

# DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY FUELS INDIA'S LGBT TOURISM AND ECONOMY



Indian LGBT community includes more than 55 million people, whose income is about \$113 million per year. As such, LGBT tourism in India has a great potential.

From gay clubs to segmented tourism, the experts believe that **India's recent decriminalization of homosexuality announces the rise of one of the world's most important pink economies in the planet's second most populous country.**

The country's LGBT community eagerly celebrated last week's decision by the Supreme Court of declaring unconstitutional an article in the penal code that prohibited sexual relations between people of the same gender.

Industry experts estimate that this historic decision will play in favor of Asia's third-largest economy, anticipating a market specifically focused on this population – although homosexuality is still a taboo in Indian society.

“Indian economy can generate billions of dollars if India's gay community decides to open their wallets,” said Keshav Suri, a hotelier and gay activist, and one of the petitioners who brought the case to the Supreme Court.

India is home to more than 55 million LGBT adults, whose nominal income is about US\$ 113 million (R\$ 469,5 million) per year, according to data provided by the marketing agency Out Now Consulting, which helps companies reach gay consumers.

“The value of this pink economy, as well as the social angles of the LGBT community, have become too important to be ignored,” added Keshav Suri.

On average, gay couples have higher purchasing power than heterosexuals.

The Indian market “is one of the world's largest LGBT tourism markets”, declared Ian Johnson, founder of Out Now Consulting. The beverage brands and travel agencies will be on pole position to reach this community, he added.

LGBT-friendly bars, discos and cafes are now allowed to be open without risk of judicial prosecution.

**Legality, freedom and opportunities**

Nakshatra Bagwe is a businessman in Mumbai and founded The Backpack Travels in October 2016, a travel agency for gay tourists. Albeit currently profitable, following the recent decriminalization Bagwe anticipates that the agency will now grow even more.

“With legality and freedom on our side, companies will start to invest in the community and the next years will bring more opportunities”, he said.

Inder Vhatwar, another businessman in India’s economic capital, will also take advantage of the Supreme Court’s decision to reopen his business.

When homosexual relationships were briefly decriminalized in 2009 by the Delhi Supreme Court, Vhatwar opened a flashy and glittering clothing store in the Bandra neighborhood, particularly trendy and popular among Bollywood stars.

However, in 2013, the Supreme Court reinstated the ban, and Vhatwar was evicted by the property’s owner.

“The ban was a source of many issues and I had to close it, but with this new decision I intend to reopen my shop”.

**Homophobic behavior and discrimination at work may have deprived the Indian economy of a figure between 0,1 and 1,7 percent of its GDP**, based on a World Bank survey in 2014.

According to Parmesh Shahani, head of the cultural sector of Indian conglomerate Godrej, “the LGBT community is evidently an untapped market, and its business potential is enormous and will continue to grow”.

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