

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

LGBTQ TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVES



An Initiative to Make Travel More Inclusive



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# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR LGBTQ TRAVELERS

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



**L**GBTQ travelers who decide to go abroad – whether that be to study, teach, intern, or volunteer – are making the decision to take on an even bigger challenge than their heterosexual and cis-gendered peers. Every country around the world has varying laws, customs, and beliefs about the LGBTQ community, and therefore will react and treat LGBTQ travelers in a unique way. After potentially overcoming the challenges of coming out in their home countries, LGBTQ students who head abroad can be overwhelmed when faced with coming out all over again, except this time in a completely foreign and sometimes unfriendly environment for people who identify as LGBTQ that may or may not lack an understanding or acceptance of LGBTQ students.

Accessibility is an issue for most students who want to study, intern, teach, or volunteer abroad, but don't have the resources to do so. Beyond just financial resources, if students can't see themselves in the stories, articles, and blog posts, written by alumni, going abroad won't seem like a viable option. In a field centered around diversity and cultural exchange, this is a shame. Our contributors are sharing their personal stories and travel expertise in order to change that.

More and more, studying abroad is becoming somewhat of a standard endeavor of college students; this guide was created to help ensure that LGBTQ students have all the resources they need to participate in study abroad safely, happily, and successfully. **Everyone deserves the opportunity to travel meaningfully, and GoAbroad is dedicated to providing every LGBTQ student, and every student for that matter, with the tools, knowledge, and confidence they need to do so.**

This is an open book (pun intended). It will continue to grow as we share more stories and add more voices.

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Charleen Johnson Stoeber** is an introverted lover of dragon fruit juice. She loves sitting with Nicaraguan children on the side of the street while patiently breaking down North American stereotypes. With a short haircut and watermelon shaped earrings, she is passionate about mental health and the rewards that come with vulnerable travel. Not only does she write for five different blogs, she also teaches art and English classes in the mountains of Nicaragua.



**Julia Zaremba** is an avid traveler, lifelong artist, theater geek, interior designer, future author, and occasional teacher. Originally from Germany, she was raised and started her university studies in Texas, before moving to Italy for her first formal teaching experience. Since then, she has traveled throughout Europe and the Americas, constantly on the look-out for the next adventure. Julia has a habit of getting stuck in love-and-hate relationships with various countries...but love conquers all.



**Emily Howard** is a British-born but European-minded radical feminist, leftist, and queer trans activist involved in community-led grassroots social justice groups. They are also a Journalism Master's student, especially interested in writing and podcast-making with the aim of getting under-represented voices heard. In their free time, Emily enjoys academic and political discussions, especially around decolonisation, and they would love to travel to previously colonised places to learn about non-European identities, histories and cultures.



**Maima Faith Merin's** burning passion for environmental initiatives has led her to live a nature-loving lifestyle. After being bitten by the travel bug back in college, she can't wait to explore more of the Philippines, before conquering the rest of the world. Despite her need to constantly be outdoors, sometimes a cup of tea and the comfort of her bed is enough to make her happy. Maima has been to a lot of places, from oceans to mountains and cities to countrysides, but no matter where she goes she is sure of one thing, the unforgettable experience of exploring new places is much better amidst great company.



**Evan Townsend** is a trained journalist, an amateur marine biologist, and a professional plane napper. In addition to writing, Evan has worked as a teacher, babysitter, turkey wrangler, dishwasher, and curriculum developer. He has lived and worked on all the continents (yes, including Antarctica.) For inquiries about purchasing the movie rights to his life story, please contact his agent.

# LGBTQ DEFINITIONS

There is no better time than the present to understand what being an LGBT student means and to raise awareness about the unique needs and challenges that LGBT students face in our world today. For the sake of all LGBT students who have a desire to step outside their comfort zone and study abroad, we are here to help get a few things straight. We encourage study abroad advisers, university professionals, program providers, teachers, and everyone involved in education to take time to understand the LGBT community on a deeper level.

## What does lesbian mean?

A woman who is attracted woman, and not men, is called a lesbian. A lesbian is the name associated with female homosexuals.

## What does gay mean?

A man who is attracted to men, and not women, is called gay. The term gay is associated with male homosexuals.

## What does bisexual mean?

Both men and women can be bisexual, which means they are attracted to both men and women.

## What does transgender mean?

A transgender person is someone, whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from what is typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender individuals are commonly referred to as transgender men or women. Transgender men are those individuals who have transitioned their gender identity from female to male (also signified by FTM). On the other hand, transgender women are those individuals who were assigned as male at birth, but have transitioned to females (MTF).

## What does queer mean?

Although this term was (and sometimes still is) used as a slur to refer to anyone identifying LGBT, the community has begun to reclaim it— hence including the Q in LGBTQ. Queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term referring to the entire LGBT community, but the true use and definition of it will vary in meaning and use from person to person. It's an alternative way for people to identify themselves, especially when "traditional" labels don't quite fit.

## What is a transition?

Those who have "transitioned" from their gender assignment given at birth have successfully changed their gender expression or behavior to the gender which they truly identify with. Some transgender individuals choose to use medical procedures or hormones to help with their transition, and others alter legal identity documentation.



# WHY LGBTQ TRAVELERS FACE UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Female or male. Boy or girl. When our mothers were pregnant everyone wanted to know the sex of the baby. When we went to school, girls wore skirts and boys wore pants. As we got older, girls were expected to like the color pink and dolls, while boys were supposed to like the color red and cars.

Gender socialization has had a huge impact on societies all across the world for centuries. For many years, gender and sex were synonymous, and every one was assigned only one, regardless of any internal or physical differences they may have.

Today, gender and sex are distinctly different, and the world is no longer black or white. However, acceptance takes an unfortunately long time, and some people remain entirely uneducated about the reality and diversity that exists within gender constructions and sexual orientation. Therefore, there are still a great deal of discrepancies that exist and much more awareness left to be raised, terms to be understood, and discussions to be had.

In terms of international education, LGBT travelers face a whole host unique challenges, uncertainties, and questions when contemplating traveling abroad. They may ask themselves any one of the following questions, among hundreds of others:

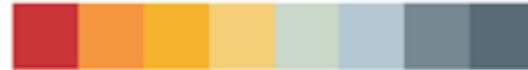
- Will I be accepted?
- Will I be safe?
- Will I be able to express myself?
- Will I feel comfortable with my housing?
- Will I experience discrimination?
- Will I have trouble in transit?
- Will I have support from my host university?

**All of these questions are important, and each one deserves an answer. Continue reading this guide to find answers to some of the questions listed above. Although we may not have all the answers yet, we are doing our best to find them.**

We invite the LGBT student community, study abroad alumni, advisors, and all LGBTQ allies out there to speak up! Email [content@goabroad.com](mailto:content@goabroad.com) to share your story, advice, and tips for LGBTQ students, and you may just find yourself inspiring others to go abroad!

