

HOW TO REACH UNDERSERVED TRAVELERS

Embracing Inclusivity to Reach Underserved Travelers

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Why Inclusion Is Good for Business

Embracing inclusion is not just best practice — it's smart business. Each year, underserved travelers, including Black, Latino, LGBTQIA+, and travelers with disabilities, represent an increasing portion of global travelers. However, our Inclusive Travel Study with APCO Insight shows that underserved travelers in the United States still face significant challenges — from safety concerns to a lack of representation — that negatively impact their experiences, making it more difficult to enjoy the benefits of travel.

Notably, 42% of underserved travelers feel limited because of their identity when selecting destinations or activities, highlighting a critical need for the travel industry to improve representation and inclusivity efforts.

Businesses that work to create more inclusive and welcoming travel experiences will set themselves up for success in the years to come by tapping into an expanding market, building loyalty, and differentiating themselves in a competitive landscape.

But to understand how to create inclusive and welcoming experiences, it is essential to first learn about underserved travelers' concerns, priorities, and preferences. In this guide, we outline key elements of identity-specific travel experiences, coupled with concrete opportunities for how your business can engage with, support, and welcome these underserved travelers.

Methodology

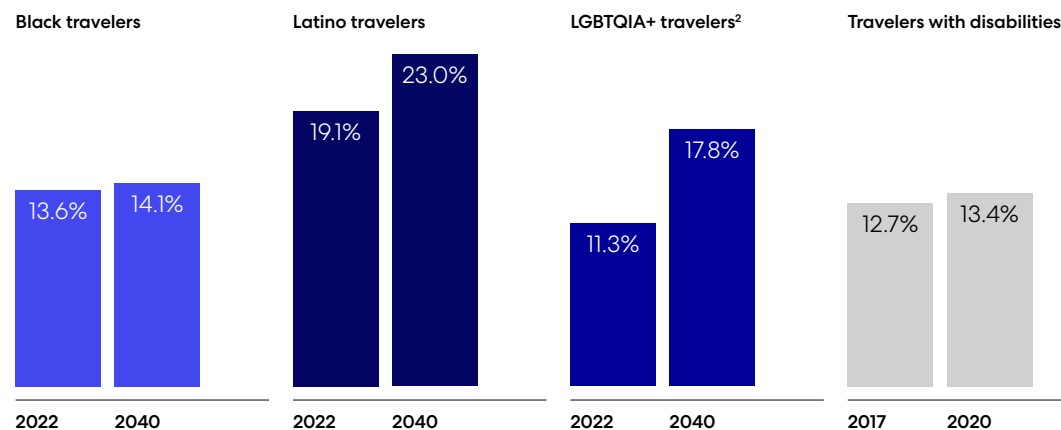
Our original research with APCO Insight explores the experiences of underserved travelers in the U.S. through findings from an online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews.

- 2,800+ respondents across the general population, Black travelers, Latino travelers, LGBTQIA+ travelers, and travelers with disabilities
- 30 underserved travelers interviewed in focus groups
- 8 in-depth interviews with travel industry leaders

Audience definitions:

- **General population:** Refers to a sample of survey respondents that is representative of the demographic composition of the U.S. population.
- **Underserved travelers:** Individuals or groups who face significant barriers to accessing products or services due to a variety of factors including, but not limited to, their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, economic status, or geographic location. These barriers can result from systemic inequalities, discriminatory practices, economic constraints, and insufficient or inadequately designed infrastructure.

Increase of Underserved Populations¹



¹ All demographic data presented here refers to the United States population and is based on projections and characteristics sourced from the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Human Rights Campaign.

² Population segment growth is attributed to multiple factors, including improved methods of data collection and increased visibility and acceptance for queer identities, leading to more young people openly identifying as LGBTQIA+.

Promote Diversity and Inclusion at the Forefront of Your Business

Underserved travelers are more likely to say that their identity influences their choice of destination, where they stay, and how they get there, compared to the general population.

Because identity plays such a large role in travel choices, a company's public commitments stand out to underserved travelers. These travelers prefer brands that champion diversity and inclusion and are more likely to book with those brands repeatedly.

The same pattern is true with loyalty programs, as underserved travelers are more likely than the general population (47%) to join a loyalty program if the company supports diversity and inclusion. This sentiment is highest with LGBTQIA+ travelers (76%), followed by Black (67%), Latino (67%), and travelers with disabilities (58%).

