

SOME QUESTIONS **LGBTQ STUDENTS SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN MAKING THE DECISION TO STUDY ABROAD:**

ABOUT ME:

- How open will I be about my sexual orientation and gender identity with my teachers, peers, friends, host family and others?
- How important is it to me to find other sexual minority students and friends while abroad? How will I make connections with other sexual minority students, local residents, or community organizations and gathering places? How will I make connections with others regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity in my host country? What are my expectations about seeking and finding community?
- Will I need access to any medications, supplies, or services due to my transgender status? Are they available in my host country? If not, will I need any additional documentation to travel with my medication or supplies?
- What are my safety needs and perceptions, and how can they best be met? Is the program able to make special accommodations for students who request single rooms, private baths, or certain roommates?
- What resources are available in my host country for sexual minority people?
- Are there any LGBT-friendly establishments nearby? How can I find them?

ABOUT SEXUALITY AND GENDER:

- What are the cultural attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity in my host country?
- What is considered typical male and female social behavior and customary gender relations and social patterns in the host country?
- What may make the coming out process different in the host country compared to the U.S.?
- What are the norms and behavioral expectations within the LGBT communities in my host country?
- What is the social perception of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in my host country? How are LGBT people socially defined? What roles do transgender people play in the host culture?

ABOUT THE LAW AND LOCAL ATTITUDES:

- Are there “public decency” laws? Or “public indecency” laws?
- What is the age of consent? Does it differ for heterosexual versus same-sex couples?
- Does the law require having “proper documentation” at all times?
- What is the police attitude towards the local LGBT community?
- Is the law applied the same to “upper class” and “working class” LGBT people?
- Is the law applied the same in urban areas as in rural areas?

ABOUT CITIZENSHIP AND LGBT PERCEPTION:

- What is the attitude of local residents toward Americans, people of other nationalities, “tourists,” LGBT “tourists”?
- What is the police attitude towards local residents, Americans, or people of other nationalities?
- What is the police attitude towards LGBT “tourists” who are visiting the country?

Learn the laws of your host country regarding LGBT issues, same-sex sexual behavior and expressions of LGBT identity and community. You are required to follow the law in your host country. Once outside the United States you are no longer protected by U.S. laws. If same-sex acts are illegal in your host country and you are caught engaging in them (or presumed to have engaged in them), you could be arrested and imprisoned in that country. In some countries, the penalties are very severe and can even include deportation, corporal punishments, and execution. And just as in the U.S., in some countries, regions and municipalities you can be legally detained or discriminated against whether you are actually LGBT or merely perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Be familiar with local laws and customs so you can make informed and safe choices about destinations and programs which will be the best fit for you and your needs.

Get to know your destination. Explore LGBT travel guides and internet resources. Talk with other LGBT and allied people about their experiences in certain countries or regions to gather as much information as possible upon which to make your choices and decisions. Once in your host country, find out what local newspapers, magazines or online resources may be available.

Context is everything; similar expressions or behaviors may have vastly different meanings in different places. In some locations when you are outside distinct gay 'neighborhoods' or specific vacation or resort facilities, open expressions of your sexual orientation might be frowned upon. In some other areas or the world, expressions of friendship may be quite different than those expressed among your U.S. peers and cause you to experience confusion or uncertainty about who may or may not be LGBT. Find out about attitudes and customs in your host country so you can read the local "road-map" of human interaction and expression like an experienced pro.

Avoid potentially risky situations. Be aware of your environment, stay alert and in control.

Don't be lulled into a false sense of security. Be aware that criminals have been known to exploit the generally open and relaxed nature of gay 'neighborhoods' and beaches; and like it or not, not all LGBT people are trustworthy and kind. Don't leave your belongings unattended and try not to carry large amounts of money around with you. Make good choices about your personal property and your personal trust.

No matter what your sexual orientation, it's important to think about your sexual health before you leave. Be prepared both mentally and physically – some sexual health products are not as readily available abroad as they are in the United States, and quality and dosages can differ. Conversely, in some other countries you may be surprised or shocked by the easy and open manner in which people talk about and obtain information and supplies pertaining to sexual health. Always practice safe sex.

Seek the advice of Cornell Study Abroad, local police, or the nearest U.S. consulate if you encounter any difficulties.