# Concerns mount for gay European travellers heading to the US



Tim\*, a seasoned journalist with a history of reporting from the United States since 2008, is experiencing uncertainty ahead of an upcoming work trip scheduled in two weeks. In a candid assessment of his situation, he said, 'I hesitated for a long time about whether to accept the invitation... Honestly, I have no idea what to expect.' Tim chose to remain anonymous to protect his travel arrangements and professional standing.

The concern surrounding travel to the US has intensified following a report in the Financial Times, indicating that the European Commission is advising its employees to utilise 'disposable phones and simple laptops' for US trips. Although the Commission later denied the specifics of that advice, it confirmed that security measures for travel to the US have been tightened, signalling a shift in perception about the risks involved.

For years, US customs has been known for its rigorous checks, allowing border officials to inspect electronic devices of all entrants. Such scrutiny has reportedly become more stringent since Donald Trump's presidency, leading to enhancements in border security practices. In the wake of several incidents where foreign nationals were denied entry or detained based on personal views uncovered in phone content, some European governments have felt obliged to reassess their travel advisories. Germany has specifically tightened its advisory for US travel after multiple arrests at border checkpoints, while Belgium has instructed its citizens to clearly declare their birth gender on travel authorisations, warning against the presence of any political content on electronic devices.

The implications of these developments weigh heavily on Tim, particularly as he approaches this journey not merely as a tourist but as a journalist. He expressed his unease about the potential interpretation of his work by US officials, remarking, 'Will they read my articles and interpret them as a political opinion? Looking at the profiles of those recently arrested—this could easily apply to me.'

Statistics illustrate a broader trend of hesitation among Belgians regarding travel to the US, with a reported 16 per cent decrease in trips last month compared to March 2024. Many within the LGBTQ+ community are particularly apprehensive about the potential ramifications of transgressing political lines. Bart Abeel, a former president of Antwerp Pride, cited his past experience with border controls, expressing his concern: 'If agents look up my name, they will quickly find that I have led Pride for so long... If they want to, they can make it difficult for me. And I simply don’t want that.'

Others, like economist Ive Marx, shared their strategies for navigating border control successfully; Marx stated that he engaged in some 'self-censorship' prior to his arrival in New York. Describing his experience, he noted, 'You have friendly agents and less friendly ones. But if you answer the questions clearly and make it clear that you are not there to interfere with domestic politics, then there's not much to worry about.'

As the landscape of international travel evolves, potential travellers are advised to take measures to mitigate risks, such as applying for their ESTA well in advance and ensuring that their documentation is accurate. There are also practical considerations regarding electronic devices; options to limit scrutiny include using older phones or ensuring that sensitive content is removed before travelling. Tim expressed his conflicted feelings, remarking on the precarious balance between taking precautions and the perception that they may imply withholding information. 'I love the US, but the situation is getting worse by the day. Maybe this will really be the last time I can go?' he pondered as he contemplates his imminent journey.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/> - This URL provides U.S. Department of State travel advisories, which reflect the intense scrutiny and varying levels of caution for international travel to the U.S., aligning with Tim's concerns and the broader context of rigorous U.S. customs checks.
* <https://www.fragomen.com/insights/staying-ahead-of-a-potential-us-travel-ban-a-strategic-guide-for-employers.html> - This resource highlights the ongoing discussions and past implementations of U.S. travel bans, including heightened vetting and screening under the current administration, which might exacerbate Tim's uncertainty about his upcoming trip.
* <https://immigration.dickinson-wright.com/2025/03/19/planning-for-travel-ban-2025-leaked-draft-includes-43-countries/> - This article discusses a proposed U.S. travel ban affecting 43 countries, indicating heightened scrutiny and potential restrictions that could impact international travelers like Tim, contributing to the climate of uncertainty around U.S. travel.
* <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/journalist-travelers.html> - This guide for journalist travelers emphasizes the importance of researching destinations and being aware of legal and security considerations, which aligns with Tim's concerns as a journalist planning to travel to the U.S.