



diversityabroad

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# Black Student's Guide to Global Programs



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Please note, this publication is not all encompassing of the Black Student experience but helps to shed light on some of the more common questions and experiences shared by Black students who have participated in international programs.



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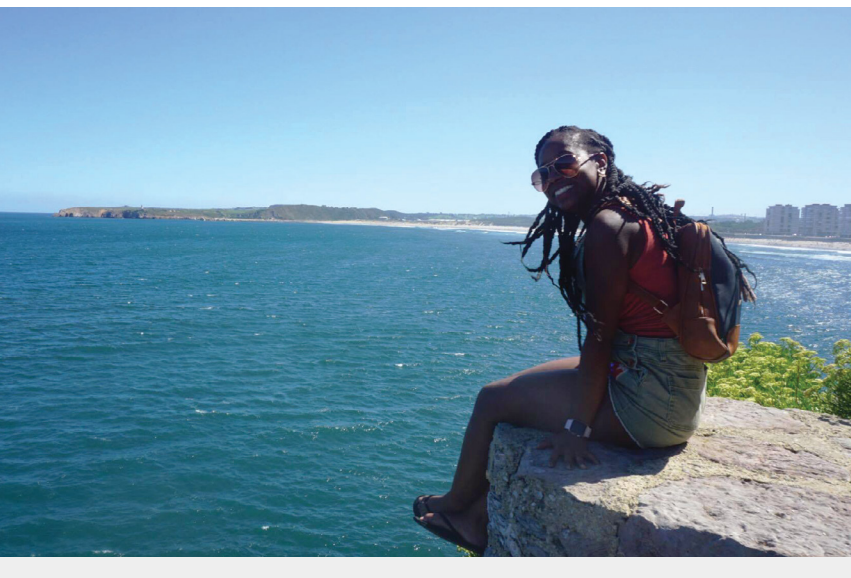
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# Introduction



More and more, the demographic of students going abroad reflects the diversity of students enrolled in schools & universities. With this in mind, the need for specialized support and resources also grows. [Diversity Abroad](#) was founded to address these gaps and to encourage students and future professionals like yourself to take their learning global.

In this guide, we are focusing on Black students (referring broadly to those of African-diaspora heritage) and what it can be like to go abroad with this identity. We've written this guide for Black students based on real experiences of living, working, and studying abroad while Black. These are the things that you may not otherwise be told but that you will be glad to know. We hope this guide will be informative, thought-provoking, and most of all help you feel prepared to take on the challenge and opportunity of going abroad.

*Disclaimer: With the unpredictability of COVID-19 and the impact it has had across the world, please be mindful to take into consideration how COVID-19 protocols and restrictions may impact you and the country you hope to explore abroad.*



# What Are International Programs?

In this guide, we will often refer to international programs, as this term encompasses the many different forms of engagement abroad. International programs can take a number of forms and are definitely not one-size-fits-all. Some common types of international programs include study abroad programs, volunteering, interning, graduate school, fellowships, and even teaching. No matter if you are a non-traditional student, on a budget, or have limited time, if you want to see the world, you've got some options. Below are just some of the program types available.

## **STUDY ABROAD**

Study abroad is probably what comes to mind for most people when they think of international programs. Study abroad programs can vary widely in terms of length, structure, cost, and content but almost always involve taking classes for credit. Depending on your major and where you choose to study, you may even be able to take courses that count toward your degree. Most university students choose to do study abroad some time during their sophomore or junior year of study or during the summer in between. Some study abroad programs place students in a home stay, while others may have you living in your own apartment or on campus in a dormitory.

## **INTERNSHIPS ABROAD**

Depending on your academic and professional goals, a standalone internship or one connected to your study abroad program might be the perfect opportunity for you. Overseas internships are an opportunity to experience how industries operate in a new context. In addition to the work experience, you can gain priceless life experience. If you are debating between interning and studying abroad, check out a breakdown of the differences and similarities [here](#).

## **TEACH ABROAD**

Teaching abroad is an incredible way to immerse yourself in the local culture, interact on a meaningful level with the locals, and earn some money to travel. Teaching is not easy; it can be challenging and you will earn every penny you make. It is a job after all, and like any job you should commit yourself to it. Take a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) course and get *paid* to be abroad. We know that finances are important—this is a great alternative if you're a graduating senior and you have never been abroad before.

## **VOLUNTEER ABROAD**

Volunteering can be another opportunity to live abroad and is one option that is often underutilized. Although you may wonder what the point is of working for no pay, you may still be earning valuable experience that will pay off in your career search down the road. Additionally, some volunteer sites offer free lodging and/or meals.

