



## LGBTQIA+ Testimonials from Abroad



I went abroad through the British Isles six week summer program. I identify as bisexual, though I am in a heterosexual relationship. I was in Ireland when they voted "yes" on same-sex marriage and it was definitely very emotional for me to be there during that historical moment. I was so proud of Ireland for doing that and I felt accepted in and proud of a country that was not my own. Even though I was told to be safe and careful about revealing my identity before I went, I definitely felt completely safe expressing every part of myself that I wanted to. I never once felt ashamed or like I needed to hide that part of me, even if I didn't outright state it. Ironically, I felt more accepted out of my home country than in it. I never encountered any hate or rejection and I would definitely consider going to those countries again.

*-Anonymous, Summer in the British Isles*

Advice to future LGBTQ+ students: Gauge your surroundings. Be careful. Do your research. Ask: Is the country you're going to known for their acceptance/rejection of LGBTQ+ people?; Why?; What are the dangers? While I went to a country that was accepting, there are many countries out there that aren't. Be safe.

*-Anonymous, Summer in the British Isles*

I went to Madrid, and I had no idea it was such a gay friendly city. I wish I had known sooner I would of done a whole year rather than just a semester.

*-Anonymous, Semester in Madrid*

I am a young bisexual woman who has been out to my friends and family for a couple of years now. I chose to be out to my friends while I was studying in London at Roehampton University because I was just getting comfortable being out of the closet and did not want to put myself back in that position. My friends were all supportive and actively tried to make me comfortable throughout my stay in the city. Right at the end of my

stay in London, America legalized gay marriage throughout the country. I was ecstatic and so were my new friends. We decided to all go out to the pub that night to celebrate the incredible news. I found London to be a pretty safe space for LGBTQ+ people, and I observed signs of support for my community through the city. London let me be proud of who I am, and supported me as I celebrated the amazing changes taking place in America.

*-Jennifer W., Summer in London*

Advice to future LGBTQ+ students: Honestly I would just hope that this semester for people will act as another clean slate. If you've come to terms with your identity/gender/orientation later than many do then studying abroad is a chance to test the waters. Embrace yourself and experience what it's like to just be free with who you are. I promise you it's the best feeling in the world.

*- Nick M., Summer in London*

I'm a gay male who studied in London. I did a good amount of research on how accepting London is before going (more because my mom was worried but you know how parents are) and the city is consistently rated as one of the most gay friendly places in Europe. Going into my time abroad I knew it would actually be easier to be unashamedly myself than at my home university so I embraced the "gay" side of my life a bit more. I went to gay bars, made a bunch of gay friends, and just in general got involved in the gay culture more than here in the states. Being in London for four months was great because I wasn't just getting a small taste of gay life in London. I lived it the entire time I was there and loved every second. Being in such an accepting atmosphere helped me to realize that I'm more than some gay athlete (yeah, I play sports at college and that's not always so accepted as we know). In general it was such a great experience because if anything else it made me even prouder to be gay. Some of my best friends I made are gay/in relationships and it was really my first complete exposure to gay relationships and it was beautiful. Every last second was perfect to me and my sexual orientation did nothing to cause problems. -

*Nick M., Summer in London*

I went abroad to Ecuador to intern with Equilibrio Azul, an organization working for the conservation of sharks and sea turtles, as well as the protection of the environment. Personally, I identify as gay. Before traveling to Ecuador, I did research online to gauge the current attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community in the country. Much of it did not seem positive. Fortunately my identity did not impact my experience abroad, despite Ecuador having a notoriously negative view on homosexuality. For the month that I was abroad, I simply "re-closeted" myself, and only revealed my sexuality to those I trusted. As unfortunate as that may sound, it seemed necessary at the time and was probably the safest option when traveling to a new place. Because of this, I was not treated any differently in the country. To future students, I would recommend doing your research about the country you want to visit. And remember, even when traveling to an LGBT-friendly place such as Canada or the U.S., always value safety above all else.

*-Carson P., Intern in Ecuador*

The summer I went to London, I came to terms with the fact that I was pansexual, not bisexual. That same summer, I went to my first pride parade in London. It was the typical rainy day and all the rainbow confetti and glitter was sticking to everything! I've never felt happier or more accepted. It was life-changing to attend such an incredible event after I had just come to better understand my own sexuality.