# A MAP OF LGBTQ ACCEPTANCE AROUND THE WORLD

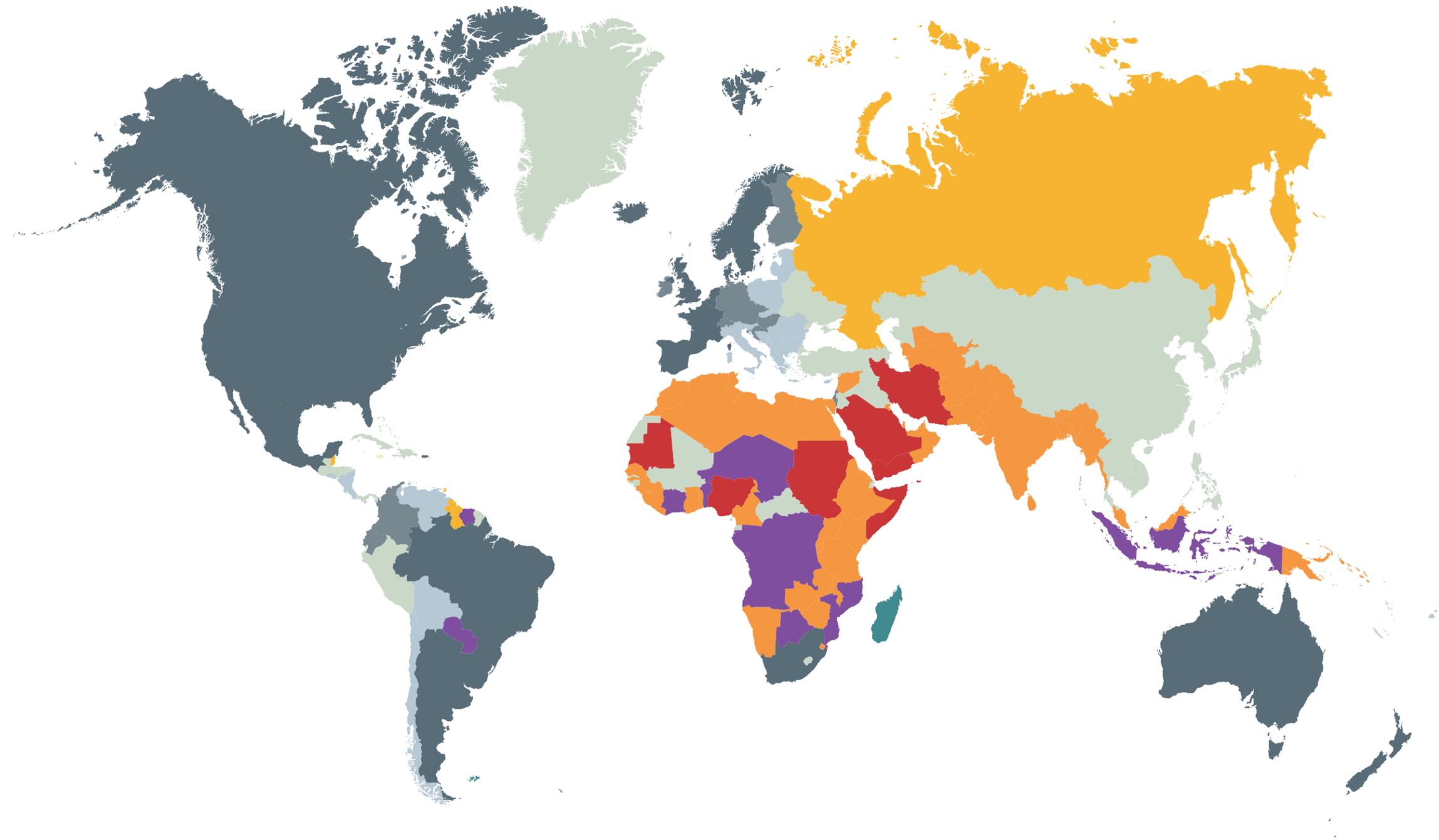
ANTI GAY LAWS



SAME SEX MARRIAGE



CONTRADICTIONARY LAWS





# QUEER IDENTITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE

by Emily Howard

Travelling as an LGBTQ person can be daunting, when the culture and attitudes of new places are unfamiliar, and it's easy to assume that you're the only queer in town. Yet, all around the world, individuals are living with gender and sexual identities that would be seen through Western eyes as LGBTQ – but they're not. Infinite identities and experiences which escape Western labels exist in almost every corner of the planet. So, if you think you're alone as an LGBTQ+ traveler in distant places, you're probably not as alone as you think.

## North America

When exploring North America's queer culture, it's unlikely that you'll meet many two-spirit people. **Two-spirit is an umbrella term used by some gender non-conforming indigenous North American people**, whose gender identities are based on their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Some, but not all, two-spirit people are attracted to people assigned the same sex as themselves at birth, but "homosexual" or "bisexual" labels do not capture their spiritual identities.

Originally conceived as gifted people who carried both male and female spirits, the roles of two-spirit people stem from their ancient culture where they were often the visionaries, healers, and medicine people. In indigenous North American tribes today, two-spirit people are still well-respected: they fulfil a sacred, spiritual and ceremonial role and are officially recognised by the Elders of the community.

## South Asia

Travelling across the Indian subcontinent, you may come across hijras. **Hijras are called different names, but they all have one thing in common: they identify as neither male nor female.** Assigned male at birth, hijra individuals present themselves in a feminine manner, and are officially recognised as a third gender.

You won't really see hijras in the "gay" scene, however, as usually their partners are "heterosexual" men who are married with families.

The history of hijras spans 4,000 years, when they were spiritually and religiously respected. Nowadays, most hijras live together collectively under the guide of their guru, who acts as a guardian, role model and advisor. Many hijra people are found on the street, as they are forced into sex work for survival and often face violence and oppression. However, in society they often also play cultural roles, for example by performing at ceremonies.

## East Asia

Nowadays, many Westerners head to Japan. But, before Western contact, Japan didn't have a system for identifying different sexualities. Here, gender and sexuality are not perceived through binary, individual frames, but through a spectrum which focuses on the social roles of the collective society. Amongst the Samurai, male-male sexual relations were an intricate part of male socialization. Men who engaged in homosexual acts were called "wakashudo," meaning "the way of the young men".

Today, many Japanese people still don't identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. **Kono sekai means "this world," and is used to refer to a wide variety of gender and sexual subcultures in Japan.** However, Westernization is being slowly adopted, with "gei" (gay) and "rezubian" (lesbian) becoming recognised - and "gay" spaces can be increasingly found, especially in the main cities.

## South Pacific

Venturing to Samoa as a non-binary traveler is fascinating, given the well-accepted third gender, **fa'afafine**, which has been recognised in Samoa, American Samoa and the Samoan diaspora since at least the early 20th century. In traditional families here, if a family did not have enough girls to help with duties typically done by women, they would choose a male child to be raised as fa'afafine.