## **GRAD SCHOOL AND FELLOWSHIPS ABROAD**

Many students believe that international opportunities are only available to undergraduate students. This is not so. There are many opportunities for students to make their graduate experience an international one. Scholarships and fellowships such as the FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) and the Fulbright are specifically geared toward graduate students who want to study abroad as a part of their program.

## ARE THEY FOR ME?

If you are reading this guide you at least have some desire to go abroad. But perhaps you still have some lingering doubts or obstacles that are standing in your way. In this guide, we address common barriers like program cost, building your support system, and cultural expectations. The bottom line is that if you want to do it, then it *is* for you. The key is to find an option that works for you, your budget, your time constraints, and your goals. This guide is all about finding ways to make it work and what to expect when you go.



*“Where there’s a will, often times there’s a way. Many channels for access to study abroad experiences exist, as do many obstacles. But we, as people, can be our own biggest obstacles. Self-determination is a major component in making a successful study abroad experience possible. Diligence, persistence, and tenacity can make a seemingly impossible opportunity come to life”*

—Kameron Dunbar  
Diversity Abroad Alumnus, Semester at Sea





## COVERING THE COST

Based on a survey from Diversity Abroad, the cost of global programs is often the #1 barrier that students cite for going abroad. While the expense is not insignificant, there are also ways to make your experience more affordable. [Scholarships](#) are a great way to go abroad without going into debt, and there are so many different kinds. Investigate scholarship possibilities internally within your school through your study abroad office or academic department, and external scholarships through

organizations like [Diversity Abroad](#). You may also be able to incorporate study abroad costs as part of your current financial aid award, so check in with your school's financial aid office as well. Besides scholarships and financial aid, it's also possible to find ways to make a bit of spending money while abroad by doing things such as babysitting or teaching English.

*"Look at the abundance of opportunity instead of lack thereof. If there might be any challenges such as being unable to pay out of pocket for the journey, know that there are many ways to get covered. The overall investment is definitely worth it, and it will mold you into a better person."*

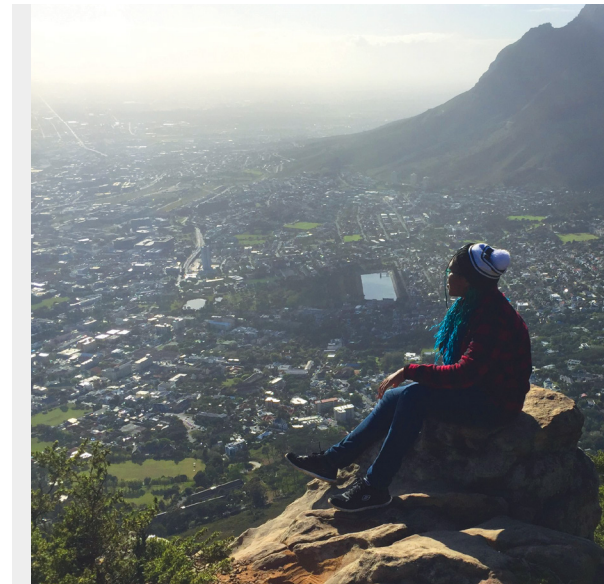
—[Christina Walthall](#), (Diversity Abroad Alumna, Japan)

# The Benefits of International Programs

Whether you are working toward an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or something else, international programs allow students to develop global competency skills. Keep in mind that no matter the program(s) abroad you choose, you will enjoy the opportunity to develop skills such as adaptability, problem solving, and cross-cultural communication; explore and/or acquire a language; and overall gain academic and life-enhancing experiences. International programs can also provide students with global skills that will allow you to stand out when you look for jobs.

## ADAPTABILITY

International programs allow you to explore a new culture or gain a deeper understanding of a culture that you might have been exposed to. No matter the case, you will be challenged in various ways, ranging from language barriers and culture shock, to general communication misunderstandings. Yes, you may experience challenges abroad, but these temporary obstacles can provide you with opportunities to become adaptable in unexpected ways! It is important to recognize that while engaging with a new cultural environment may be difficult at times, becoming more adaptable will aid you in your personal growth as a skill you can use continually in your personal and professional life.



