

ORIENTATION

PALAU

OFFICIAL LINE: Up to 10 years' imprisonment for gay male sex. Like in many island nations whose laws are based in traditional Christian doctrine, it's unclear if lesbians can be cited for sodomy.
REALITY: With its emphasis on high-end resorts and eco-adventure tourism, tiny Palau does not discriminate against the pink dollar. But don't expect any out LGBT scene in this former U.S. territory.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

OFFICIAL LINE: The government of Kessai Note, the first commoner to become head of state, decriminalized homosexuality in 2004 as part of its emphasis on social justice and equality. HIV testing is required of all visitors staying more than 30 days.
REALITY: Indigenous transgenderism or effeminacy is socially accepted, but its relation to male-male sex is not openly acknowledged in this highly Christian country and former U.S. territory.

GUAM

OFFICIAL LINE: Gay sex has been decriminalized in this U.S. territory since 1978. Legal prohibitions apply only to nonconsensual homosexuality, sex in public, and sex with those under the age of consent (16).
REALITY: Guam enjoys the most developed modern gay life in Micronesia, perhaps due to the presence of many U.S. military personnel (Guam seems to operate under a benign version of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy). A low-key queer scene exists linking gay military to the ethnic Chamorro and U.S.-born locals, and to Japanese and Taiwanese tourists. Gay and gay-popular nightclub venues are concentrated in the main town of Tumon. The Ms. Pacificana pageant, a Vegas-style AIDS benefit drag show, made a comeback in 2005 after a long hiatus.

AMERICAN SAMOA

OFFICIAL LINE: Laws against homosexual sodomy were adopted in 1963 but abolished by 1980.
REALITY: The fieldwork site for Margaret Mead's landmark *Coming of Age in Samoa*, chronicling the islands' adolescent sexual freedoms, American Samoa (a U.S. territory) now aggressively polices heterosexual age-of-consent violations. Strict controls on female sexuality mean sexual activity occurs between straight-identified men and transgender *fa'afafine* but bears no correspondence to gay identity. American Samoa offers less opportunity for connections between locals and visitors than Samoa.

- QUEER POSITIVE
- NOT SO POSITIVE
- QUEER NEGATIVE

AUSTRALIA

OFFICIAL LINE: By the end of 2007, the state of Victoria will join the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania, and the cities of Sydney and Melbourne in allowing the legal registration of same-sex partnerships, although these partnerships are not recognized in federal law. Western Australia allows same-sex couples equal access to adoption and fertilization procedures. Foreign partners of lesbian and gay Australians can migrate under a federal partner migration law, and although consensual homosexuality is no longer illegal in any Australian state, anomalous age-of-consent laws persist. In 1991, Queensland decriminalized sex between men, but it has no same-sex partner laws.
REALITY: Despite a currently conservative government, Aussies are much more easygoing on LGBT issues than Americans. With opera, a beach scene, and multiple gayborhoods, Sydney ranks with San Francisco, London, and Amsterdam as a major international gay city. Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is televised nationwide, and LGBT infrastructure and events can be found in every major city and also in queer beach towns like Noosa in Queensland.

NEW CALEDONIA

OFFICIAL LINE: See Tahiti.
REALITY: This French territory's chic main town, Nouméa, has one of the gayest vibes in the South Pacific (save for Australia and New Zealand), with gay bars and gay-friendly nude beaches filled with French expatriates and tourists. The tourism board supports gay marketing, and the local gay and lesbian association, Homo-Sphère, throws many parties and is lobbying for gay rights as New Caledonia heads to a 2014 referendum on full independence from France.

NEW ZEALAND

OFFICIAL LINE: Two national laws, the Civil Union Act and the Relationships Act passed in 2004 and 2005, mean that same-sex couples, including common-law couples who opt not to have a civil union, enjoy rights of immigration as well as next-of-kin status and marital property rights. However, the law does not cover adoption, so gay couples must adopt as individuals.
REALITY: New Zealand may lack the glitz of Australia, but this progressive country boasts the world's first transsexual member of a parliament (who was a former sex worker), and its official stance of antidiscrimination is consistent with its everyday tolerance of sexual differences. The epicenter of LGBT life is Auckland (where the prime minister has joined in its gay pride festival), and the capital, Wellington, also has a sizable gay community. Gay-owned guesthouses and gay-popular nude beaches can be found throughout the country.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

OFFICIAL LINE: The national criminal code dictates possible maximums of 14 years in prison for sodomy, seven years for attempted sodomy, and three years for "gross indecency" (or its attempts) with another man. Lesbian sex may be illegal too, since an unnatural offense is defined as a person who "has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature." The majority of cases reaching court deal with indecent interactions with underage boys or forced sodomy in jail.
REALITY: Many factors have given PNG the highest HIV infection rate in the Pacific—so high that one Australian study says AIDS could kill a third of the country by 2020. According to Human Rights Watch and the Australian government, this is fueled by police indifference to (if not participation in) rape of women, and PNG's own AIDS council asserts that police blame HIV on sex workers and gay or bisexual men, targeting them for arrest. Indigenous forms of same-sex activity, usually intergenerational, have grafted with colonial forms of sex patronage and commercial sex work, but prevalent homophobia makes this a volatile, unsafe combination.