Assigned male at birth, fa'afafine people embody both masculine and feminine characteristics, and express themselves in multiple ways, from flamboyantly feminine to conventionally masculine. Generally, fa'afafine people are known to have relationships with men, however there is also no concept of "gay" or "straight" in Samoa.

## Deconstructing Colonial Concepts

It was traveling, in the original sense – as explorers and conquerors – that brought about norms of gender and sexuality in the first place. The spread of Western concepts of gender and sexuality has been attributed to European imperialism. Through the imposition of European imperial laws, gender and sexual norms devised during the Enlightenment were forced upon populations around the world. For example, homosexual acts between men were criminalized in 41 colonies under British rule.

Queer travelers must take caution even today, as this colonial law still exists today in India, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, the Maldives and Jamaica.

**“You can find people with alternative gender and sexual identities in every corner of the globe.”**

So, although traveling as an LGBTQ person abroad can be daunting and often feel lonely, you're probably not the "odd one out" as much as you think. Although they might not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer, if you know how to look, you can find people with alternative gender and sexual identities in every corner of the globe.

If nothing else, learning about these unique approaches and definitions of gender and sexuality around the world is an interesting exercise in learning more about the LGBTQ community and its (sometimes) ancient roots.



# SAFE, NEUTRAL, & NEGATIVE LOCALES FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS ABROAD

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by Julia Zarembo

Growing up in a liberal environment, it might seem perfectly normal to dress up as rainbow fairy or unicorn and march in Pride parades. With pro-LGBTQ protests, social movements, and legal rights increasing every day, a utopia of support develops, and that glare someone gave you in the parking lot for holding hands with your same-sex partner becomes the evening's heated dinner topic.

Honestly, this is great. In many countries of the world, the LGBTQ community has come a long way, and each victory should be celebrated until equity has been reached. However, this isn't the case in all countries in the world.

Just like queer people seek respect and affirmation, it is their job to understand the LGBTQ culture of a country before leaving for a study abroad program. Certain beliefs and progressive rights have not been accepted by many countries, and, as an LGBTQ student going abroad, it is not the host country's job to advocate for these rights. I'm all for social justice, but it's important to understand that what is accepted in our society might be penalized by death in others. Studying abroad as an LGBTQ student certainly adds another layer of preparation to the study abroad process, and there are extra things to be aware of throughout your time abroad, too.

That being said, LGBTQ students are not technically banned from studying abroad in any country in the world. What they should be aware of, however, is that reality might be different abroad, and adjustments in behavior might be necessary. Understand your social agenda, decide how much you are willing to compromise, and then take a look at the countries below. The following countries cover the spectrum of support for LGBTQ people and their rights:

## LGBTQ-Friendly Study Abroad Locales

More developed countries, especially those in northern Europe, have [the most affirming LGBTQ communities](#). If you would like to continue your crusade for freedom, get involved with LGBTQ activities at school, and have an open relationship with your partner, these options will let you focus on studies without sacrificing any of your colorful bracelets or PDA moments.

**Canada.** Toronto is home to Canada's largest gay community, with no shortage of LGBTQ-approved neighborhood nooks and events throughout the year.

**Spain.** Spain is one of the world's most LGBT-friendly nations, according to the results of a [2013 poll by the Pew Research Centre](#). Further, Spain is hosting World Pride Madrid 2017, the great world LGTB Pride festival.

**France.** A more egalitarian social mindset allows for a general acceptance of the LGBTQ community. France was one of the first countries to remove transsexualism from its list of mental illnesses, and Paris specifically offers a supportive network for LGBTQ students abroad.

**Scandinavia.** The first country to recognize same-sex partnerships, [Denmark](#), also hosts the impressive Copenhagen Pride event every year. [Norway](#), [Finland](#), and [Sweden](#) offer more civil rights to the LGBTQ community than many other European countries.

**New Zealand.** With a growing network of LGBTQ-friendly homestay options, New Zealand is increasing in acceptance rapidly, and even hosts a Gay Ski week at the end of August (the biggest gay party in the Southern Hemisphere, I've heard).

**Prague, Czech Republic.** The Czech Republic, for the most part, mirrors the homophobia present in Eastern Europe. However, Prague sparkles bright as a LGBTQ beacon in the region, and offers some of the most active LGBTQ communities, with monthly events.

## LGBTQ-Neutral Study Abroad Locales

If you don't want to feel threatened by your sexual orientation, but have no need to lead equality marches, parts of Asia and Central America has plenty of nature, history, and delicious treats to offer study abroad students without infringing on their sexual identification.

**China.** Unwanted attention in China will likely come from skin color, rather than sexual orientation. While social pressures force many people to remain "closeted," the LGBTQ movement has grown significantly in the last ten years, and new rights are being steadily gained.

**Japan.** Since its samurai days, expressions of gender dressing have been more open, with skirts, long hair, and facial piercings not uncommon. Today, same-sex marriage and gender changes are legal. Society might not be open as publically as other countries, but that is changing every day.

**Costa Rica.** Even though Catholicism and Latin American machismo are still present in Costa Rica, the high volume of international travelers are establishing a growing acceptance of the LGBTQ community. San Jose offers LGBTQ-friendly areas and same-sex relations have been legal since 1972.



## LGBTQ-Negative Study Abroad Locales

Unfortunately, many parts of the world do not approve of LGBTQ identification. While all are welcome to study abroad in these locations (and the opportunity for cultural revelation can be great), it's not recommended to flaunt your personal life and romantic choices publicly.

**Malaysia.** As an Islamic nation, homosexuality and gender changes are not supported by law, and society's understanding of specific terms is very limited. Penalties for such behavior include up to 20 years of imprisonment.

**Nigeria.** With over 95 percent of the population not accepting of homosexuality and same-sex acts punishable by death, Nigeria is the least LGBTQ-friendly country in Africa. It shares its opinion with many neighbors, such as Mauritania, Sudan, and Somalia.

**Jamaica.** Although the LGBTQ community here is starting to fight for rights, there are still many violent crimes directed toward homosexual and bisexual people. Sexual acts between men can result in ten years of imprisonment, and homophobia is high in society.

As a rule, LGBTQ communities are more prominent in larger cities, where mindsets are more liberal and the demographic more varied. In more rural areas, traditional mindsets, most of these rooted in religion and social norms, tend to be more prominent. So, when wanting to explore Eastern Europe, opt for Prague as a home base. If you are intrigued by Mexico, Mexico City offers an active LGBTQ scene, but other regions are not as accepting. Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are some of the most popular LGBTQ tourist destinations, but LGBTQ hate crimes are on the rise in the rest of Brazil.

Regardless of which country you chose as your next study abroad venture, it is important to understand local customs of host countries. Even if LGBTQ practices are legal, maybe culture discourages coming out publically (and this is probably true of many private matters, don't take it personally). At the same time, you can use this as an opportunity to show others that LGBTQ people are just humans who happen to identify or love differently than most people and teach others some new vocabulary; just be smart about your approach.

