Middle Eastern food with a little bit of a Mediterranean influence. It's not actually a queer restaurant, but we often find a lot of queer people there. **One Park** is another good one—it's a bar, gallery, restaurant, and record store. I've found a lot of queer people to be there, too, not that it's meant to be a queer space specifically, but it just naturally happened that way. Next door to that is a restaurant called **Therapy**, which is worth checking out."

The More You Know

"Both cities are beautiful, and each has their own separate issues, so to me, it's important to be as honest as possible when I talk about them. It costs so much to travel, and it's such a privilege to travel. I feel we need to stop romanticizing things and be really honest with people about the cities they want to go to."





Above: *Perfect framing for the* Leopard Fragments *series at the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden;* ***Opposite:*** *Johannesburg's Maboneng Precinct.*

More Places to Visit

- Hemelhuijs
- The Athletic Club & Social
- Loading Bay
- Ken Forrester Vineyards
- Fabrica do Prego
- The Table
- Ellerman House Hotel
- Seed & Circus
- Cafe Chiffon
- The Nines