## PROBLEM SOLVING

As you step outside of your comfort zone and adjust to your new life abroad, you will undoubtedly experience situations that push you to think outside the box. Whether you are trying to figure out the local transportation system, banking practices, or simply ordering food at a restaurant, with each new experience you will strengthen your ability to problem solve without feeling discouraged. At the beginning some things may seem intimidating, but you will begin noticing that, with time, you will gain confidence because you'll feel comfortable in your ability to solve whatever challenges come your way during your time abroad.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Another skill you will gain while living abroad is the art of cross-cultural communication. Many Black students might already be familiar with this concept because they are used to navigating school, work, family, and friends through more than one cultural lens. For example, you may have been used to eating certain types of food and speaking a specific way at home and having to code-switch when you interacted with other Americans outside of your home environment. You will learn that, based on people's cultural backgrounds, they may communicate and approach life in different ways. This is not to say that one culture is better than another; instead, each culture is unique. The ability to communicate with people from various cultural backgrounds allows you to be more flexible and understanding, which is a skill that will serve you well in your personal and professional life.

## **LANGUAGE EXPLORATION/ACQUISITION**

As you consider living abroad, you may want to learn or improve your foreign language speaking and writing skills. By participating in an international program, you can choose to live in the country where you can be fully immersed in another culture and language. There you'll have the opportunity to work on your grammar and writing skills! The opportunities are endless, and you can choose the best option for you. No matter what you decide, studying abroad is a great way to dive deep into the host culture and build your résumé!

## **CAREER BENEFITS**

Living abroad is a valuable experience to include on your résumé. Sometimes students forget all the impressive things they accomplished abroad. In addition to learning a new language, they may have gained other skills that are important to highlight on their résumé, such as problem solving and navigating unfamiliar situations. It is important to include all of the skills you gain abroad and to share specific examples, which you can also highlight during interviews. Essentially, after going abroad you are poised to discuss ways the experience sets you apart from your peers!



A young woman with dark hair styled in a bun is sitting on a stone wall, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a white patterned long-sleeved shirt with a lace-up front, bright pink pants, and brown sandals. A black bag is slung over her shoulder. The background is a lush green landscape with a village and a river visible in the distance.

**Calling In**

**Your Parents**

Maybe you're ready to take off, but your parents aren't quite on board. It's not uncommon for parents to have concerns about safety or cost, or even to doubt the value of going abroad. Among Black students, only a small fraction study abroad. Many may come from cultures where they are encouraged to stay within their own community. If going to school in another state is a stretch, then venturing across the world could be unheard of. You know your family best. Think about their concerns and what they value. Do your research and be ready to address their worries and [highlight what you stand to gain](#).

## Getting Your Family on Board

### 1 Be Respectful and Hear Them Out

Oftentimes, a negative reaction from older people in our lives can be attributed to the approach and/or a perceived lack of respect. It can be challenging to navigate new dynamics when a child goes off to college and now wants to be seen as an adult in the family. Many parents become frustrated when they feel they are no longer needed or respected by their child. If your family members are upset because they think you are "acting like you're grown," reassure them that you value their opinions and then truly listen to their concerns.

### 2 Show Them You've Done the Research

Familial hesitation may stem from concerns that you are unprepared or haven't thought through your decision. Research the living conditions, safety issues, and [cultural climate](#) of your future location. Share this information as well as resources from your study abroad office and from your program site. Your family may also be reassured by reading firsthand accounts from other people of color who have traveled there.



## 3

## Share the Benefits

Some family members, who may have noticed the lack of representation in some of these experiences, may not see studying abroad as an experience marketed towards Black people. The best way to counteract this mindset is to discuss the very tangible benefits of study abroad. Most parents want to see their child graduate college and get a good job, so it is a safe bet to focus on the boost that going abroad will provide to your career prospects. You can also stress the educational benefits. Will you be taking classes toward your degree? Learning or honing new language skills? Share with your parents what you expect to gain from going abroad.

## 4

## Make a Game Plan Together

Once you and your family are on the same page as far as your intended travel, you will want to make a communication plan. You should plan to discuss things like when you will check in, how often, and using what means. Consider using [messenger services](#) or [apps](#) that run on Wi-Fi so that you're not dependent on cellular data while you're abroad. Depending on folks' level of technical savvy, you may want to walk them through setting up things like Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp before you go. Some cell phones allow you to add another time zone as part of their clock application, which can be helpful for keeping up with the time difference when you're away.

Unfortunately, you may also need to prepare yourself for the fact that your family may not support your decision to go abroad. With or without parental support, taking the step to travel to another country can be daunting. Even if you and your parents don't see eye to eye, there are still ways to enjoy your experience. And the good news is, you don't have to do it alone!





