

Title: It Takes Two to Tango: Straight-Friendly Buenos Aires

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Abstract:

Studies on LGBT tourism remain marginal within the tourism literature. Of the extant literature, several predominant themes are evident that primarily center on economic opportunity, or the ‘pink dollar’, and LGBT tourist motivation. The study of LGBT tourism has primarily been focused upon Western contexts, and little is known about Other countries and peoples, an omission this paper aims to address. The exploration of LGBT tourism in Buenos Aires, Argentina, provides simultaneous insights into the challenging of heteronormative space and practice, and the acceptance of homosexuality. The emergence of LGBT tourism activity is indeed contingent on societal and political turns that break the stagnant hegemonic preconceptions of the implied heteronormative ‘normality’. In-depth semi-structured interviews with industry stakeholders, participant observation, and promotional maps (referred to as ‘Gay Maps’) show several key specificities contributing to the success of Buenos Aires (BA) as an LGBT tourist destination.

The study has found that gay places and spaces are not confined to one area in the city, and whilst there has been an attempt at constructing a confined gay space, this has largely proven to be unsuccessful. In contrast to other cities around the globe, gay spaces and places in BA are diffused within the city. Participants stress a lack of necessity for ‘one’ gay space, and the ‘Gay Maps’ evidence the diffusion of gay space, which potentially suggests a shift towards integration and acceptance of homosexuality within the wider BA community. Yet, the categorisation of places in the ‘Gay Maps’ tends to suggest otherwise. In particular, the use of a ‘straight-friendly’ categorisation shows defiance towards heteronormative space and the use of ‘gay-friendly’ categorisations, which support heterosexuality as norm and homosexuality as Other.

The queering of traditionally heterosexual activities also supports the notion of a confined resistance to heteronormativity. This is perhaps most evident in the practice of ‘Queer Tango’. ‘Queer Tango’ not only challenges heteronormativity, but also critically reviews the performance of traditional gender roles and the male lead. The ‘Queer Tango’ space is characterised by fun, laughter, and openness; it is a decidedly ‘straight-friendly’ space. The promotion of Argentina as an LGBT destination also involves both normalisation and defiance; the LGBT offering is the same as the heterosexual offering—beach, urban, and nature tourism. Yet, the use of gay photographers, models, and creators of tourism promotion is an attempt to break from heteronormative patterns of representation.

While Argentina, and Buenos Aires specifically, evidence patterns of normalisation and defiance, alongside growing popularity as an LGBT destination, there are still caveats to be found within the offering. LGBT tourism follows similar patterns evidenced elsewhere of a growing homo-patriarchy with few (perhaps even no) lesbians or women involved in decision making. However, the country is still playing a leading role in gay-friendly policy making across Latin America, and within this, LGBT tourism and its Argentine proponents are the primary influencers.