THE GAY MAP OF THE PACIFIC

By Lee Wallace

HAWAII

OFFICIAL LINE: The 50th state gave birth to the U.S. gay marriage movement when three gay couples applied for licenses in 1990. Since then, a number of same-sex marriage bills have been introduced in the state legislature, with hope that one will pass quite soon. Since 1997, Hawaii has offered Reciprocal Beneficiary Registration to same-sex couples, and in 2001, a gay-positive hate-crimes law was passed (and amended in 2003 to include transgender people).

REALITY: Because there is no state residency or U.S. citizenship requirement for those wanting to register their relationships, Hawaii, a gay destination of long standing, has been a popular spot for gay "marriages." Although *mahu* (trans people) are tolerated across the state, nearly all Hawaii's gay infrastructure is found in Honolulu, including gay beaches, gyms, bars, and hotels. But even with Hawaii's progressive politics, island culture may dictate that nonwhite gays and lesbians remain somewhat closeted.

SAMOA

OFFICIAL LINE: Laws against male and female homosexuality with maximum prison penalties from five years ("indecency") to seven years (sodomy).

REALITY:

For the South Pacific Games, which Samoa hosted in summer 2007, Team Samoa managers had ordered that gay sex, because it was an embarrassment to the country and "against the law of God," be barred among its athletes for the games' duration; the head of the Samoan National Olympic Committee soon overruled the prohibition. An increasing overlap between indigenous transgenderism and Western homosexuality has been fueled by local migration. In Apia annual drag beauty pageants retain local flavor but are increasingly designed to attract gay and straight tourists. *Fa'afafine* (transgender people) frequently work in the tourist sector.

Homosexual connections between local men and visitors are made relatively openly within a culture that is much more concerned with controlling female sexuality.

VANUATU

OFFICIAL LINE: No sodomy laws, but there are unequal age-of-consent laws: 15 for heterosexual sex, 18 for homosexual.

REALITY: No real gay scene or dedicated gay resorts, but "no-children" resorts welcome same-sex couples. Vanuatu on the whole is fairly laid-back when it comes to gays, and some LGBT expats live openly in the main town of Port Vila.

FIJI

OFFICIAL LINE: Sodomy laws are still on the books, yet Fiji's latest constitution (written in 1997) banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This paradox was tested in 2005, when two men, an Australian tourist and a Fijian national, were sentenced to two years for private consensual sex. This was overturned on constitutional grounds, although it is unclear what impact this ruling has. The Fijian High Commissioner to New Zealand has since stated that gay men who engage in consensual sex will not be arrested.

REALITY: The local Sexual Minorities Project has been lobbying for LGBT rights for over 10 years, often against the protests of conservative local churches. In 2001 local response to the vicious murder of the director of Fiji's Red Cross and his longtime partner revealed the extent of homophobia. Male prostitution goes on in the capital, Suva, and in Nadi but is aggressively policed. While some resorts advertise themselves as gay-friendly, discretion is required elsewhere. In 2006 plans to establish an exclusively gay resort on the island of Yasawa met local resistance from religious organizations and government officials.

The far-flung nations of the Pacific, often referred along with Australia and New Zealand as the region of Oceania, span nearly half the globe. The islands of the Pacific are broken down into three main ethnic groupings: Polynesia (from Hawaii to New Zealand to Easter Island), Micronesia (from Palau to Kiribati), and Melanesia (from the island of New Guinea to Fiji). The study of the open character of Pacific sexualities, in particular transgenders who are such an obvious presence in Polynesia, helped change Western understandings of homosexuality. But the legacy of Christian missionaries and new nationalist agendas have at times set back the traditionally gay-friendly Pacific cultures. Indigenous sexualities are increasingly being transformed by migration to the large modern gay scenes of the Pacific Rim, namely Sydney, Auckland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where many gay Pacific Islanders flock and at times return home with newly politicized identities. Broadly speaking, the former British or French colonies tend to be more proactive about legal reforms than the U.S. territories, and the Polynesian islands more socially accepting of sexual difference than those of Melanesia and Micronesia.

The map shows the **OFFICIAL LINE** versus the **REALITY** in selected Pacific island groups.

TONGA

OFFICIAL LINE: Prohibits male homosexuality with up to 10 years' imprisonment. Lesbian sex appears to be legal.

REALITY: Although speculation persists over the sexuality of the recently coronated King George Tupou V (a 60-year-old bachelor), reactions to Western homosexuality can be aggressive. More religiously conservative than its South Pacific neighbors, Tonga has experienced recent setbacks to its pro-democracy movement (including riots in November 2006), meaning that gay and lesbian visitors should be cautious.

TAHITI

OFFICIAL LINE: Though there are no sodomy laws, it is unclear what rights LGBT people have in French territories (Tahiti is a part of French Polynesia). Although France's PaCS law (equivalent to a civil union for gays) is technically in effect in all its territories, French Pacific territories have been granted increasing autonomy and have not explicitly recognized PaCS yet.

REALITY: Tahiti is a popular gay vacation-package destination for Europeans and North Americans. U.S.-run gay and lesbian cruises in French Polynesia leave from Papeete, which some mixed gay-straight discos at which Western gays party with local transgender *rae rae*.

WE ASKED OUR READERS: WHICH OF THESE PACIFIC ISLANDS WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO VISIT? YOU SAID...

Hawaii	25%
Australia	20%
Tahiti	18%
New Zealand	13%
Fiji	10%
Vanuatu	3%
Palau	3%
Papua New Guinea	3%
American Samoa	2%
Guam	1%
Tonga	1%
New Caledonia	1%