Takeaway

Weave diversity and inclusion into every part of your brand — from how you market and the activities you offer to the content you create and how you communicate with travelers — as every touchpoint with your guests and visitors informs their trust in you. Take every opportunity to build real connections with underserved travelers and create meaningful interactions that reflect their values and identity and build loyalty.

Action

Use inclusive, welcoming, and respectful language across all marketing and listings and call out amenities and accessibility for travelers of all backgrounds and abilities. Begin with a strong and accurate [property listing](#) with high-quality photos, information that clearly communicates inclusivity and safety, and positive guest reviews.

Evaluate your [guest experience](#) and the different touchpoints you have with your travelers. Communication is important, so try sending information to travelers before their trip with welcoming language and to set their expectations before arrival. Finding ways to surprise and delight travelers also goes a long way in the overall experience with your brand. This can be as simple as leaving a handwritten note to welcome them or acknowledging a special occasion they are celebrating.

71% of underserved travelers state a preference for brands that support diversity and inclusion initiatives, compared to 62% of the general population.

Impact of Promoting Diversity and Inclusion on Traveler Behavior



• Indicates underserved travelers are much more likely than the general population

Leverage Authentic Representation in Travel Advertising

Underserved travelers feel that travel advertising should represent them authentically, as seeing themselves in promotions is important when choosing where and how to travel. However, most do not currently feel represented in travel advertising, indicating that the industry is missing the mark — and missing out on potential business.

This lack of representation can impact your bottom line, as representation in travel promotions leads to a significantly higher likelihood of taking a trip among all underserved traveler identity groups.

This desire to travel when feeling represented is even more pronounced for travelers with intersectional identities. Latino travelers with disabilities (80%), LGBTQIA+ travelers with disabilities (76%), and Black travelers with disabilities (69%) say that seeing people like them in promotions increases their likelihood to travel.

70% of underserved travelers are more likely to plan a trip if they see themselves reflected in travel ads.

Takeaway

Incorporating diversity into your content and advertising strategies intentionally and authentically will go a long way with underserved travelers, increasing their likelihood of traveling with you and building brand loyalty. This includes acknowledging intersectionality and the overlap of identities and experiences.

Action

Apply these [tips for inclusive content and advertising](#):

- Use inclusive language and gender-neutral tone in your copy.
- Highlight the accessibility of your services and facilities, for example, non-barrier rooms, accessible bathrooms, on-site restaurants, and more.
- Be thoughtful in representing a variety of perspectives and diversity in videos and imagery, including race, ethnicity, age, ability, and gender.

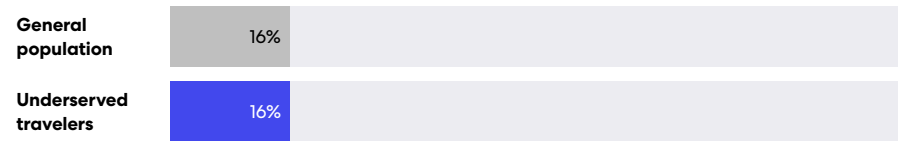
Expedia Group Media Solutions' advertising products such as [TravelAds Sponsored Listings](#), [display advertising](#), and [bespoke Travel Spotlights](#) offer different ways to effectively and authentically reach and engage with travelers. Incorporate representation and inclusivity through customized copy and diverse imagery that promotes unique amenities and features that make your property or destination stand out, such as being an LGBTQIA+-friendly hotel.

Importance of Representation in Travel Ads

When researching potential destinations, it is important travel ads and promotions reflect people like me



Travel ads and promotions represent me very well



Representation in travel ads and promotions make me more likely to plan a trip



Inclusive Advertising in Action

Visit Panama worked with Expedia Group Media Solutions on [dual awareness campaigns](#) to show the diversity and uniqueness of their destination and inclusion practices. The bespoke content featured a three-episode video series, "The Next Turn," following travelers of different abilities as they explored Panama's culture and customs, historical sites, and natural attractions.

"The campaign succeeded in driving a substantial surge in tourist arrivals from our target markets, as well as extended stays among visitors, owing to its strategic promotion of our country's natural attractions, cultural experiences, and adventure activities."

Lorena Correal W., Strategic Alliances Manager, Visit Panama

Alleviate Concerns During the Research and Booking Process

Underserved travelers overwhelmingly prioritize destinations where they feel safe (86%) and welcome (80%). They spend significantly more time researching and planning to determine inclusivity and extra hours to confirm the safety, inclusivity, and accessibility of their destinations for people with their identity. These insights illustrate the gap in available information for underserved travelers and show a clear need to provide them with more resources at the beginning of their trip planning to accelerate booking and increase overall confidence.