# Support from Your Extended Network

## 1 Extended Family

If you and your parents do not see eye to eye, think about other people in your family whom you are close to. Are you and your siblings close? Do you have a favorite auntie, grandparent, or cousin? Extended family members can be valuable allies and can also provide support while you are away.

## 2 Your School

If you are based at a college or university, chances are that you have multiple resources available to help you on your way. Your university's study abroad office is a good place to start both for country-specific information and for [general advice](#). Make good contacts in these offices and ask about support for students before, during, and after studying abroad. You may also want to check in with other places like your campus's office of multicultural affairs to see if they have any specialized resources or can connect you with other diverse students who have gone abroad.

## 3 Your Friends

To many of us, friends are like our chosen family. Because they are more similar in age and experiences, your friends are also more likely to understand your choices and your goals. Lean on your peer network, in addition to your family, for support.

## 4

### DiversityAbroad.com

There is a wealth of information and support here for you on DiversityAbroad.com. Diversity Abroad is here to assist as you begin to find study abroad programs and [scholarships](#) to fund your travels.

*“Make sure you’re ready to be in a different country from your parents for an extended period of time because I certainly missed my family while I was abroad. I learned quickly that I no longer was able to casually fly back home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. So just take into consideration your family and try to constantly keep them updated on how you’re doing because my parents definitely called every couple of days to check up on me and that was heartwarming.”*

—[Larryn Zeigler](#)

Diversity Abroad Alumnus, UK

## Staying in Touch

Regardless of whether they are on board for you to study abroad, your family will likely want to know where you are and whether you are safe. Be sure to keep updating them on your location and comfort and keep the lines of communication open, even if the time delay means that you are just sending emails while the other half of the world is asleep.

Aside from functional communication, it can be challenging to be disconnected from life at home. Whether it’s being gone for homecoming or waking up to a totally confusing Twitter meme, no one enjoys the FOMO that comes from missing crucial moments at home. Technology has made it easier than ever to stay in touch, even across the world. Figure out your communication plans *before* you go. Roaming fees are no joke, so take advantage of the many [devices and apps](#) that allow you to send messages via Wi-Fi. Add your friends and family using your preferred app and let them know how to reach you. Just make sure you’re engaging with your new surroundings too!



**Keeping It**

**Real(ish) Abroad**



Going abroad will likely challenge you to rethink how you see the world and even yourself. This reconfiguration is usually a good thing in the long run, but while it's happening you may find yourself feeling inspired and invigorated but you may also feel lost and confused. Here are a few challenges you may experience and ways to maintain your identity when navigating a new environment.

## CODE-SWITCHING

As a Black person in America, you are likely very familiar with the practice of [code-switching](#), which refers to adopting the language and culture of the dominant group to navigate predominantly white spaces and social institutions. Code-switching in everyday life can take a variety of forms, from “speaking properly” to straightening one’s hair to look “more professional.” In a study abroad context, you may find yourself experiencing freedom from these pressures for the first time, but on the flip side may find yourself still needing to code-switch to navigate the new culture and environment. Feeling like you have to be “on” or act a certain way once you step outside your door in the morning can be incredibly draining. Code-switching is hard enough at home, and it can be magnified by being in a foreign context and potentially speaking a foreign language. The good news is that as a Black student, you are already an expert at code-switching and have the skills to adapt to a new cultural environment. To combat that exhaustion, be sure to tune into your mood and energy levels. If you find yourself drained day after day, remember that it is okay to take a break for some “me time”. You should also check in regularly with your support system in-country and back home for those times when you need to talk to someone you can be real with and who knows the real you.



# Racism

[Race](#) is something many Black Americans think about every day. Going abroad will likely shift your [perception of race](#). Most of us prepare for stares or unfriendly treatment, but we may not expect to have our skin touched on the train or to have our picture taken while eating lunch. Many people's only concept of the United States is through the media. Due to underrepresentation and misrepresentation of people of color, it is not uncommon to encounter people who assume that American = white.

The concept of *colorism*, which refers to the preferential treatment of those with lighter over darker skin, is steeped in communities all over the world. Cultural impacts of colorism are not uncommon in the United States, and may be particularly prevalent in other parts of the world. Keeping this in mind can aid in your preparation to confront any related challenging moments abroad.

If you are going abroad with a cohort of students from the US, you may also face the same racially based challenges within your cohort abroad as you do at home. For better or worse, you are also likely to have a different experience of being abroad than non-Black classmates.

