



# Information for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) students

Below are some tips to help you prepare for your time abroad and your transition back into American life when you return. Preparing for what to expect in a particular country can make the difference between a wonderful experience abroad and an unpleasant one. Before you go, it is important to reflect on the culturally based ideas and definitions of sexual identity and consider carefully how your identity as a GLBT person may affect your relationships with host nationals, your cultural adjustment and your overall education abroad experience.

## Before Leaving

Part of your pre-departure preparations should include reflecting on the larger context of acting on your GLBT identity while abroad. What role as a visitor do you / should you have in the host culture? Does your right to be GLBT in the U.S. conflict with your host country's religious or cultural values and traditions? How will you reconcile your human rights with the cultural values of your host society? Are there safety considerations that you should be aware of? Refer to the resources listed on the reverse side of this sheet and consider the following:

- \* Cultures vary in terms of what is considered appropriate behavior and how sexual identities are defined and understood. Learn as much as possible before you leave about the culture-specific norms of friendship and dating, styles of behavior and general attitudes. Behavioral signals (such as eye contact, a smile, touching) may lead us astray in a foreign culture. For example, in several Middle Eastern countries hand-holding among males is a custom of special friendship and respect and does not necessarily imply homosexuality. Is it possible for you to contact (through email, etc.) other GLBT folks from the host country to ask them specific questions?
- \* Obtain country-specific information on the support systems (meeting places, organizations, etc.) available in your host country. Are these appropriate for you? Do you visit similar places in your home community?
- \* Familiarize yourself with the laws of your host country. In some countries, where sexual orientation can be a basis for persecution under the law, personal safety considerations may require you to hide your sexual identity. Inform yourself about country-specific laws on age of consent, traveling with print or other materials on sexual orientation, etc. If necessary, are you willing to hide your sexual orientation? Finding out about the laws of the host country, would you re-consider your options?
- \* If you are out in the U.S., reflect on what it means to leave behind a support system of friends and family. Being GLBT abroad has been described by some as a second coming out. How will you re-establish your identity overseas?

## Re-entry

A sojourn abroad is a time of personal growth and discovery. Many transformations in personal development and self-awareness can occur, prompted by the fact that the restrictions of the home culture have been removed. Returning home is therefore a time of transition that can at times be difficult.

Consider the following:

- \* If you choose to come out while abroad, how will this affect your return to friends and family? Will you be able to re-integrate these relationships upon your return or will you need to find a different supportive community?
- \* Be aware before you come back home of the ways in which you may have changed both independent of and as a result of your coming out.
- \* Consider the implications of coming out when back home. Often family and friends may want to dismiss your sexual orientation as temporary due to the experience abroad, rather than acknowledge a lifelong identity.

## Resources

Amnesty International 1997 *Breaking the Silence: Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation*  
Also includes an appendix "Rough Guide to National Legislation Round the World on the Legality of Homosexual Acts".

Damron, Bob. *Damron Address Book '98*

Damron, Bob. *The Damron Women's Traveller '98: Lesbian Guide to USA, Canada, Mexico, Caribbean, Europe*

Ferrari, M. *Ferrari's Places of interest: Gay and Lesbian Worldwide Guide*

Ferrari, M. *Inn Places: Worldwide Gay and Lesbian Accommodations 1994*

NAFSA. *Lesbigay Signals: The Newsletter of the Special Interest Group on Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Issues*

Noel, L. *Intolerance: A General Survey*

*Out and About: Essential Information for Gay and Lesbian Travellers*

*Spartacus -99: International Gay Guide*

Van Gelder, L. and P. Brandt. *Are you Two Together? A Gay and Lesbian Travel Guide to Europe*

<http://www.overtherainbow.com>

"A gay and lesbian resource guide of destination information, including gay and gay- friendly hotels, restaurants, bars, bathhouses, cruises, shopping, social and religious organizations, bed & breakfasts, and more!"

<http://www.indian.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>

The site of Lesbigay Special Interest Group of NAFSA: Association of International Educators

<http://www.iglhrc.org/resources/resources.html>

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission contains country-specific online resources and information



Office of Study Abroad  
Michigan State University  
109 International Center  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1035  
(517) 353-8920 phone  
(517) 432-2082 fax  
<http://studyabroad.msu.edu>