

2019

Perspective on the LGBTQ Segment: The View of Tourism Accommodation Establishments of the City of Porto

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Recommended Citation

Andrade, Helena; Breda, Zélia; and Dinis, Gorete (2019) "Perspective on the LGBTQ Segment: The View of Tourism Accommodation Establishments of the City of Porto," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2019 , Article 86.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2019/iss1/86>

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Abstract:

The municipality of Porto, located in the north of Portugal, has experienced a big tourism expansion in a short period of time, exceeding in 2017 7 million tourists, a figure expected only in 2020 (Moreira, 2018). The growth of tourism in the municipality and the increasing acceptance of alternative lifestyles, as well as the recent law that supports non-discrimination, has allowed a favourable conjuncture for the expansion of the LGBTQ tourist segment, which represents a global share of 12% (IGLTA, 2012). Despite this favourable situation, the municipality of Porto is still regarded as conservative. This work aims to identify the openness of the municipality of Porto towards the LGBTQ segment, by perceiving if there is a response and treatment similar to those offered to heterosexual tourists, or if there are signs of prejudice based on the sexual orientation of the tourist.

An analysis of the practices, behaviours, actions and strategies of the professionals of a random sample of accommodation establishments located in Porto was conducted through a semi-structured interview with 16 employees of these establishments, who were knowledgeable enough to answer the questions (ranging from directors and managers to receptionists). The interviews were mostly conducted face to face, with only one by e-mail and two by telephone. All of them were transcribed for further analysis, being structured in main four groups (the LGBTQ segment, the hotel towards this segment, Porto as a LGBTQ destination, and sociodemographic profile of the respondent).

Results indicate that hotel professionals do not show any kind of homophobic behaviour or embarrassment in customer service towards any type of client. In part, they feel comfortable with the LGBTQ community because many of the interviewees have co-workers or friends who are part of this community, and because they are part of a young generation more open and prone to advocate for equal rights. Results also show that there is a positive attitude towards the LGBTQ community that allows LGBTQ tourists to choose and return to the destination, as well as that this community feels comfortable being in their “own skin,” that is, not feeling oppressed or threatened by expressing their sexuality in public.

This research contributes more information on the LGBTQ community in Portugal, and specifically in the municipality of Porto, using a holistic perspective and not being only focused on the homosexual market. It also contributes to a greater knowledge of tourism supply-side issues for the LGBTQ community and the importance that this community has for a tourism destination.