



## 5 Best Underrated Cities for Gay Travelers

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Barcelona, San Francisco, London, New York City... Been there, done that? Sure they're awesome places, but they're also the most-visited. You're probably ready to visit the less-hyped, more quirky and obscurely cool haunts around the planet, right?

Don't let those big-name A-list destinations totally overshadow the quiet gems that are just as vacation-worthy in their own unique way. Distinctive with their own quirks and personality, these five underrated cities deliver enough punch to have you packing your bags.

### Medellin, Colombia

Sure, Colombia has been beaten down with bad press (drugs, kidnapping, Shakira), but it has come a long way by rebounding from its darker days and exposing itself in a newer light. While Bogota and Cartagena shine as the most visited of Colombia's destinations, the small city of Medellin is jostling its way to prove its worthy of your visit. (And not just thanks to that *Entourage* movie plotline, either.) Chock full of commanding views (it's nestled snugly in the tropical Andes Mountains), year-round weather hovering around 72 degrees, a thriving nightlife and the burgeoning neighborhood of Lleras Park packed with boutiques and trendy restaurants, Medellin is effortlessly Colombia's best-kept secret.

Make sure you try traditional Colombian cuisine with a modern flare at the bustling Basilica restaurant (Cr 38 8A-42 Antioquia). Locals and visitors alike enjoy the spirited nights fueled with live music and traditional dancing. And yes, the gorgeous staff are known to speak our language, if you know what I mean.

### Birmingham, England

When you think of cool cities in Britain, Birmingham may not necessarily come to mind. Historically, Birmingham endured the reputation of being industrial and gloomy. But things have changed within the last few years, largely due to the revamp of shopping facilities, which attracted global travelers and put Birmingham on the UK map as the Old Country's third most-visited destination. Birmingham is also a great central point for day trips to cultural and historic points like Stratford-Upon-Avon (Shakespeare's hometown), the commanding Warwick Castle and, of course, London.

But shopping is the main attraction, so there's no downtime for shopaholics. The Mailbox (converted from the Royal Mail's main sorting office) is packed with high-end designer and boutique shops and trendy restaurants next to the canal (yes, believe it or not, there are canals here). A day of shopping wouldn't be complete without a visit to the Bullring shopping complex, which spans the equivalence of 25 football fields. Blimey, indeed!

To get a sense of Birmingham's new vibe of swank, speedy style, check out [MyBrum.co.uk](http://MyBrum.co.uk).

### Oslo, Norway

It's easy to get distracted from sightseeing in Oslo: Norwegians are effortlessly gorgeous. As my friend Joshua put it as we people-watched in Vigeland Park, "Even the guys considered ugly here are super hot." But attractive people isn't the only thing Scandinavia's underdog offers: Burgeoning restaurants, buzzing nightlife and internationally known artists like Ibsen and Munch-who have had as much global impact as the Vikings-make this city hard to miss. And if you can pack your bags, like now, you'll get there in time for August's killer *Yafestivalen*, a major music bash that runs for days and features citywide concerts featuring the likes of Matt & Kim, Amy Winehouse, Gogol Bordello, Spoon, Lily Allen and the Jesus and Mary Chain-and hundreds more.

The mother of all Oslo gay bars is London Pub (CJ Hambros Plass 5), the city's most famous gay establishment since the

'70s. Resident DJs keep the bar thriving with top forty and classic pop songs, and the downstairs basement has a more loungy atmosphere.

### **Lisbon, Portugal**

One of the last cities in Europe to not be overly commercialized (you won't find a Starbucks or a single Pret-A-Manger), Lisbon retains an air of heritage and tradition amiss in other parts of the Iberian peninsula. Just like its neighbors, Lisbon offers sublime beaches, quiet cobblestone streets, great cuisine and modern hotels, but its the nightlife that's becoming iconic.

Though the gay scene in Lisbon is quite small, its quietly blossoming. Rule of thumb: dinner at 10pm, drinks at midnight, clubs at 2am, and the main club (Lux, Av. Infante D. Henrique, Armazem A, Lisbon) [luxfragil.com/](http://luxfragil.com/) at 4am... Glam-trashy Finalmente (Rua da Palmeira, 38, Bairro Alto, Lisbon) is a favorite for locals and visitors alike, and campy drag shows and hot Portuguese go-gos fuel the night for good-ol' gay times.

### **Tenerife, Canary Islands**

Though Gran Canaria wins the most-visited award for the Canary Islands, Tenerife still draws nearly 5 million annual visitors for its unique landscape (it's a former cluster of volcanos dating from 12 million years ago) and fab wine that's nothing like the selection in mainland Spain. In fact, it is Canary wine that was uncorked during the celebration of the discovery of America, and Tenerife is the largest producer (it gets its unique flavor due to its altitude, weather and soil that grows 24 different qualities of grapes). This bit even impressed John Keats, who has lauded Tenerife wine in his poetry.

El Teide National Park is the most commanding site on the island. The park is sprawling with craters and peculiar plant-life that's indigenous and emblematic of Tenerife. Mounds of basalt topped with obsidian embellish the mountainous region and you truly feel you might be walking the grounds of a red planet. Get that winning snapshot atop Teide, the highest mountain in Spain (and the iconic emblem on the pesito before it went Euro).