

10 REASONS WHY LGBTQ STUDENTS SHOULD STUDY ABROAD

1. UNDERSTAND SEXUALITY IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Part of looking at sexuality as a student abroad is situating sexual practices and identities in their cultural contexts through meeting new people, asking questions, and observing how people interact with each other. Just like other forms of hierarchy and difference, sexuality does not manifest in the same ways across time and space. The specificity of sexuality will become more clear upon studying abroad as an LGBTQ student.

2. GAIN PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR IDENTITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Coming out is a difficult process that solidifies identities for many LGBTQ students, and so those who are studying abroad may have acquired a strong sense of their sexualities. Being among people who identify in different ways that may or may not relate to sexuality will help you contextualize your identities. You may even enjoy foregrounding different identities in different settings, feeling more stable or more fluid depending on the constraints of your situation.

3. BUILD TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AMONG SEXUAL MINORITIES

Too often sexual empowerment is portrayed as a Western political goal that does not or should not take on a transnational life, bringing together sexual minorities in disparate locations. But in order to create a more equal and healthy sexual world it is necessary for sexual minorities to come together and build relationships of understanding and solidarity. Instead of assuming either that sexual minorities do not exist where you are traveling or that their concerns do not relate to your own, step outside of your comfort zone, find the spaces where sexual minorities are visible, and participate in those spaces for projects of collective empowerment.

4. LEARN TO BE MORE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR SEXUALITY

LGBTQ students studying abroad may often have developed spaces where they are comfortable expressing their sexualities; while this process is necessary and constructive, it can also invest a sense of complacency in our everyday thoughts and actions. Being a sexual minority in a new place will enable you to be more frequently conscious of how you do or do not think about, express, present, and share your sexuality. While this new learning will sometimes require you to change how you make your identities visible to others, you will ultimately come away with more nuanced perceptions that can be tied to specific cultural contexts.

5. CONNECT WITH DIFFERENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FIGHTING FOR SEXUAL RIGHTS

Building transnational solidarity among sexual minorities does not require participation in social movements, but such movements can be enlightening and empowering components of your study abroad experiences. While the American LGBT movement has acquired some international influence over how sexuality is made political, social movements in other contexts have different political goals and perspectives, sometimes in opposition to those in the United States. For example, gay marriage has assumed the status of a panacea in mainstream thinking about sexual rights; however, the movement for sexual rights in India has placed more emphasis on legal reform and resistance to violence. In the end, comparing different movements will help you to formulate the political goals that are most meaningful for you as an LGBTQ student.

6. CHALLENGE THE LANGUAGE OF LGBTQ

One of the first issues with which LGBTQ people in the United States often struggle is the language of LGBTQ and the labels that they carry. Similarly, the language of LGBTQ does not translate to all cultural contexts. In fact, sexual minorities in disparate locations have unique and personal ways of thinking about identities and sexualities. Learning these new languages can be as integral to your study abroad experiences as improving the languages that you've learned at Cornell. Perhaps you will be more aware of why you prefer the labels of LGBTQ, or these labels may become less stable in characterizing your sexuality.

7. DISPEL STEREOTYPES (BOTH OTHERS' AND YOUR OWN) ABOUT SEXUAL MINORITIES

A whole range of stereotypes about queers in different locations are proliferating through the mass media and official discourse of globalization--one is reminded of the generalizations made by American LGBT groups about homosexuality in Iran after the execution of two Iranian teenagers, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, in 2005. Through your conversations about sexuality and study abroad, you can challenge these stereotypes and offered more contextualized pictures of sexuality. You may be surprised to discover that mainstream stereotypes were helping to condition your own perceptions of sexuality.

8. VIEW SEXUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

A consequence of the mainstreaming of LGBT politics in the United States in the context of American imperial expansion is that the U.S. is constructed as a promised land for sexual minorities. However going abroad will allow you to hear others' perceptions of the U.S. and its conditions for diverse queer groups and to see this nation on a global level. Internal and external power hierarchies founded on sexuality may become more visible, leading to new understandings of your position as a sexual minority living in the U.S.

9. BRING TOGETHER DIFFERENT IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Perhaps the most astonishing experiences of being abroad is learning more about yourself, often even more than you learned about where you studied. As an LGBTQ student abroad, you will be able to integrate your sexuality with the other identities and interests that compelled you to go abroad. Hopefully, upon returning and in your future travels, you will continue this project of integration and make sexuality a major component of how you engage cross-culturally. While this certainly may include visiting new places, it can also mean providing a global context to your conversations with peers about sexuality and identity.

10. EDUCATE YOUR PEERS ABOUT OTHER FORMS OF QUEER WORLD MAKING

As briefly mentioned in the last point, a component of study abroad is communicating your better understanding of disparate locations to your friends, families, colleagues, and mentors. Don't forget to include how queers in your study abroad destination are engaged in their varying and deeply meaningful projects of queer world-making that distinct from the world-making of American queer people. In sharing queer world-making activities, it becomes possible to connect issues of identity, language, performance, practice, behavior, and others that queers employ to produce new spatial and temporal worlds.