

LGBT Students and Study Abroad



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This brochure has been compiled by the Office of International Programs (OIP) and the Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Education, Outreach and Services (LGBT Center), in order to assist Ithaca College students who are LGBT (publicly or privately) with issues which may arise when considering studying abroad. If you are a member of the LGBT community and you are interested in studying abroad, then you are taking the right first step by reading this brochure. There are countless short term, semester and year long study abroad programs available to you that will enhance your academic career and broaden your personal horizons and we wish to ensure that you feel comfortable participating on these programs.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students considering study abroad may have a host of questions and concerns, some related to orientation and identity, others not. The LGBT Center met with several LGBT students who have been overseas to gather their comments and advice to future students, which have been included in this brochure.

Clearly, each individual has their own set of circumstances in terms of their LGBT identity. In addition, every place in the world has different policies and cultural attitudes towards people who are or are perceived to be LGBT. It would be impossible for us to cover all of the issues which may arise for you or to describe the climate around sexual status and orientation of each culture. Luckily, there are many resources available that can help you find the answers you need and we have provided many of them in this brochure.

You are welcome to discuss the information in this brochure and further questions with the OIP and LGBT Center staff.

“I realize now that I let a lot of concerns keep me from going abroad when I was an undergrad. I wish I had just spent a little more time getting answers to my questions instead of assuming it just wouldn’t work for me as a sexual minority student!”

Steps to Studying Abroad

There are many resources which will help you to decide, first of all, which programs are available to you through Ithaca College. Please visit the OIP website (www.ithaca.edu/oip), or visit the OIP office to browse through the Study Abroad library and to pick up a copy of the Guide to Study Abroad (if you don't already have one) and/or attend one of the Study Abroad Information Sessions which are held at the beginning of every semester.

It is never too early to begin considering and planning to study abroad. You will have restrictions on when and where you can go based on your curricular needs as well as, most likely, your financial situation. Please talk to your academic advisor as soon as possible to let them know of your desire to study abroad. In addition, as a LGBT student, there are a host of other questions which may arise for you and which you should consider when choosing a host country or study abroad program or before taking off for your destination.

Some questions LGBT 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?

Some helpful tips:

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 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 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 the OIP, local police, or the nearest U.S. consulate if you encounter any difficulties.

Some tips adapted from Suffolk University President's Office of Diversity Services Diversity Services – "Studying Abroad as a GLBT Student."



- IC student abroad in Australia, 2006

What I wish I knew then that I know now...

Hints and tips from current and former IC students who studied abroad, in their own words:

- “Be sure to research the culture and climate before you go (queer-wise)!”
- “For trans or genderqueer folks, consider ways to minimize the hassles when going through security checkpoints, what kinds of documents to keep with you in case you get stopped/harrassed, etc. “
- “The language in my host country used a lot of gender-specific pronouns and endings on regular words and stuff, really different than the way we use language here. At first it freaked me out, not just because it was a lot to remember but because I am sometimes mistaken to be a different sex than I really am (both at home and abroad!). Then I noticed that my host family found a way to adapt – without even really talking about it directly, they kind of made up a new non-gendered “article word” that they used for me (instead of the traditional choice of the male or the female article words). At the time it just happened, but now I realize it was so cool!”
- “The first piece of advice that I think LGBT students from IC need to know when traveling abroad are to realize how fortunate they are to attend school at such an accepting campus, and to realize that other students with whom they may be studying may not come from campuses that are as tolerant. This means that other students may not be accepting or understand issues, and that LGBT students need to simply be understanding and use it as an educational opportunity.”
- “Also, students should learn the laws specific to gay rights. Find out the proper and improper terminology for describing LGBT persons and relationships in the language. Is there a word that distinguishes a same-sex partner from a same-sex friend? What are the slang terms for LGBT persons? Are they appropriate to use? If so, when and with whom? “
- “Being in a new environment adds hardships to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation/gender. However, students who already experience hardships due to their demographics will feel even more outcast and out of place. Just take a deep breath and realize that everyone experiences this, regardless of who they are.”

“Just relax and enjoy yourself!”