LGBTQ acceptance is a growing trend, but it still has much room for evolution until global equality has been reached.

It is important to continue the fight, but it is also important to understand your role in other nations. Sense of confinement is not positive, but knowing safety zones is important. Especially when opting for a homestay option, reach out to program advisors and state your situation. It's better to explain concerns before they become issues.

For further help, check out [GoAbroad's How to Study Abroad as an LGBT Student article](#). Study abroad should be an enriching, positive experience for everyone, regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation.



# 7 TIPS FOR COMING OUT TO YOUR HOST-FAM

by Char Johnson Stoeber

If you're not straight and/or cisgendered (you identify with the gender you were assigned at birth), your sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity (or lack thereof) make the already difficult feat of traveling even more challenging. For LGBTQ and non-binary people, traveling becomes more than just getting over jetlag. One's sexual orientation can affect one's safety. Many people think that coming out of the closet is a one-time deal, but for LGBTQ people, it's a never-ending process that depends on where they are and how safe they feel exposing their sexuality.

**Unfortunately, not everyone has the privilege to come out.** It might not always be safe to do so. It's also much easier to come out as lesbian or gay than to come out as bisexual, transgender, or non-binary. Same-sex behavior is illegal in almost half the countries in the world, so don't feel pressured to come out while abroad.



When you're living with a host family, coming out to them can be awkward at first, but if you do, you're helping them realize how diverse people are. Here are some tips for coming out to your host family:

## 1. It's OK to Stay in the Travel Closet

Although it's illegal to be gay in over 70 countries, don't let your sexual orientation and/or gender identity stop you from traveling meaningfully. More and more queer people ("Queer" is a reclaimed term referring to non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual people) are traveling abroad, and they have their fair share of coming out stories on the road.

Be sure to research where it is safest to travel abroad if you are LGBTQ and what different countries' LGBTQ laws are before selecting a destination.

Ask yourself important questions: Does the country you're going to have marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws? What does the government and the country's leaders think about LGBT people? How do LGBT people feel about the police? Your rights can change with the stamp of a passport, so do your research. Your safety comes first.

## 2. Be Honest with Your Program or University About Your Concerns

Check program websites **before** you apply and pay program fees to see if they are outwardly LGBTQ friendly and offer resources, and get recommendations from program reviews. Ask if they provide specific resources, like an online forum, for LGBTQ participants. Some program directors are openly out and gay, so never expect they will be closed-minded. If you're not honest with them about how your sexual orientation and/or gender identity is making you nervous to travel, then they cannot support you.

## 3. Ask Your Program Provider if your Host Family will be LGBTQ-Friendly

If possible, ask your provider for your host family's previous guests' contact information so that you can ask them how LGBTQ-friendly the host family is. If not, ask your program provider if the host family has hosted LGBTQ guests before. Whether their previous guests were queer or not, they might have valuable insight as to how accepting the family is toward queer people sleeping under their roof (whether they be thatched or aluminum).

In general, host families are trusted community members who are already well-versed in hosting people from other cultures, so it should be comforting for you to know that they are open-minded in the sense of wanting to host someone who looks, speaks, and thinks differently from them.

Be sure to read reviews of programs, whether you're studying, volunteering, or teaching abroad, to get a feel for any comments related to your situation. Follow up with organizations specifically on these issues.

## 4. Test the LGBTQ-Friendly Waters

Observe how your host family talks about LGBTQ issues. During television shows (if they have a television), watch for the way they talk about a singer's or an actor's gender presentation. They might have a lot or very little to say about Ricky Martin's sexuality, about same-sex marriages allowed in South Africa, or Russia's 2013 anti-"gay propaganda" law, which prohibits any positive mention of homosexuality in the presence of minors.

Strike up a conversation when the situation presents itself. Many people think that being LGBTQ is a decision, not an identity. Now, hold your horses before you say "Hey mum, can you pass the falafel? Oh and by the way, I'm gay." Instead, ask her what the community thinks about LGBTQ issues. If the community is fine with it, then ask her what she thinks about LGBTQ people. You don't have to out yourself, but you could mention an LGBT friend you have who you miss back home, then see how they react.

Do they empathize with you? Do they seem confused? You might be the first person who brings up LGBTQ topics in a non-prejudiced way, and that in itself might confuse them.

## 5. Ask your Family to Respect Your Privacy

Just because you feel safe at home with your new family doesn't mean that the people in the community will be as accepting. If you come out to your host family, but feel unsure about being out of the closet in your community, explain that to your host family. Sometimes people assume that if you come out to them, that you are comfortable coming out to anyone, but that's not true. You might come out to your school friends, but not to your host family. Find the communities that accept and affirm you.

## 6. Get Ready for Potentially Awkward Questions

If a host family member asks you how LGBTQ people have sex, you don't need to answer that question. When people ask questions like this, it reveals that they still see heterosexual sex as the only "real" sex there is. Sex and sexuality are very different.

You didn't come out to them to talk about sex, you did it because doing so would make you feel more comfortable as a human. Mention how your identity pushes you to look for safe spaces wherever you go, or how withholding who you are makes you uncomfortable, but sometimes you do it in order to feel safe. Also, you could mention how it makes you nervous that in countries like the United States, police forced a woman out of a bathroom she was supposed to use, just because she looked like a boy.

Once you begin talking about how your sexual orientation and gender identity affects your daily life, then people will understand that being LGBTQ is a unique identity that shapes your life in profound ways. Once they realize that you didn't choose to be LGBTQ, and that it's how you were born, then it'll start to click for them that your orientation and gender identity (or lack thereof) are just small parts of the complex person you are.

**"...people will understand that being LGBTQ is a unique identity that shapes your life in profound ways."**

## 7. Teach them Terminology!

They're likely teaching you a language, so you can teach them some vocab, too! Be patient if your family assumes you're straight. Relationships between men and women are what they are used to seeing every day, whether it's out the window or on television. Most romantic songs are about heterosexual romantic relationships. If you're a lesbian and your host mom asks you if you have a boyfriend back home, it's just an innocent question that shows she is trying to get to know you. You could answer by saying "No, I don't have a boyfriend. My partner is a woman." Or "No, I don't have a partner." Reinforcing the word "partner" gives the conversation a less heteronormative tone.

Whether you decide to travel meaningfully to a country that's allowed same-sex marriage for years, or you're choosing to stay in the travel closet, remember that your presence in a country will make an impact when it comes to teaching others about yourself and your culture. If your sexuality and gender identity doesn't make it into that conversation, your host family will still learn from you, and you from them. However, if you do decide to come out, be prepared for some potentially awkward yet impactful conversations!

