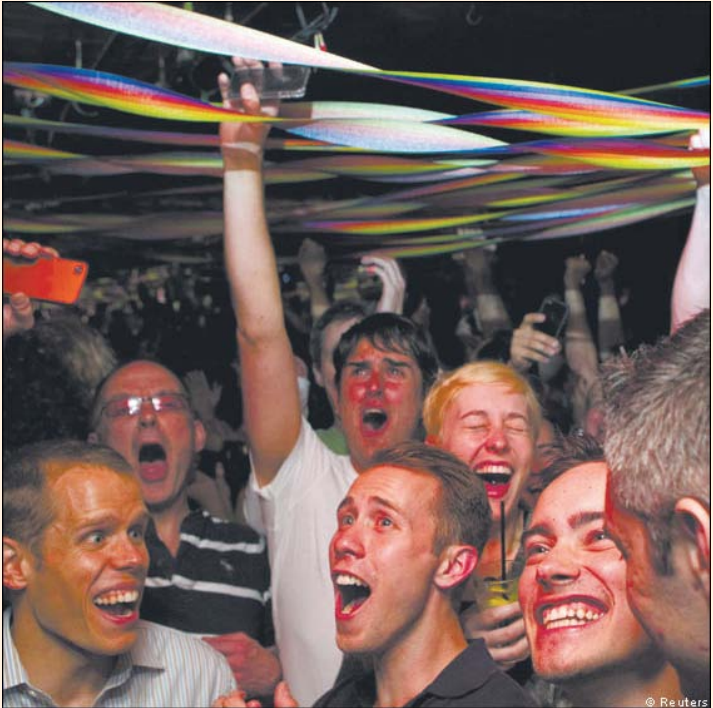


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New York set for boom in gay weddings

By Shannon Bond in New York



A champagne toast, a suite overlooking Fifth Avenue, an intricately crafted cake and a carriage ride through Central Park: all the elements of a classic New York wedding are included in a package the Pierre Hotel is marketing to gay couples following the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

The luxury hotel is just one of many businesses advertising special deals timed to follow the state's [landmark legislation](#) – part of the city's global marketing campaign to sell New York as a gay wedding destination.

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“We already had a package in mind when the city approached the hotel about its push,” said Nora Walsh, the Pierre’s director of public relations. “It

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was a great chance to get it out there right away. We wanted to make sure that everyone knows we're celebrating the age of modern marriage."

New York's marriage equality act is likely to generate some \$311m in revenue from weddings, tourism, taxes and licence fees for the state over

the next three years, according to [projections from the state senate's Independent Democratic Conference](#).

The city's hotels, wedding planners, caterers, photographers and other businesses are gearing up for a surge of interest following the passage of the legislation, which goes into effect in late July. "We anticipate that the campaign, set to launch soon, will create hundreds of millions of dollars in additional economic impact to the city's \$31bn tourism industry, and have a positive impact on tourism industry jobs," said George Fertitta, the tourism bureau's chief executive.

"Every time a new state has legalised [gay] marriage, more people want to get into the business," said Bernadette Smith, a wedding planner who specialises in ceremonies for gay clients. "But New York is even more appealing to same-sex couples across the country because the origin of the modern gay civil rights movement is here."

Carley Roney, editor in chief of The Knot, a wedding website, agreed. "Yes, you can go to Vermont or New Hampshire or Massachusetts, states where gay marriage is already legal," she said. "It's just not as sexy as coming to New York City."

With the average cost of a wedding in New York running at more than \$70,000, according to The Knot, a large proportion of that money will funnel to businesses in the city. In addition, as heterosexual marriage rates have stalled nationally, gay marriage carries the promise of expanding the market for the first time in two decades, Ms Roney said.

"The people who are high fiving themselves and chest bumping right now are the venues, which account for about half the total cost of a wedding," she said. "This is going to be a huge influx of money into caterers, hotels, reception halls, anyone who is in the venue rental business. That's where all the money goes."

Smaller players in the wedding industry are also seeing a rush of interest. Annie Lawrence, an interfaith minister in Manhattan, has received about a dozen calls since Friday. "The first couple to contact me was from Long Island. They've been together 19 years and already have the date booked," she said.

Recalling a British couple who spoke with her last month about a civil union in New Jersey, she said, "I can't wait to tell them they can do it in New York instead." Ms Lawrence also plans to contact couples for whom she has performed commitment ceremonies and invite them to come back to get legally married.

Ms Smith, the wedding planner, has been organising celebrations in Boston for more than seven years. When the measure came to a vote in the New York senate on Friday, she was ready. She opened an office in Manhattan and has started taking calls from excited couples – and from people looking for a job.