



Life for LGBT people in Israel

Israel is a generally progressive country where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people live freely and openly. British laws against homosexuality were inherited when Israel was founded in 1948. These were formally repealed in 1988.



Same-sex marriage

There is no system of civil marriage in Israel. Marriages can only be performed under the auspices of a small number of recognised religious communities. Israel does, however, recognise those performed in other countries and since 2007 has given full legal recognition to same-sex marriages in this context. LGBT couples may not be able to marry inside Israel, but in 2012 an Israeli family court granted the first same-sex divorce in the country. In 2013, a trans-woman, Chen Arizona, married her husband in a ceremony that was broadcast on national television news.



Painting the town gay:
Tel Aviv prepares for Pride

Protection against discrimination

LGBT couples in Israel have the same pension, inheritance and medical rights as heterosexual couples. This includes equal access to fertility treatment for lesbian women. Since 2005, LGBT people have been able to adopt each other's children and enjoy full rights as parents. In 1992, employment discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was outlawed. Inclusion of LGBT people in the Israeli military has been formally accepted since 1993. LGBT people now serve openly in the army, navy and air force, with the same rights as those in heterosexual relationships for their partners.

Religious attitudes

Despite Israel's progressiveness, life for LGBT people can still be difficult in Israel. Homophobic attitudes prevail in some traditional communities of all religions and cultures. The religious Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem tried to put a stop to the 2005 Pride parade. When Pride went ahead, a religious Orthodox Jewish man stabbed three participants. He was later convicted and given a 12-year prison sentence.

The established religious authorities in Israel are generally conservative in their attitudes towards LGBT people. However, traditional and progressive Jewish alternatives have proliferated. There are now religious Jewish LGBT groups around Israel, and even LGBT synagogue services in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The leader of one prominent Orthodox Jewish LGBT group is Rabbi Ron Yosef, who came out as gay in 2009.

Social attitudes

Violence against LGBT people is generally rare, but still occurs. A central Tel Aviv centre for young LGBT people was targeted in

2009 and two people were shot dead in an apparent hate crime.

Although polls suggest a majority of Israelis support same-sex marriage, same-sex couples are still unable to marry in Israel, and have to go abroad to do so. Non-Israeli citizens can live in Israel with their same-sex partners as permanent residents, but do not automatically receive citizenship. And although same-sex couples can adopt and receive fertility treatment, it can be difficult for their children to be recognised as legitimate by official religious bodies.

National political life

The first openly gay member of the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) was a professor of chemistry at Tel Aviv University, Uzi Even, who took his seat in 2002. LGBT citizens of Israel also serve as judges, public officials and represent Israel as diplomats throughout the world with full recognition of their partners and children. One such diplomat, Yossi Avni-Levy, is also a writer and the recipient of the Israeli Prime Minister's Prize for Literature.

Israeli culture

LGBT people are prominent in Israeli culture. Several Israeli films with LGBT themes have been successful in recent years, including *Yossi and Jagger* (2002) and *The Bubble* (2006). Starting with *Florentin* (1997), mainstream Israeli television drama has included LGBT characters and including an Orthodox Jewish man struggling with his gay identity (*Srugim*) and a co-parenting couple (*Ima v'Abbaz*). In 2009, Israeli television broadcast the award-winning series *Mary*



Dana International

Lou, an LGBT coming of age drama. This was set to the music of Svika Pick, who also wrote the winning song *Viva La Diva* at the 1998 *Eurovision Song Contest*, famously sung by Dana International – an Israeli trans-woman. *Dancing with the Stars*, the Israeli version of the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, featured its first same-sex couple in 2010 when two women – television sports presenter Gili Shem Tov and Dorit Milman – danced the cha-cha on prime time television.

LGBT culture in Israel

Large Israeli cities have LGBT facilities, including social clubs and bars. Rather than separate LGBT nightclubs, LGBT nights are frequently held at clubs across Israel. Israel is now a popular tourist destination for LGBT people. Tel Aviv has held an annual Pride parade since 1998, with now attracts over 100,000 participants, coming from all over the world. The city celebrated LGBT life in 2012 by painting a number of its pedestrian crossings in rainbow colours for LGBT pride month. Jerusalem has held its own Pride parade since 2002.