# HOW TO STUDY ABROAD AS AN LGBTQ STUDENT

by the GoAbroad Writing Team

**S**tudy abroad can be quite an intimidating idea to approach, but an entirely worthwhile challenge to take on no doubt. For LGBTQ students, study abroad comes with a host of additional considerations, so it is time to lay it all out on the table and simplify the process, so you can make it happen! From finding a study abroad program to funding your trip to tips for arrival, here is a step-by-step process of how to study abroad as an LGBTQ student, following by plenty of resources to help get you started:

## Visit Your University's LGBTQ Center

Nearly every college or university campus has one, though it may be called a variety of names. Every LGBT student should visit their campus LGBTQ Center to get some basic advice on how to best approach the topic of study abroad with their advisors and how to prepare themselves for the challenges that study abroad may present. LGBTQ Center staff can speak from their own experiences abroad, or provide you with contact information for LGBT students who are study abroad alumni, among other things.

## Talk to your International Office or a Study Abroad Advisor

After you've prepared yourself to discuss the topic on a larger scale, and considered your ability to face immersing yourself in a completely unfamiliar place, it is time to talk to an advisor

and visit your campus' international office. The team of student advisors in your international education office will be able to give you information on the [basics of studying abroad](#), the breadth of programs available to you, transferability of academic credits, semester options, location-specific information, and travel advice.

Embrace all the information you receive, take time to review all the opportunities that fit your academic goals, and discuss possibilities with family, friends, and maybe even some other LGBT students you know who have studied abroad too.

## Narrow Down Location Options

Now it is time to narrow down the locations that fit with your interests and attract you most. But before setting your heart on a location, be sure to consider safety issues, stance on the LGBTQ community, and possible language barriers. Make a list of locations you can't wait to visit, and then look up information on each to give you a better idea of what type of challenges you would face there as well as positive characteristics you would be happy to immerse yourself in.

## Search for The Right Program

Once you have a much smaller list of location options, let's say two to four possible destinations, you should begin looking through all the study abroad program opportunities in each location. Consider narrowing down your search by the semester you'd like your study abroad program to take place, your major or areas of interest, and the structure you'd like to have to your program follow.

Next you should look over the inclusions and benefits of each individual program. Do they include excursions? What type of housing arrangements are available and will you feel comfortable with the accommodation provided? Will you have meals prepared for you? How much money will you need to budget for your own personal expense and how much of your daily costs of living will be covered? These are all essential questions every student must consider before selecting a study abroad program.

## Check out Scholarship Opportunities

There are a number of scholarships specifically for LGBT study abroad (see Scholarships section below), created to help support LGBTQ students who want to expand their education abroad. However, there are also hundreds more study abroad scholarships that are open to all students interested in going abroad, whether for a semester or even a full year.

## Read up on your Location of Interest

Now that you have selected your program, it's time to read up on your new home! Find out all the ins and outs, insider tips, advice from past study abroad alumni, and everything in between so you are as prepared as possible. Make sure there isn't anything you missed about your location of interest, or your program for that matter, that is a deal breaker for you. Start by checking out GoAbroad's [Article Directory](#).

## Apply & Finalize Your Trip

Congrats! You are now ready to apply for your study abroad program and make your dream a reality! Keep in close contact with your study abroad office, your academic advisors, and your host university or program provider, so you can keep up to date on the status of your application and program arrangements.

## Prepare

Time to start making your packing list and getting your flight and visa sorted out! The most important thing is to stay calm, organize your list of "things to do before you leave", and remember to keep an open mind. You are about to embark on what may be one of the most life-changing experiences of your life, so take time to mentally prepare yourself for a completely new way of life and outlook on the world.

## Arriving & Adjusting

Upon arrival, you will surely feel a mixture of excitement, anxiety, and anticipation. It is completely normal to go through a period of adjustment, also known as culture shock. If you are prepared for it to happen, it will be much easier to overcome. Do your best to embrace and learn about the local way of life, instead of criticizing it, and maximize every opportunity for cultural immersion.

Seek out local organizations, events, or venues that are specifically catered to LGBT students or the local LGBT community in general. These will prove to be a great place to meet other LGBT students and locals, socialize in a comforting environment, and provide you will a place to learn more about the LGBTQ community in your host country.



# TOP STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

by the GoAbroad Writing Team

As the global fight for gender equality and understanding marches on, the number of available LGBTQ study abroad programs has increased. More and more schools and universities are discovering the value of engaging issues of identity and activism within a global, cross-cultural context. Any LGBTQ community members or supporters considering studying abroad should start by checking out the following highly acclaimed programs, but by all means this is not an exhaustive list.

## University of Louisville's LGBT Center—LGBT Study Abroad in Greece

The first of its kind in the surrounding region, this LGBT study abroad program takes students on a two week excursion to both Athens and Lesbos. Greece is widely regarded as the birthplace of homosexuality, and the cross-national history of LGBT studies is a common theme throughout the curriculum.

Students are challenged to develop connections between academic and hands-on cultural experiences, such as the study of Sappho poetry on the island of Lesbos. They also have the opportunity to meet numerous local organizations, and contextualize how politics and the Greek economy relate to public opinion, activism, and the LGBT communities across the country.

The program covers round trip airfare, cultural activities in Athens and Lesbos, transportation passes, and accommodation. Students are responsible for securing their own passport, visa, immunizations, and personal spending money.

**Why it's award worthy (and was even a finalist for a 2014 GoAbroad Innovation Award):** Students learn at the heart of human rights for the LGBT community in Europe. Visit centuries old sites, learn from another country's LGBT movement, and meet directly with key leaders working to ensure positive changes for Greece.

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## CEA Global Education & the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) – Culture & Identity Studies: Explore Gay Paris

The University of Maryland (UMBC) has teamed up with CEA study abroad to create a four-week gender studies course in Paris, France. CEA works in conjunction with the University of New Haven and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

Winner of the 2011 Innovative New Program Award in the annual GoAbroad Innovation Awards, the curriculum focuses on construction of 20th century gay and lesbian identities within Parisian culture, specifically in relation to race, immigration, and religion. Students map gay and lesbian histories in the Marais district and suburbs and neighborhoods of the city to visualize and discuss LGBT spaces in urban society. This LGBT study abroad program immerses students in French gay culture, and they can also choose to participate in the LGBT pride parade.

Program costs include orientation, tuition, cultural excursions, volunteer opportunities, access to computers and wi-fi, international cell phone, health insurance, and book shares. Accommodation options include shared studio, dormitory, shared apartment, homestay, or independent living. High school graduates with at least a 2.5 GPA are eligible, and experience in French language is not required.

**Why it's award worthy:** Students create and use maps of gay Paris to discover how the population is perceived in this highly urban city. Learning about belonging in Paris gives students a better understanding of their identity and they get to participate in one of the largest pride parades in the world.

## Center for Global Education, Augsburg College – LGBT Study Abroad in Mexico

The Center for Global Education at Augsburg College offers this summer academic program in Mexico that connects students of various backgrounds and ethnicities to create a dynamic learning environment. The theme of the study abroad program is Crossing Borders.