Be prepared to navigate feelings you may have about being a non-white American in a non-white country. Many students struggle with whether to feel more aligned with their citizenship or their race. If you highly identify with being Black/African American at home, it may be challenging to be in a place full of Black people with whom you do not immediately have a cultural connection. To read more about the experience of "going home" to a place you've never been, check out our [guide for heritage-seekers](#).

Unsurprisingly, your experience as a Black traveler may differ from that of a white student studying abroad. To be as prepared as possible, you will want to go beyond perusing generic travel guides, which have typically been curated for a white audience. You've already taken the first step in your research by reading this guide, but you should also learn more about the experiences of Black people in your specific location.



*“While I was abroad, many asked if I was a rapper, entertainer, or athlete. The question did become annoying after a while. However, it also gave me the opportunity to teach others about my culture as a Black American/Nigerian. For many, I was the first person of color from the US they had ever met. In that experience, I was able to counter misconceptions and stereotypes of what a typical Black American should be.”*

—Delonte Egwuatu  
Diversity Abroad Alumnus, Argentina

## GLOBAL ANTI-BLACKNESS ABROAD

As a Black person in America, simply existing can be a dangerous proposition. When going abroad, your mileage may vary. No doubt you are familiar with the way Black people are commonly depicted in the media as no more than [stereotypes](#). When traveling internationally in a place where Blackness is [uncommon](#), people may stereotypically assume that if you're Black, you must be some combination of celebrity, dancer, rapper, athlete, or criminal. Furthermore, you may find [hypersexualization](#) of black people, which may lead to unwanted and/or inappropriate attention. The application of these stereotypes can range from amusing and benign to serious and threatening. To prepare yourself, research the specific situation in your host country so that you have an idea of what to expect. But don't let the threat of stereotypes and global anti-Blackness attitudes scare you away from finding your perfect study abroad spot.

## BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

We've discussed some potential stereotypes; now let's focus on the joy of being Black abroad. Depending on where you travel, you may find new experiences and perspectives open to you precisely *because* of your Blackness. Living in an African or predominantly Black country can be a wonderful chance to [embrace your Blackness](#), feel like you belong, and be seen as the norm rather than a minority. In other countries without a large Black population, you may find that local people are eager to meet you and to talk to you. In many cases, they may be meeting a Black person for the first time and could have some strange (and often humorous) ideas or questions. If the person seems genuine, it's often best to assume good-natured curiosity. These conversations can be a great opportunity to develop local connections and engage in cultural exchange. Depending on where you travel, you may also find being Black can serve to lessen some of the prejudices that people may have against Americans, and locals will be more friendly and open toward you. In America, we often have to fight negative messages about Blackness. But being Black abroad can mean something entirely different. Blackness is special. Blackness is beautiful.

*"I am a black, heterosexual, cisgendered female, and throughout my voyage it was being black that really had some significance in my voyage. Particularly in China where my blackness was both obvious and pointed out on a daily basis. I experienced staring, photographs, and even verbal remarks that during one experience in Suzhou, was just plain offensive. Sometimes I even just experienced honest, innocent, curiosity, such as in India where I was asked if I curled my hair. I chuckled and explained that it just grew like that from my head.*

*Not even just on land, but on the ship as well, there were many unintentional moments of insensitivity. However I don't think it was an individual experience that taught me something, but I think it was a culmination of my voyage that did. I learned something about being a black American versus being a part of the multiple groups that make up the African diaspora. I even became more aware of what it meant to be black and travel. Furthermore, in black student union we had many great discussions on a global level as opposed to a local one which was very insightful."*

—[Afiong Onyile](#)

Diversity Abroad Alumna, Semester at Sea



*“As a black male, meet and greets with other foreigners became complex because I would explain to them that I was not from, nor had I ever traveled to Africa. When I told them I was American, many would shamelessly inquire about my opinion on race relations in America. Beside these, somewhat awkward icebreakers, I felt very accepted and treated equal during my time abroad in Thailand.”*

—[Austin Ogletree](#)

Diversity Abroad Alumnus, Thailand



## MISIDENTIFICATION

You should also be prepared for the fact that your [identity may not be recognized](#). People may doubt that you are American. They may also read you as a different race or even a local (which can be advantageous at times). You may also find that your sense of privilege has shifted. For example, perhaps you come from a low-income or first-generation background back home, but in your host country you are suddenly considered wealthy and well-educated. In many countries, you will automatically have a higher status simply by virtue of being American. Many of us have internalized oppression through coming of age in America. It can be disorientating (although hopefully eye-opening) to find yourself suddenly in a different social status position.