LGBTQIA+ travelers with disabilities spend 16 hours researching and planning their travel, compared to 9 hours for general population travelers, and an additional eight hours to ensure the safety, inclusivity, and accessibility of services and destinations.

While travelers across all demographics routinely turn to family and friends, search engines, and online booking platforms as their primary sources of information when researching and planning, underserved populations place more importance and trust in travel experiences from their respective communities.

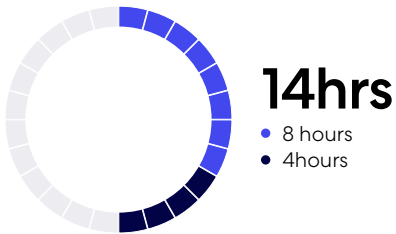
Underserved travelers value and seek out reviews and recommendations from individuals who share their identity. For example, 61% of both Black travelers and Latino travelers prioritize reviews from people with similar backgrounds, compared to 49% of the general population. Similarly, 55% of LGBTQIA+ travelers and 46% of travelers with disabilities consider it essential to receive reviews and recommendations from those who share their identity. This highlights the significant value underserved travelers place on relatable and relevant content when making travel decisions.

Inclusive booking features, including reviews, language options, accessibility search functions, advanced filters, and representational imagery, among others, vary among different identities. Overall, reviews from people who share their identity and the availability of language options that match their preferences are the two most important features when it comes to booking.

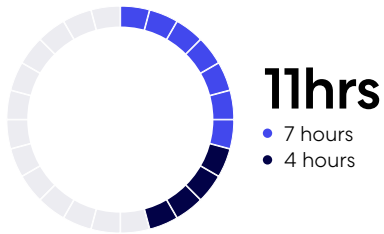
Average time spent researching and planning for a trip

- Time spent researching and planning for a trip
- Extra time spent researching to ensure services and destinations are safe, welcoming, and accessible for people with your identity

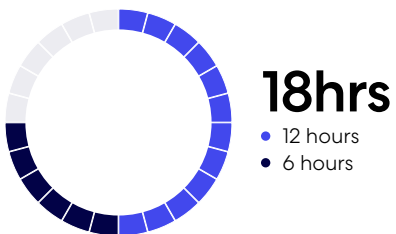
Black travelers



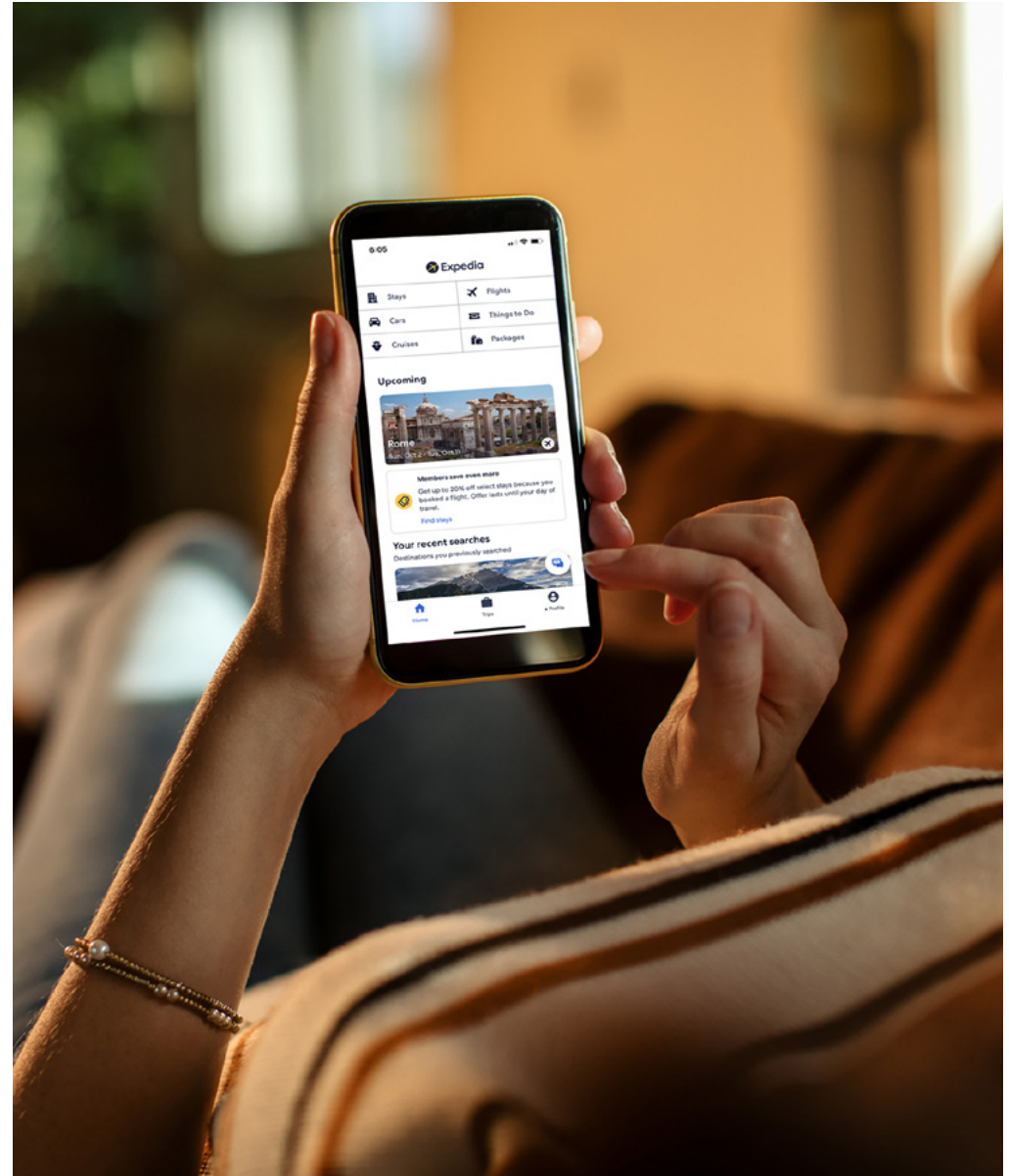
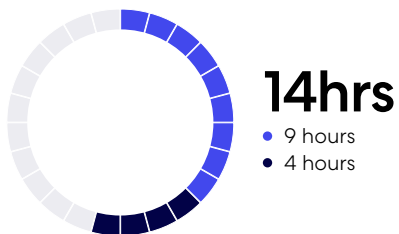
Latino travelers