Students travel to Cuernavaca, located about one and a half hours south of Mexico City, to participate in this community based course focusing on the intersections among language, nationality, race, gender, religion, and politics, with an emphasis on feminist, queer, and postcolonial liberation priests, nuns, and religious minorities. Coursework also includes intensive Spanish language training and students can elect to integrate an internship or volunteer work into this LGBT study abroad program.

Students live in campus housing with access to computers, wi-fi, and a library. There are also four to six week homestays available. Classes are mostly taught in English. Program fees include tuition, room and board, cultural excursions, travel insurance, and some transportation. Scholarships are available to offset costs.

**Why it's award worthy:** Cuernavaca is central for innovative grassroots organizations, a hub for LGBT rights, and a key to the feminist movement in Mexico, making it an ideal destination for LGBT study abroad in Mexico. Top notch professors (who have direct experience as activists in Mexico) and outstanding program support for students before and after make it an easy award worthy choice (not to mention the program won the 2012 GoAbroad Innovation Award for Global Access and Equity).

Find more study abroad programs in GoAbroad's [Study Abroad Directory](#).

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## Syracuse University Madrid Center - LGBT Study Abroad in Spain

Syracuse University offers a LGBT course entitled Sexuality in Spain, during which students travel to Madrid to explore how sexuality plays out in Spanish social spaces, both modern and historical. In addition to standard academic readings, materials also include a collection of memoirs, fiction, media, and film. The program is offered during the spring or fall semester. Fees generally include accommodation or a housing allowance, orientation, cultural activities, some meals, and an international student ID card.

**Why it's award worthy:** As one of three countries that legalized gay marriage in 2005, Spain is an ideal location to study LGBT rights and Syracuse has been at the pulse of this movement since the beginning. In addition to marriage, homosexual couples can legally adopt children in Spain too. A top notch university in the U.S. has transposed its high quality academics to its Madrid campus to investigate how sexuality in a highly traditional Catholic nation has transformed over the years.

## SIT Study Abroad – LGBT Study Abroad in the Netherlands & Morocco

In this LGBT study abroad program, students travel to the Netherlands and Morocco to better understand the relationships among gender, sexuality, race, class, and religion as they relate to both personal experience and public perception. Students have the opportunity to connect with local white, Muslim, and Afro-Caribbean communities within both countries to further explore program themes, such as queer movements, political rights, and migration. Participants stay with a host family in the Netherlands for twelve weeks and take an excursion to Morocco. Program costs include accommodation through homestay, meals, transportation, health insurance, and museum entrance fees.

**Why it's award worthy:** Known for its top tier academics, SIT pairs with the best hands-on complementary learning excursions in the Netherlands, such as Amsterdam Public Library to visit the International Gay and Lesbian and Information Center. Students connect with a wide array of populations in both countries to gain perspective on sexuality and gender during this LGBT study abroad program.

Studying LGBT studies abroad provides students with an international framework for LGBT themes, such as gender, race, religion, politics, and cultural context. Students in this field must take extra caution when it comes to safety, and fully research all countries and laws they may encounter during their travels. The number and quality of LGBT study abroad programs continues to grow, contributing to the spread of global awareness and tolerance. If you're considering LGBT studies, these types of study abroad programs are your chance to explore and participate in an important global movement.

Find more study abroad programs in GoAbroad's [Study Abroad Directory](#).



# TRAVELING WITH SOMEONE YOU LOVE, IN A PLACE YOU AREN'T ALLOWED TO LOVE THEM

by Evan Townsend

On the Arabian Peninsula there is a moving walkway, the kind usually found between airport terminals, which can carry you for miles across the inhospitable expanse of the desert. It is, by far, the longest walkway of its kind in the world. Or at least that's how it seems when it's midnight, nearly 100 degrees, and you're dying to get back to your hotel room.

After an exhausting and blistering-hot day trip to Oman, my boyfriend and I found ourselves in the glass-cased, climate-controlled wasteland between the metro station and the Dubai Mall, the final gauntlet between us and the hotel room which we had left at 5:00 a.m. Even though the conveyor belt below was dutifully pushing us toward our destination, I couldn't fight the feeling of exhaustion which had been building all day.

I was suddenly overcome with an urge to lean in to my boyfriend, to let the sleep deprivation and dehydration just melt away in a quiet hug. **But just as quickly as the urge had come over me it disappeared, as my desire for affection was outweighed by my fear of prison time and deportation.**

As an American from a small, rural area, I'm familiar with navigating situations where I'm unable to publicly express my feelings toward the person I love. But, there's a key difference between having displays of affection repressed by social stigma and having them repressed by civil law.

My boyfriend I first met while living in Kenya, a country where sex between men is punishable by up to 14 years in prison. (The laws regarding sex between women are somewhat less clear.) I was working on a grant program and he was stationed there as a diplomat. From the moment of our first meeting we implicitly understood that navigating our relationship would be different than what either of us were used to.

**"...it's difficult, it's tiring, and it's risky."**

He first caught my eye at a bar in Nairobi frequented by expats. I invited him over for a drink and we sat and talked for over an hour. We discussed work, literature, shopping. To the outside observer there was nothing to distinguish our conversation from one between two friendly colleagues. The mutual and silent decision to avoid the topics of romance, dating, and sex was one made out of necessity.

During our first few dates we found substitutes for typical displays of affection: instead of a goodnight kiss we shared a hug at the doorstep, careful not to linger long enough to attract suspicion. Handholding was replaced by a quick hand squeeze, but only after we got in his well-tinted car.

