

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LGBTQ+ TRAVELERS ABROAD

Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community may face unique challenges when traveling internationally. Laws, norms, and attitudes regarding the LGBTQ+ community vary globally and may have safety implications. Additionally, some communities may define and understand sexual orientation and gender identities differently. While some locations may criminalize same-sex sexual activity, others may offer strong legal protections to LGBTQ+ individuals. Furthermore, attitudes within countries can vary, and a country's public policies or dominant attitudes may not directly translate to individual perspectives.

UW-Madison urges all participants to obey the laws of the host country and respect and abide by local norms and practices. Before selecting a country, become well acquainted with a host country's laws and tolerance levels. Research your destination thoroughly and make a decision that does not project your own attitudes and tolerance onto foreign cultures. There will be an international experience that is just right for you.

The questions, considerations, and recommendations below may help you decide if/where you want to travel abroad and how to navigate and mitigate some of the health and safety risks present for LGBTQ+ individuals. You may want to discuss some of the topics with an advisor.

Researching a Host Location:

- Is it safe for me to be "out" as an LGBTQ+ member?
- What laws govern the LGBTQ+ community, and are they applied throughout the country?
- What are the expected norms and attitudes toward those who openly identify as LGBTQ+?
- Are conversations related to sexual orientation and gender identity taboo?
- What are the general perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community? How large and visible is the community?
- What are the typical gender norms and behaviors?
- Are there LGBTQ+-friendly establishments?
- What LGBTQ+ resources and support are available in my host location and institution?
- What behaviors are typically appropriate for friendship and dating?
- What terms are used to discuss LGBTQ+-related topics?
- What housing accommodations are available? Can the program provide private rooms and bathrooms? If I stay with a host family, should I come "out" to them? Will they likely be accepting of my gender/sexual identity/orientation?
- Is healthcare accessible to LGBTQ+ individuals? Are medications, medical supplies, and other support available in a manner that suits my needs? What does insurance cover? What is legal? What documentation is needed? Should I bring prescriptions or other essential supplies with me?

Self-Reflection:

- How important is it for me to be able to express my sexual/gender identity while abroad? How open do I want to be and with whom?
- Would I be willing to go somewhere that does not accept my full identity?
- How important is it for me to find and connect with others with similar identities abroad?
- Am I comfortable explaining my sexual/gender identity or responding to related topics if someone asks?

Recommendations from the U.S. Department of State (DOS) for LGBTQ+ Travelers:

- Review the U.S. DOS country-specific page for your host country for information on LGBTQ+ travelers under "Local Laws & Special Circumstances."
- Ensure your passport is up to date, including the correct name and gender marker. The U.S. DOS is currently incorporating a third gender marker, X, for non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming persons.
- Bring copies of important documents, such as legal and health documents, especially when traveling to countries where legal rights differ from the United States.

Recommendation for Locations that are Potentially Intolerant of the LGBTQ+ Community:

Extra caution is advised for LGBTQ+ members traveling to destinations where laws, norms, and attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community are potentially intolerant or ambiguous.

Disclosing an LGBTQ+ identity or engaging in same-sex sexual activity can be dangerous, leading to verbal harassment, stalking, intimidation, or even violence. Some countries threaten to impose fines, jail sentences, or even the death penalty for those who engage in same-sex sexual activity.

Although the below advice may be disappointing, it may help LGBTQ+ individuals traveling to intolerant locations remain clear of local laws and undue interest:

- Avoid discussing sexuality, gender identity, and other LGBTQ+ topics, especially if asked by someone you do not know well or someone in an authoritative position.
- Do not publicly display affection.
- Do not engage in behaviors that may draw unwanted attention.
- Avoid sexually related terms while using the internet and writing emails.
- Do not use the internet to meet members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- If harassed by police or authority figures, immediately contact your program director or the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.