Ambassadors – We encourage you to speak with LGBT and allied students who have returned from study abroad. The LGBT Center and the LGBT student groups on campus may help connect you with returning students interested in sharing their experiences and perceptions. There is also a rich network of students, faculty, and staff who serve as resources for LGBT and questioning students, many of which have lived, studied, or worked abroad themselves; some of these people are listed in the on-line directories “Out & Proud,” and “Allied campus community members” at www.ithaca.edu/lgbt.

Culture Shock:

While studying abroad, most students experience what is known as Culture Shock. This consists of an initial period of exhilaration as a result of the new things you are experiencing, followed by a period of isolation and homesickness. Eventually, one overcomes this period and begins to adapt to a new way of life. As an LGBT person, your feelings of isolation may be felt more drastically. Spend some time before you leave creating a support network of friends and family both at home and overseas who you can turn to. Let them know ahead of time about this anticipated period of loneliness and ask them to be there for you and to support you in getting through it. Simply having someone to talk to can make a world of difference. Ask the OIP for more information about culture shock and how you can best prepare for it.



On-line Resources

Ithaca College Center for LGBT Education, Outreach & Services

<http://www.ithaca.edu/lgbt>

The Center for LGBT Education, Outreach, and Services actively fosters the academic success and personal growth of LGBT students and offers college wide services to enhance the campus community's awareness, understanding and appreciation of LGBT people and issues. Services include an office staffed by a professional coordinator, a Resource Room offering a welcoming and supportive environment for LGBT people and allies, and resources, information and referral on a host of LGBT issues and themes.

National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education

http://www.lgbtcampus.org/faq/study_abroad.html

The National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education has compiled a FAQ about LGBT student study abroad, and also includes a section on specific programs of interest to students of all orientations and identities interested in pursuing study abroad programs which focus on lesbian/gay studies or queer studies.

NAFSA Lesbigan Special Interest Group

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/student.htm>

NAFSA is the professional organization for international educators, and this site contains information specific to LGBT students studying abroad.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission

<http://www.iglhrc.org>

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission seeks to secure the full enjoyment of the human rights of all people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation or expression, gender identity or expression, and/or HIV status. This site provides a large collection of legislation affecting LGBT people around the world including marriage and sodomy laws, and other general LGBT concerns.

Gay.com's Out and About

<http://www.gay.com/travel/outandabout>

Access Out & About Travel Guides, tips, and articles on travel to areas throughout the world. Report cards on the "gay-friendliness" of destinations are also available.

International Lesbian and Gay Association

<http://www.ilga.org>

The International Lesbian and Gay Association is a world-wide network of national and local groups dedicated to achieving equal rights for LGBT people everywhere. It includes more than 400 member organizations representing every continent and about 90 countries. ILGA is an international federation focused on presenting discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation as a global issue. Browse this site for a worldwide legal survey detailing cultural attitudes and laws towards sexual orientation.

National Center for Transgender Equality - *Air Travel Tips for Transgender People*

<http://www.nctequality.org/airtravel.pdf>

Transgender people have as much right to travel as anyone else, and have the right to express their gender while traveling. However, recent heightened airport security has meant increased scrutiny, harassment, and discrimination against trans people who fly. This resource will help make your air travel experience smoother.

Lonely Planet - <http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com/>

Lonely Planet includes both general travel information and a special discussion section (Thorn Tree Forum) for Gay & Lesbian Travelers.

Research on Underrepresentation In Education Abroad: An Annotated Bibliography

http://www.ciee.org/uploads/underrep_bibliog_annotated.pdf

This annotated bibliography provides a broad listing of research studies, conference presentations and articles on underrepresentation in education abroad. The bibliography includes underrepresented student groups including LGBT students, students with disabilities, ALANA students, adult learners, and community college students.

Print Resources:

The **Center for LGBT Education, Outreach & Services Resource Room** maintains a collection of books and videos, some of which center on themes of sexual orientation in other countries and cultures. Browse the collection by using the lending library database search function on computers in the Resource Room.

Travel guides, especially those in the *Lonely Planet* series, may include specific information for gay and lesbian travelers. Depending on the guide and the destination, these sections may be extensive or somewhat brief.

The bibliography at **NAFSA Lesbigan Special Interest Group** <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/student.htm> lists a number of print resources; click the "Bibliography" link on the left.

Contact Information:

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(Some of the "questions to consider" were adapted from a handout presented by Eero Jusurun, CIEE – NAFSA Conference 2001).

