

## LGBTQIA+ Student Resources

### *LGBTQIA+ Students Abroad*

All study abroad students experience cultural nuances and differences while abroad. Prior to departure, we encourage students to reflect that as a study abroad student, you bring more than just physical belongings with you to the host country. We are referring to your personal culture, values, interests, and identity; which could possibly include identifying as LGBTQIA+.

Cultural norms surrounding gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation vary widely around the world. In some places abroad, expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation are more open than what a student may be used to in his/her home country/home campus. In many places, however, these expressions and identities are culturally taboo or even criminalized.

Being aware and respectful of local cultural norms and laws in your host country is crucial. Taking time to reflect on how you will balance local cultural expectations with your personal comfort level in regard to being open with new acquaintances will be very important. Amideast program staff is available to help you better understand local customs, answer questions, and to support you throughout your study abroad program. Make sure you ask questions and share any concerns with the program staff.

### *LGBTQIA+ Considerations in the MENA Region*

Students will find that the social climate, laws, and personal interactions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) often differ drastically from those of the United States. LGBTQIA+ students face unique experiences and sometimes additional challenges during study abroad programs. If you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer; you may need to be discreet about your gender identity and sexual orientation in public. It is often difficult to judge how strangers may react to information about your identity. In the MENA region there is often limited social acceptance of sexual orientations and gender identities that stray from the “cultural norm” of heterosexual relationships. In some countries, such as Morocco, there are laws forbidding same-sex sexual activity. Please keep in mind that students are no longer protected by home country laws once they are abroad. Knowing these laws as well as considering the questions listed below may help LGBTQIA+ students to better prepare for their semester abroad.

We encourage all students to refer to the Student Handbook in your Student Portal for more detailed information about host country social customs, including LGBTQIA+ student considerations, in the MENA region.

### *Some questions to consider before going abroad:*

- What are the attitudes and laws related to the LGBTQIA+ community in the host country?
- If you personally identify as LGBTQIA+, how open do you want to be about your sexual orientation and gender identity with your teachers, peers, friends, host family, and others while you are abroad?
- What is the political climate regarding LGBTQIA+ identity in your host country? What are the possible risks you might face as an LGBTQIA+ student in the Middle East and North Africa?
- What are the cultural norms around expressions of gender, friendship, and sexuality in your host country?
- If you are currently open about your gender and/or sexual identity in your home country, how might you manage having to be more discreet?
- What informational resources are available to help you better understand what it is like to be LGBTQIA+ in your host country?
- How will you respond if someone in your host country says something negative about people identifying as LGBTQIA+?

### *Having a Positive Study Abroad Experience with Amideast*

Amideast Education Abroad Programs is dedicated to helping all our students have a safe and rewarding experience studying in the MENA region. Staff members are available to help you in Washington D.C. and the host country. Please feel free to approach staff members with any concerns or questions that you have. In order to help Amideast best support you, here are some things to remember:

**Host Family Considerations:** Staying with a host family is an important component of most Amideast Education Abroad programs and each host family is carefully selected and vetted. Students should consider the implications of being identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender in the host-culture and how coming out might affect the host family relationship. If you have concerns about being identified as LGBTQIA+ (whether intentionally or not) in your host country, be sure to talk with the program staff in advance of your departure or anytime during your program. In many contexts, it may be best not to talk to your host family about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Peers:** As a diverse cohort of study abroad students, we expect all program participants to support and respect one other. As part of our program there will also be opportunities to interact with local peers, who may have very different opinions about LGBTQIA+ issues than you may be used to. If you have any concerns about other program participants or local peers related to being LGBTQIA+, let a program staff member know immediately.

**Safety:** As mentioned previously, there are places where expressing particular sexual orientation or gender identities can pose legal and/or safety risks. Openly expressing sexual orientation or gender identity may make experiencing discrimination or receiving verbal or physical threats more likely while abroad.

Despite appearances, all students will stand out in some way (though to varying extents) as someone who is a tourist or visitor in the host country. Further, it is possible that people may assume you are a visitor to the MENA region or they might suspect you are LGBTQIA+ even if you do not tell them. We encourage students to consider clothing and behavior that may help you blend into the local culture and/or simply lower your profile.

All Amideast students must follow program safety guidelines and rules outlined in the Health, Safety, and Security Guidelines in the Student Portal.

**Additional Resources:** There are numerous online resources available to help you learn more about being LGBTQIA+ in different parts of the world including the following:

- LGBTQIA+ travel information is also available at the Department of State's webpage: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/lgbti.html>
- Human Rights Watch LGBT program: <http://www.hrw.org/topic/lgbt-rights>
- International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA): <http://ilga.org/>
- International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC): <http://www.iglhrc.org/>
- Open Society Foundations LGBTI issues website: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/topics/lgbti>
- The National Center for Transgender Equality: <http://www.transequality.org/>

Resources focused more specifically on LGBTQIA+ study abroad students and travelers have been posted on the Amideast Online LMS.

