

LGBTQ GUIDE TO STUDYING ABROAD

Studying Abroad can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. It is a chance to explore the world, learn about a new culture, push your own boundaries and grow as a person. There is no doubt that this type of experience will challenge you in many ways. This handout is designed for those students who identify as LGBTQ and wish to study abroad. What does being LGBTQ in another country mean? What are the cultural norms of a particular society? Is this country right for me? Below are a few recommendations to help you make an informed decision and facilitate the transition to a new environment.

BEFORE HEADING OFF...

There are a few things that you may want to research before departing for your study abroad experience.

Cultural Differences with respect to LGBTQ issues

Just as seen here in the United States, attitudes and understanding of LGBTQ individuals and issues vary region by region. Cultural sensitivity is important to keep in mind while living and traveling abroad. In some places you may not be able to express yourself as you do at home so you must be conscious of the social reality that exists in the region you are interested in while choosing your program. The best way to learn is by researching in advance. Look for blogs, newspaper articles, or books that talk about the LGBTQ attitudes abroad or see if anyone you know may be familiar with this topic. The more you know beforehand will affect how easy the transition will be upon arriving.

Legal Rights of LGBTQ individuals

Another important item to research is the legal environment surrounding LGBTQ issues. In some countries LGBTQ individuals are protected and have just as many rights as other members of society. Unfortunately there are other places where identifying as LGBTQ openly is punishable by law or there may be no laws to protect an individual from hate crimes. Therefore it is extremely important to know the legal regulations and conditions of a country so that you can try to avoid any problem or uncomfortable situation.

Resources that your specific program offers

With awareness across the world of LGBTQ issues on the rise, many study abroad programs have started to develop resources for LGBTQ individuals specific to their own region or program. Many times the program headquarters will have information and resources available on their websites for LGBTQ individuals, but if you would like to learn more specifically about a program, emailing the program office may uncover more useful information. You may also wish to contact a previous student from the program to see if they can tell you anything about the country in terms of LGBTQ issues.

Research the Area for other Resources

Not all programs may be as helpful or have the necessary resources that you may desire. A bit of searching on the internet however can often reveal many helpful organizations and NGOs that can

provide a rich insight into the conditions abroad. Start with a basic search through blogs and social networking sites and go from there.

Cornell Resources

Don't hesitate to talk to your Advisor from Cornell Abroad or the Cornell LGBT Resource Center about what you might expect abroad and resources available to you.

WHILE ABROAD...

Homestays/Housing

Your living arrangement while abroad will differ by program. No matter where you are staying, you should feel safe and comfortable at all times. It is up to you to decide whether to openly express yourself, but be sure to think of all of the consequences that this action could have before acting. If staying with a homestay family, ask yourself if you feel the family would be accepting or what kind of change in the family dynamic would occur if you chose to come out. It is important to be sensitive to the various cultural practices across the world, and this may mean not being able to be as open about your sexuality as you are at home. You may wish to talk to the housing director of your program to see if they can put you with a family they know would be accepting, or if any problems arise during your time with a family, speak up and don't be afraid to ask for a change in living arrangements. You should feel at home wherever you stay at while abroad and the study abroad program should try to make you as comfortable as possible.

Relationships

It is important to be self-conscious of the way you interact with people while abroad. Whether it is with friends or people you may be interested in dating; body language, verbal cues and the manner you compose yourself may be interpreted differently abroad than it is at home. Something can elicit a completely different response than you expect, so be aware of this and try to learn the particular customs of your region. The way in which LGBTQ individuals interact may be different also depending on the part of the world and this can affect how open they can be. Take this into consideration if you meet someone and pursue a relationship. Also be sure to always practice safe sex and be aware of any sexual health resources that may be available to you.

Support Networks and Safety

Having a support network while abroad is extremely helpful. Whether it is because you miss your home, are suffering through culture shock, or are having issues being LGBTQ in the country, a support network will help you cope with your issues and can guide you in times of need. Try to make some friends that you can talk with on the program or even open up to a member of the program faculty. Meeting people in the country also can be helpful when you feel lost or confused, so try to get out and immerse yourself in the culture. Having support includes having safe places that you can identify across the region. Whether it is police stations, the program headquarters, or an organizations office, know at all times where they are located because safety is extremely important and you should have a plan of action if the need were to arise.