

LGBTQ+ Study / Travel Abroad Advice – University of Kent

Most LGBTQ+ students experience no difficulties when visiting other countries either for study or travel. That said, the University of Kent does advise you to do some research on the country you will be visiting before you travel as you will be subject to the laws and the judicial process of that country. Attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity vary from country to country, both legally and socially, and it is important that you familiarise yourself in advance.

The University of Kent cannot advise you one way or the other as to your decision to visit or study in a specific country. However, we can equip you with the skills and knowledge to be able to make an informed decision yourself.

Transgender students sometimes face difficulties or delays at border controls overseas if they present as a different gender to what is stated in their passport. The HM Passport Office offers advice and information for transgender individuals applying for a passport in their acquired gender

Married students travelling with their spouse should be aware that some countries do not recognise a marriage between two persons of the same sex. This can have implications should you or your spouse become ill, as you may not be recognised as the next of kin. The University of Kent advises you to look up the customs and practices in the country you are travelling to and to explore the possibility of bringing written consent for you and your spouse, to authorise them to access your medical information should you become ill or require hospitalisation

Before you travel

- Research your destination. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice website has information on 225 territories around the world. As well as general safety information, it includes a section on local laws and customs, which will tell you if LGBTQ+ travellers are likely to face any issues in a particular country. Pay particular attention to the local laws and customs – in some countries homosexuality and/or homosexual relations are illegal and can be subject to severe penalties
- Be aware that in countries where homosexual relations are legal, levels of tolerance and acceptance within society may still vary hugely
- Review your personal documentation and identification in terms of the name and gender marker you are travelling under
- Invest in a good guide book – many specialise in advice to LGBTQ+ travellers
- Pack important documents;
 - legal and health documents,
 - contact information for your family and/or lawyer,
 - address and phone number of the nearest British embassy or consulate in English and in the local language
 - Travel insurance (check to see what policies have plans that are tailored specifically to LGBTQ+ individuals)

While you are there

- Avoid potentially risky situations. Take the same precautions you would at home (don't leave drinks unattended, be wary if offered drinks by a stranger, don't walk home alone or meet someone new without telling a trusted friend where you are going and when you will next be in contact)

- Physical shows of affection can attract unwanted attention; ensure that you are aware of the local attitudes and opinions.
- If you intend you visit cruising areas or using a dating app, find out about the local situation and take sensible precautions if you meet someone; police have been known to carry out entrapment campaigns
- Be wary of new-found 'friends' – criminals sometimes exploit the generally open and relaxed nature of the gay scene
- If you receive unwelcome attention or remarks, it is usually best to ignore it. If harassed, maintain your composure and remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible. If appropriate, report it to the police or your local British Embassy
- You are more likely to experience difficulties in rural areas
- Some LGBTQ+ neighbourhoods can be quite segregated. Be aware that attitudes in the surrounding areas can be much less accepting.
- Consider increasing the privacy settings on your social media or other apps while you are travelling
- Consider talking to local groups who are often best placed to advise you on local attitudes, LGBTQ+ friendly venues and other services.

Sources of help

If you do experience problems when you are abroad, you can either contact the local police (depending on where you are) or your nearest British Embassy, commission or consulate can help

Where you can find information

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| Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice website | https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice |
| International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (includes a county by country breakdown) | https://ilga.org/ https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws |
| Find a British Embassy | https://www.gov.uk/world/embassies |
| International LGBTQ+ Travel Association | https://www.iglta.org/ |
| Gay European Travel Advice | https://www.geta-europe.org/gay-travel-advice-europe.php |
| Out of Office.com | https://www.outofoffice.com/travel-advice |
| Equaldex | https://www.equaldex.com/ |

Why can't the University of Kent provide a list of countries where same-sex relationships are illegal?

We don't have a list of countries where same-sex relationships are illegal for a number of reasons:

- same-sex relationships aren't specifically mentioned in law in many countries, and in others the law is unclear
- same-sex relationships may be legal, but certain acts may not be
- a same-sex relationship may be lawful but local society can be intolerant of open same-sex relationships
- in some countries same-sex relationships are illegal, but the law is not strictly enforced and social attitudes may be relaxed
- a distinction is sometime made in law between men and women

Therefore it would not be helpful to simplify the complex legal / societal situation of hundreds of countries into a simple list.