# Bringing the Whole You Abroad

## IDENTITY

Oftentimes, higher education professionals may lump together all Black students through a one-size-fits-all-approach in advising for study abroad programs. This may become an issue if school administrators overlook or misunderstand nuanced needs, concerns, and interests unique to students from various ethnic and cultural Black backgrounds. While similarities do indeed exist, there is a great deal of diversity among this group too, as you know.

Due to the multiplicity of identities Black students possess, you may experience a sense of frustration that international programs

administrators and staff may only consider one aspect of your identity (in this case, race and/or ethnicity). Whether it's socioeconomic status, national origin, gender identity, immigration status, or status as a first-generation college student, these are all important components of identity and can be especially relevant for you as a Black student while preparing to go and while living abroad.

Though those around you may not consider these many intersectional parts of their identities relevant, you should always feel you can display and share as much of your personal experience as you are comfortable sharing. Simply put, feel free to be yourself!

While you should never have to feel like you need to suppress a certain part of your identity just to “fit in,” it's important to be conscious of how your identity may be perceived by others while you are abroad. For example, the experience of a darker-complexioned Black student may differ from that of a student with a lighter complexion in the host culture. Considering such perceptions and the historical context and media influences that may drive those perceptions may help you prepare for how you might navigate related conversations and experiences.



## IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

In some instances, you may be the only Black student in your program. You may even experience impostor syndrome, which is a non-discriminatory feeling of self-doubt, insecurity, or fraudulence. Feeling like you don't belong while you're studying abroad can be isolating and lonely. It may help to focus on the things you share in common with the culture abroad and/or your new group of friends. New friends may value things that are important to you such as family, community, and preparing food together. In spite of cultural differences, the more you travel, the more you will begin to see that we all have more things in common than differences.



It is understandable to feel isolated in a place that is primarily homogeneous, if no one looks like you or understands Black culture. People in the local culture may not have met many, if any, Black people!

Instead of viewing this as a hindrance, it can be your opportunity to shine and share some of your rich cultural attributes that you value the most. You could cook a traditional dish that reflects your culture and home life as a way to share your Black roots. If music is your jam, perhaps showcase a song or dance that is important to you and expose local friends to a new musical genre, such as Jazz, Gospel, Blues, Rap, Hip-Hop, R&B, or Neo-Soul.

## GENDER IDENTITY

We've discussed concerns from the point of view of cisgender Black men and women above, but we also wanted to consider the perspective of students with a fluid gender identity. It is vital that you have a good understanding of the landscape for how gender/gender identity is perceived in your host country. You can start with your campus's study abroad office and LGBTQ+ student center to see what suggestions and resources they may have for students going abroad. Depending on where you are traveling, you may be pleasantly surprised. Many non-Western cultures do not adhere to the binary conception of culture that we have traditionally had in the US, and may be more accepting of gender fluidity.



## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Attitudes toward sexual orientation vary widely across the world. Some countries are even more progressive than the United States in terms of being open and accepting of same-sex relationships. In others, you may be faced with stares or disapproving looks. And in some places, homosexuality may be a serious taboo or even illegal. If you identify as LGBTQI+, it is extremely important that you research the country conditions before making the decision to study abroad in a given location. If you are interested in traveling to a place where homosexuality is illegal or a serious cultural taboo, please

weigh this factor carefully. You will need to make an educated decision about whether you are willing, comfortable, and able to hide your sexuality while in that location. Deciding whether to be out in your host country can be a matter of personal safety. For additional tips on what questions to ask and how to keep yourself safe and supported, check out our [LGBTQ+ Students Guide](#). Finally, there are numerous gay and lesbian travel sites and organizations that can also be a valuable source of information in this area. And for a firsthand account, read through [Emily's roadmap](#) to queer study abroad.



## DISABILITY

Depending on cultural factors and the disability itself, people with disabilities can expect treatment to be different from country to country. Although the US has not always been the best when it comes to people with disabilities, there are legal protections in place and a general emphasis on facilitating independence. In other countries, people with disabilities may not have the same level of services and support as they may have in the US. Having a disability should not prevent you from studying abroad, but it may be a factor to be mindful of in the place that you choose to study abroad. Be sure to consult with your study abroad advisor about the resources available to you in the program and location of your choice. You can also check in with your institution's disability and accessibility office. If you would like to read further on this topic, please visit Diversity Abroad's [guide for Students with Disabilities](#).



## RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

For many Black students, the church community and personal religious beliefs are a huge part of identity and daily life. As with the other identities we've mentioned, you'll need to take into consideration the situation in your host country. What are the prevailing attitudes toward religion? Is there a single dominant religion? Is your religion regularly practiced in this place? If you are a spiritual person, you will want to make arrangements to safely honor this while you are abroad. Try to connect with a church or other worship group once you are settled. You will continue to nourish yourself spiritually, and this can be a great way to meet people in the community. Diversity Abroad has a special guide that focuses on how to handle [practicing your religion while abroad](#). You may also find that traveling abroad can actually serve to redefine your faith. For example, read about [Delonte's](#) experience in Cape Town, South Africa.

## HOW TO BRING THE WHOLE YOU ABROAD

As with any new or different experiences in our lives, participating in an international program can seem like a challenging endeavor. While there may indeed be bumps along the road, this transformative time during your academic career is truly a life-changing journey. From immersing yourself in a foreign culture to meeting individuals from diverse backgrounds, this is an opportunity for you to “bring the whole you” abroad as you navigate new spaces.

Always remember that your roots and background are an important part of who you are. You should always feel free and be proud to share any aspect of your identity. From family stories that shaped who you are to your previous experiences as a Black student at your college/university, these are also parts of your life you may consider critical elements of your identity. It's always an individual choice as to what parts of your personal life you reveal to others. As such, it's a good exercise to think about what you are comfortable sharing with people and what you would rather keep private.

Though it's essential to allow the major parts of your identity to “travel with you” abroad, you can also intentionally commit yourself to leaving room for personal growth. Be open-minded to this new experience, and stay curious! International programs will, without a doubt, teach you things in the classroom and beyond that will influence who you are for the rest of your life.

# Staying Healthy and Safe Abroad



Wellness is a very prominent topic these days, but what does it actually mean? To us, wellness is twofold and encompasses both physical and mental self-care. Between stale plane air, new foods, stress, and a disrupted sleep schedule, it is no wonder that many people get sick when they travel. You know your body and what it needs, so make sure you are taking care of the basics—stay fed, watered, and rested as much as possible. Don't let a disruption of your routine also disrupt your exercise habits. Depending on your location and your preferred method of exercise, you may need to find creative ways to adapt your routine to your situation. Long walks are a great way to get in some exercise and explore your new location.

If you require a [specific diet](#) or prescription medications, you will want to take extra steps to have what you need in your host country. This can mean either bringing supplies with you or researching how to obtain them before you arrive. If you are bringing prescription drugs with you, you will also want to research whether what you are bringing is permitted and in what amounts in your host country. Laws vary by country regarding controlled substances, and some may require advanced permission in order to bring in prescription drugs.

If you menstruate and enjoy using particular feminine hygiene products, please keep in mind that some products may not be as easily available abroad, such as tampons (with or without applicators). Depending on your location and product preference, it is often best to bring enough supplies to last you for the duration of your international program.

Speaking of product preferences, we would be remiss if we didn't cover [hair](#). Depending on the demographics of your host country, you may have a hard time finding a place to do your hair. Consider adopting a low-maintenance protective style or learning how to manage your hair on your own. You will also likely need to bring hydrating and styling products with you.

In addition to taking care of yourself physically, it's also important to take steps to keep yourself [mentally healthy](#) while abroad. If you are currently having or have in the past experienced mental health challenges, be sure to disclose this information to your study abroad advisor. College professionals deal with these issues every day, and they may have specialized resources to support you while you are away.





Even if you have not struggled in the past, being in a new and unfamiliar environment can be stressful. Make sure you take the time to check in with yourself periodically. That can be through journaling, blogging, making videos, art, or however you like to reflect and process your experiences. Walks and meditation are also great ways to unwind and harness a little inner peace.

Remember that you should never tolerate abuse, threats, or violence, no matter the cultural context. [Be smart](#), pay attention to what your gut is telling you, and be cautious in a new situation. In non-threatening situations, it may be helpful to try to keep an open mind and assume good intent. We've also broken down a few [considerations](#) to keep in mind when facing ambiguous situations abroad.

# Culture Shock Is Real

No matter how much you research and plan, nothing can truly prepare you for the experience of being immersed in a new country and cultural environment. Because of this, [culture shock](#) can either be instantaneous or a more gradual experience that takes a while to process. Sometimes, students may experience culture shock in the midst of multiple small occurrences during their new daily routine rather than one major traumatic event. For example, you may begin to feel frustrated that the everyday comforts and habitual tasks of life at home are not the same abroad. Many factors can trigger feelings of culture shock, from differences in food or the realization that water isn't free at restaurants in some countries as in the United States, to more complex issues like a lack of personal space or privacy or struggles with understanding the host language.