LGBTQIA+ travelers



Travelers with disabilities



Preferred Booking Features

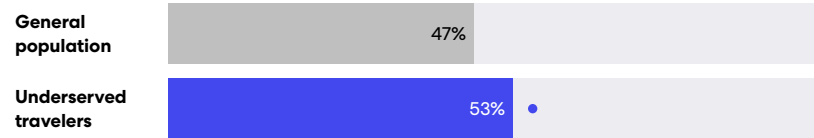
Language options that match my preferences



Imagery/pictures depicting people like me



Advanced filters for gender-inclusive features



• Indicates underserved travelers are much more likely than the general population

Advanced filters for accessibility features



Compatibility with assistive technology



User reviews from people like me



Takeaway

Underserved traveler groups need easier access to more relevant resources and information to help them confidently plan and book trips.

Action

Optimize your listings and content across platforms with details that will help underserved travelers understand whether you will be a safe, inclusive, and accessible option. This can include:

- Accurate descriptions of accessibility options — along with photography — to help travelers with disabilities better understand how they can get around.
- A list of languages spoken by your staff, so travelers know what communication to expect. Be sure to include sign language options if possible.
- Inclusive imagery in your listing photos to make it clear that all identity groups are welcome.
- Designating your property as LGBTQIA+-welcoming on your Expedia Group listing and search results.

Encourage reviews from underserved travelers to provide those within the identity group a better guide for what they can expect.

- Turn on automated post-stay review requests through the Messages tool in Partner Central to increase your reviews.
- Place signs in the guest rooms requesting reviews or have your front desk staff ask during check-out.
- Display positive, relevant reviews across your marketing channels through our Guest Review widget, helping potential travelers feel more confident about choosing your destination or property.

Produce content that fosters a sense of connection and understanding among travelers of all backgrounds, making travelers feel confident while researching, planning, and booking trips.

For example, on your website, house identity-specific guides that include welcoming language and offer recommendations specific to identity, such as LGBTQIA+-friendly restaurants or Black-owned local businesses. Promote this content on your social channels and share it with travelers when they book with you to help them feel more welcome before their trip.

Conclusion

Underserved travelers face unique challenges that shape their decisions and experiences. Travel businesses can better serve these communities by creating more welcoming and inclusive experiences from planning to booking to in-trip.

By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, travel brands can build lasting loyalty and meaningful connections with underserved groups while creating opportunities to grow their business. If we do not take collective action, our growth as an industry is at risk.

For more insights, download Journeys for All: An Expedia Group Study on Inclusion in Travel.