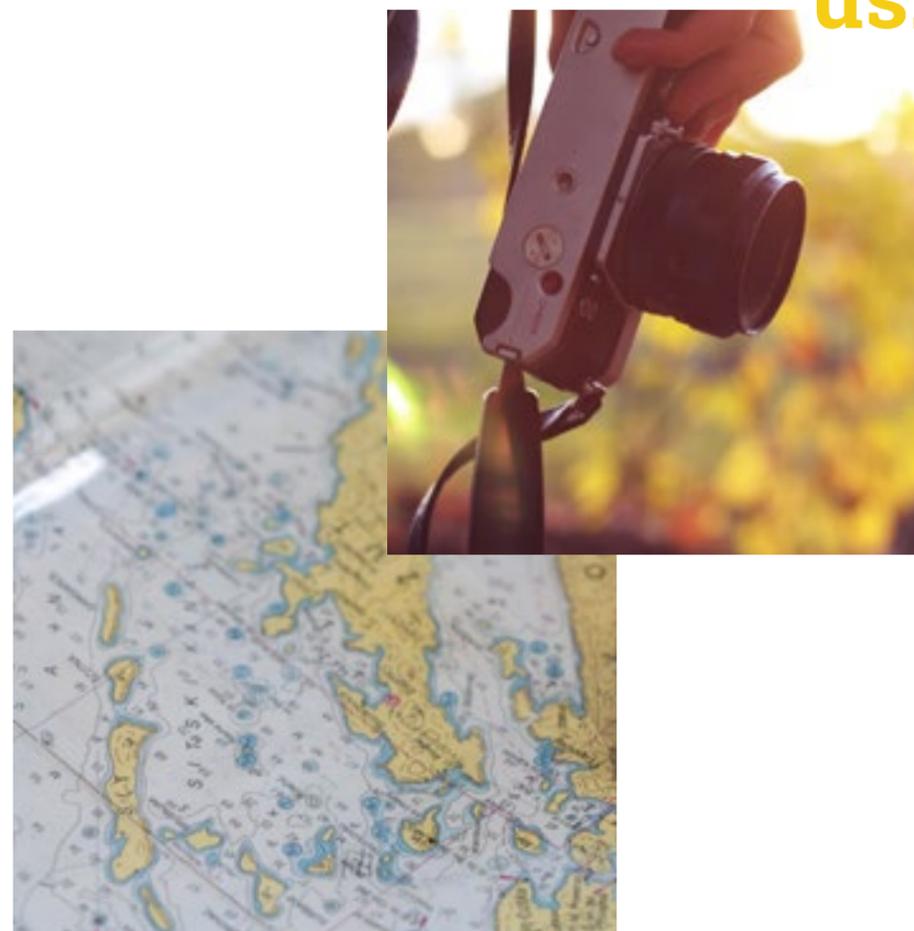
As our relationship continued, we found increasingly subtle, and therefore safer, ways to tell each other we cared. He would say it by eating with me at my favorite greasy and trashy food joints, and I would say it by watching his equally pretentious and artsy films. I would say it by sharing the last of my maple syrup with him (a rare and precious commodity in East Africa,) and he would say it by somehow finding more. We would say it by sharing earbuds on a long boat ride, imitating each other's accents, and sharing covert grins over inside jokes.

But, as much as we travelers like to romanticize the challenges we face as "part of the experience," the reality is that it's difficult, it's tiring, and it's risky. All our secretly flirtatious public behavior never replaces the need for physical affection, it only mitigates it. Despite slipping into the comfort of familiarity and routine, my boyfriend and I are always acutely aware of the potential for real danger.

When we finally did get reach our hotel room in Dubai, we collapsed in our separate twin beds, which come standard as part of the "Just Friends" tour package. As he reached across the gap for my hand, I thought of all the places we could've gone instead, the gay-friendly havens where we wouldn't have just been tolerated, but embraced.

It's true, our ability to live in and travel to countries where certain sexual and gender identities are criminalized is a privilege, dependent on our ability to present or not present our identities when we choose. But, as we broke Statute 177 of the Dubai Penal Code that night (really, the jokes just write themselves,) I couldn't help but feel like a sort of queer outlaw. We don't travel to countries because of their LGBTQ laws, nor despite them. We travel because we have an insatiable appetite for adventure, and we'll be damned if our sexuality is going to stop us.

**"We travel because we have an insatiable appetite for adventure, and we'll be damned if our sexuality is going to stop us."**



# HOW TO FIND YOUR COMMUNITY WHILE TRAVELING

by Evan Townsend

If you're anything like me, then you've probably done time in the nebulous social construct colloquially known as "The Closet." This isn't the kind of fun, magical closet with satyrs and talking lions. It's a place where you suppress thoughts, avoid questions, even lie when you're confronted. It's a place where you try on a beard or two, or maybe a place to hang out with a cute classmate. ("We're just friends, Mom!")

While no one has an ideal experience in the closet, one good thing that came out of it for me was the opportunity to connect with queer people who share many of my same experiences. As I made more of those connections and my circle of LGBTQ friends grew larger and larger, my need to hide grew less and less, until I had built a community where I could be myself.

Unfortunately, homophobia isn't an exclusively American phenomenon, and coming out isn't a one-time experience. When I left America for the first time, I wasn't just arriving in a new country, but also a new closet.

In such an unfamiliar environment, I didn't want to risk negative reactions from my coworkers and flatmates to my sexuality. So instead I reverted to hiding it, feeling like I was right back where I had started.

I quickly realized, however, that building a community where you feel safe is always possible, even if it's not always easy. Here's how:

## Do Your Research

Familiarize yourself with how your sexual or gender identity is viewed not only socially, but legally. Research the program you're traveling with to see what sorts of resources are available to you while you're in-country, particularly resources catered to LGBTQ people's unique needs.

Ultimately your safety should be your priority. If your research doesn't reveal what you were hoping for, don't be afraid to look at other programs or even other countries.

Challenges are inevitable, but traveling doesn't have to come at the expense of your security as a queer person.

## Start Networking Before You Go

Once you've decided on a program and destination, you're ready to start making connections. You can start building relationships with other program participants at home in a cultural context you're more familiar with, that way you have a connection before you go. Talk with your friends at home and alumni of the program to see if they can put you in touch with any of their friends in the region you're traveling to.

## Remember that People are People

Your research may have told you about the pervasive attitudes of a region, but it can't tell you about the personal ideologies of the people you will meet. Regardless of a country's policies or social norms, you will always find individual exceptions. Approach each new relationship with no assumptions and you may be pleasantly surprised. Before you start holding hands and singing "It's a Small World," remember this goes both ways. Just as there are queer folks and allies everywhere in the world, there are also bigots.

## Use Apps

Like a literal gaydar, dating apps will show you nearby queer folk. Despite its reputation as a glorified meat market, Grindr and apps like it can lead to surprisingly meaningful friendships. If you're looking for apps that cater to more diverse genders and sexualities, Tinder and OKCupid are also viable options. OKCupid even allows you to change your displayed location to anywhere in the world, so you can start browsing for matches in your host country before you arrive.

All three apps are popular globally, and the convenience and security of a virtual queer-friendly space is enough to make up for having to wade through a few dozen headless torso pics. Or maybe the torso pics are an added bonus. I'm not here to judge.

## Find Queer Spaces

There's a good chance your travel destination has some sort of queer-friendly space, from nightclubs to book clubs. If you're lucky this may be publically displayed in a bar or advertised on the local message board. In regions where LGBTQ people are less tolerated, queer-friendly spaces are rarely labeled as such. In these regions it's best to start by making individual connections, then having a member of the community invite you to such a space. Even the most intolerant regions often have that one "unofficial" gay bar.

## Keep up with Your Friends at Home

Even though I felt like I had to start over the first time I left the country, the reality was that my queer and allied friends hadn't gone anywhere. Everything I had read about living abroad had told me to "disconnect," but I wasn't so ready to give up the community I had built. While you shouldn't ever use it as an excuse to not build local relationships, there should be no shame or guilt in seeking the comfort and support of your friends back home.

The cliché of travel is that a culture's beauty lies not in its differences, but in its similarities to your own. The same goes double for people whose identities have been persecuted for most of human history. There are few more rewarding moments in travel than when someone reaches across not only cultural boundaries, but global norms and historical precedents to take your hand and tell you "I understand."