*-Sally S., Summer in London*

In London, my identity as a gay man did not affect how people treated me. Being Mexican-American definitely had an effect, but not being gay. It was surprising for me personally, being in a space where I did not fear being/coming out. It has helped me in being me. London is such an open city. Yes there is the rare homophobic slur, but it literally only happened once, The rest of the time people simply didn't care. For future student I would say, do research on the country that you are going to. Find out how it treats its own LGBTQIA+ citizens. You will have to live in that space as either out or not. But it will help knowing what to expect in before going. If the country is not necessary nice towards our community, there is no shame in hiding for your own safety. Be proud of who you are, yes. But your safety is the most important thing. While there, you can find people from our community, and be out to them.

*-David O., Intern in London*

I identify as a gay/bisexual woman, and I studied in Reutlingen, Germany from January to May. It didn't impact it at all really, I feel very comfortable with who I am and my friends and family support me, so I've been very fortunate that I haven't run into any problems. I had such an amazing time abroad, and I would strongly encourage anybody who's interested, to definitely spend some time abroad, you may discover something else about yourself!

*-Siobhan C., Semester in Germany*

I went abroad to Italy. It was perhaps the best experience of my life. The people were incredibly friendly and kind there. I learned a lot and traveled a lot, and made so many new friends. I however, never came out and told anyone that I am gay. I hid that fact from everyone there. I did not want to be judged based upon my sexual orientation. Also from what I learned in the first few weeks was that Italians were not the most accepting of being gay. I mean they were not outwardly hostile or prejudice toward people who were gay or lesbian. They had more of an attitude of if you are fine that is okay, just keep it to yourself and don't show it around us. It is a little hard to describe how I felt about it or how it impacted me as I kept this to myself. Perhaps I was a little afraid that if I did come out abroad then I would have been alienated by some in the community and those in the abroad group as well. I just went about my days like I always would and lived life to the fullest while there. It was honestly the best time of my life and I would recommend anyone that is LGBTQIA or not to go and experience another life for themselves.

*-Anonymous, Semester in Italy*

I studied abroad for a semester in London, England. When I do decide to label myself it's usually gay or lesbian and honestly it didn't hugely effect my time abroad. I'm always hesitant to come out to new people because I don't know how they'll react, so trying to find the right opportunity to tell this brand new group of friends I made was nerve wracking but I felt like I was lying to them (and constantly talking about finding cute British boys wasn't exactly "fun" after a while). Everyone was super accepting and some of them had questions I've been more than willing to answer. I was so awkward about coming out to them and now it's just become a big joke between all of us. As for being out and living in London - it's no big deal. It's a big city so that's relatively expected and SOHO is a known "gay area" here, specifically for nightlife (SO fun by the way). If I regret anything it's not dragging my abroad friends (all of whom are straight) to the gay/lesbian bars and clubs sooner. They have fun and I actually have a chance at meeting someone - it's a win/win in my books.

*-Marissa B., The London Semester*

Advice to future LGBTQ+ students: If you're out and going abroad and are shy to tell people like I usually am or if you're not out but think abroad you want to be (I know a few people who came out abroad) I say just do you. People are going to accept you even if they don't understand it at first because everyone is trying to make friends and you're also going to find that everyone who decides to study abroad is going to be pretty open-minded and forward thinking. Don't be afraid to be yourself. Don't be afraid to explore who you are - and honestly, being in a foreign country with no one who knows you can't really be a more ideal situation to figure out who you really are and who you want to be.

*-Marissa B., The London Semester*

I identify as queer, and I went to Edinburgh with CISAbroad. Everyone I met was very open and accepting, and most of the girls on both my football and rugby teams were out and proud lesbians. My decision to go to the UK was based on that it was an English speaking country and that it was (relatively) liberal compared to the other countries I was looking at, such as Italy and Cuba. I had a wonderful time, and I highly recommend going to the UK for any potential people who identify as LGBTQ and are worried about fitting in//being accepted in the country they want to go to. If asked, I would advise queer people to go to as many queer bars/clubs and events as they can, if not to meet other potential partners but just to connect with other queer people as friends. If you identify as a girl, I especially advise you to join a rugby team since girls' rugby seems to attract a lot of queer people. I do wish that before I had gone abroad that someone had told me that the UK is NOT as conservative as I originally thought.

*-Anonymous, Semester in Edinburgh*