# 11 STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIPS FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

by Maima Faith Merin

Study abroad can be a defining moment in any student's educational journey, one filled with opportunities for growth, numerous realizations, and many more meaningful experiences. For LGBTQ students, studying abroad can be not only an incredible powerful educational experience, it can also be an opportunity to expand understanding, awareness, and acceptance of the LGBTQ community globally.

To support LGBTQ students who are ready to take on the challenge of studying abroad, many organizations, institutions, and associations have established study abroad scholarships to specifically provide financial assistance to LGBTQ students.

Every student deserves the chance to study abroad alongside their peers and experience all the world has to offer, and these scholarships are just some of the opportunities that have been put in place to inspire LGBTQ students to take the leap and study abroad

## 1. The Point Foundation LGBTQ Scholarship

[Point Foundation](#) is a national, publicly supported, scholarship-granting organization focused on helping LGBTQ students. It seeks to empower promising LGBTQs to achieve their academic and leadership potential. Aside from financial support, the Point Foundation also provides mentorship, leadership development, and community service to LGBTQ students in high school and university. Each year the scholarship ranges from \$5,000 to \$28,000.

## 2. Gamma Mu Foundation Scholarship

[The Gamma Mu Foundation](#) seeks to award individual scholarships to gay men who are interested on attending a postsecondary institution or a vocational school. The foundation supports a wide array of educational options, so that every gay student can pursue their specific educational aspirations, including associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, graduate programs, and vocational and technical training. The foundation gives a \$19,000 award each year.

## 3. Pride Foundation Scholarships

Established in 1985, the [Pride Foundation](#) is a regional community organization that is dedicated to giving opportunity and equality to LGBTQs across the Northwestern region of the United States. The Pride Foundation has over 50 scholarships available for LGBTQ students. These scholarships are categorized by academic pursuits, community leadership, cultural identities, and geography, but are available to students at every degree level. The Pride Foundation's scholarship awards range from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

## 4. LEAGUE Foundation LGBTQ Scholarship

Since 1996, the [LEAGUE Foundation](#) has been providing financial resources to American LGBTQ high school seniors who want to pursue higher education. The foundation has three separate scholarship awards: the Laurel Hester Memorial Scholarship, the Matthew Shepard Memorial Scholarship, and the LEAGUE Foundation Scholarship. Applications are accepted from January through April annually, and awardees are announced in July.

## 5. APIQWTC Scholarship

[Asia Pacific Islander Queer Women and Transgender Community](#) (APIQWTC), pronounced as "Api-cutesy," is a volunteer-based organization founded in 1987. The APIQWTC scholarship is awarded to two Asian Pacific Islander, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgender students pursuing technical or professional training or full degree programs at higher education institutions each year. The selected scholars receive a \$1000 scholarship to go toward their educational endeavors.

## 6. PFLAG National Scholarships

Founded in 1972, [PFLAG](#) is the largest grassroots-based organization in the U.S. The organization is committed to advocating for equality and societal affirmation of LGBTQs. The PFLAG National scholarship is open to LGBTQ and allied students worldwide, who plan to pursue a higher education and demonstrate an interest in participating in the LGBTQ community. Awardees receive \$1,000 to \$5,000.

## 7. Stonewall Foundation Scholarships

Since 1990, the Stonewall Foundation has been focusing on the needs of the LGBTQ community specifically in the state of New York. The foundation inspires meaningful change by creating scholarship opportunities for LGBTQ students. In 2015, the Stonewall Foundation offered four separate scholarships opportunities for LGBTQ students, each one reflecting the unique values of its donors.

## 8. Colin Higgins Youth Courage Award

Established in 2000, the [Colin Higgins Foundation](#) gives away the Youth Courage Award annually to recognize exceptional students who demonstrate courage in the face of adversity and discrimination. LGBTQ youth activists who apply will have the chance to win a grant of \$10,000, an opportunity to attend the National Conference on LGBTQ Equality, and be honored during Pride Week on an all-expense paid trip to Los Angeles or New York.

## 9. NGPA Aviation Scholarship

Gay, lesbians, and their straight allies who are interested in pursuing an aviation career can apply for a scholarship provided by the [National Gay Pilots Association \(NGPA\)](#). This international organization promotes equality as well as aviation safety.

The NGPA Aviation Scholarship is awarded to exceptional candidates who have demonstrated involvement and support of the LGBT community.

## 10. Rainbow Scholarship

Made possible by the generous donations and support of numerous international education professionals that are dedicated to helping LGBTQ students participate in international programs, the [Rainbow Scholarship](#) is awarded to LGBTQ students who want to pursue meaningful, intensive education programs abroad. Awarded by the [Fund for Education Abroad](#) annually, this scholarship is part of the NAFSA Rainbow Special Interest Group, which is made up of professionals that are devoted to supporting and counseling LGBTQ students as well as combating discrimination against LGBT students.

## 11. IGLTA Foundation Scholarships

[The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association Foundation](#) offers Annual Global Convention Scholarships in order to support future LGBT leaders in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The IGLTA Foundation also focuses on supporting students interested in establishing businesses in destinations that lack LGBT acceptance, in order to help promote awareness and global acceptance of the LGBT community.

# RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

To help LGBT students who are contemplating studying abroad, preparing for their trip, or currently participating in an international program, we have put together a comprehensive list of resources to make researching easier; and in turn, studying abroad easier for LGBT students.

- [Education Abroad Guide](#)
- [Know Your Rights: Airport Security](#)
- [NAFSA: Association of International Educators Rainbow Special Interest Group](#)
- [University of San Diego - LGBTQ Students & Study Abroad](#)
- [The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association](#)
- [Northwestern University Study Abroad - LGBTQ Students Abroad Page](#)
- [IES Abroad Diversity Resources](#)
- [The LGBT Guide to Study Abroad by Tufts Programs Abroad](#)
- [LGBT Identity Abroad by The University of Iowa](#)
- [U.S. Department of State LGBTQ Travel Informationz](#)
- [Know Your Rights: Schools by National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Returned Peace Corps Volunteers](#)
- [International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association](#)
- [Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the UK - LGBT Foreign Travel Advice](#)
- [Diversity Abroad](#)
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
- [A Blueprint for Equality: The Right to Travel \(2015\)](#)
- [Useful Articles:](#)
  - [Suggestions for LGBTQ Students Going Abroad](#)
  - [10 Reasons why LGBTQ Students should Study abroad](#)
  - [GlobalGayz Blog](#)
  - [NYU Student-to-Student Guide for LGBT Students](#)
  - [Tips for Advising Trans Students on Study Abroad](#)
  - [Putting LGBTQ into Generation Study Abroad](#)
  - [Some Questions LGBTQ Students Should Consider When Making the Decision to Study Abroad](#)
- [Videos:](#)
  - [University of Minnesota - Orientation for LGBT Students Studying Abroad](#)
  - [IES Abroad - It Gets Better Project for LGBT Students](#)



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This Guide will continue to expand as more and more resources are shared and developed, be sure to check back frequently to get the most up to date version.

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<http://bit.ly/LGBTStudyAbroad>