A big part of culture shock can result from the difference between expectation and reality. Perhaps you are traveling to a country where you have familial roots. You may assume that since you're going to the Motherland, so to speak, that the people will embrace you and the culture will feel familiar. It's possible, however, to actually find yourself feeling like those around you perceive you as an outsider. Perhaps you'll begin to wonder if the location of your international program is right for you. One way to cope with these kinds of feelings is by considering how you might be more adaptable and open to the differences around you. Remember that traveling to another country and immersing yourself in a different culture presents an enormous opportunity for learning — about the world and about yourself!

Though there's no magic solution to prevent culture shock, there are certainly proactive ways to deal with it. You can begin by anticipating varying degrees of culture shock, recognize and validate your feelings, and process them as part of your overall experience and learning abroad. Navigating a new environment as a Black student from the United States can pose certain unique challenges that may heighten culture shock. At the same time, you can transform these instances into learning experiences as you encounter individuals with different perspectives and distinct cultural norms.





**Coming Home**

**and Continuing the Journey**



So you went abroad and had some unforgettable experiences, now what? In this section we will get into handling the transition back home, how to claim the benefits of your experiences, and how to continue learning.



## REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

[Reverse culture shock](#) refers to the experience of feeling out of place or having trouble readjusting to life at home. Though you have probably changed as a result of your travels, things at home are likely as they were when you left. For example, if you have developed a new and more complex understanding of Black identity while abroad, it can be difficult to translate this back into an American context.

There are a number of ways to ease your reintegration into life at home and overcome feelings of reverse culture shock. First, be patient! Give yourself time and continue reflecting on what you have learned and how you've changed. Perhaps your travel sparked new ideas or created new questions for you. Consider taking a class or picking up a few books that will build upon your experiences. Later in this guide, we'll also discuss options for taking your learning even further into a graduate school experience.

## PAYING IT FORWARD

You may also want to share your experience abroad with others. Check in with your study abroad office to see if there are any official programs or channels for you to engage in this at your institution. On a personal level, consider hosting a gathering for your friends and loved ones where you show your favorite pictures and videos from your travels and perhaps share some of your favorite foods.

Finally, you may have formed important relationships or impressions while abroad. If you can maintain those connections, your cultural learning will continue even after you come home. You can also investigate local community centers, services, or events for people from your host country. This is a great way to stay engaged and to give back to these groups now that you are home.



*"Studying abroad has prepared me for my future career by teaching me to understand other cultures (like tolerating customs that I do not agree with). In addition, I have gained a deeper understanding for the Spanish language which broadened my spectrum of communication."*

—Selina Macias  
Diversity Abroad Alumna, Ecuador

## CAREER

Once you have settled back into life at home, you should begin to reflect on your experiences abroad and how they translate into professional assets. If you held any positions while you were abroad, be sure to add them to your resume. You should also want to update your resume with any skills you acquired (such as foreign language proficiency) during your international program. Finally, be sure to identify the soft skills you gained such as an increased tolerance for ambiguity, cultural flexibility, resilience, etc. While they may not appear as bullet points on your resume, these are definite assets in terms of your career search. Think about how you market these skills to potential employers, and definitely plan to highlight these skills in job application and interview settings.



*“Studying abroad really helped me stand out as a dental school applicant. When I was conducting interviews at various schools, I was always asked about my study abroad experiences. I believe studying abroad gave me an advantage over other applicants.”*

—Nia Beasley

Diversity Abroad Alumna, China & Cyprus

## GRADUATE SCHOOL

As in the career realm, international experiences can serve to set you apart and offer a boost to your application when it comes to pursuing a postgraduate degree. Your international experience can also shape your graduate school plans. Did you develop a new research interest or passion? You can incorporate it into your personal statement or apply to graduate schools focusing in that area. If you loved your host country, you may even want to consider attending graduate school there. Particularly for master’s degrees, universities abroad can be much less expensive than they are here in the US. You can also go international all over again by incorporating [study abroad](#) or international fellowships into your graduate school experience.



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a denim shirt, stands in the center holding a small grey goat. She is surrounded by a group of about ten young children of African descent, many of whom are waving their hands towards the camera. They are in a rural, dusty area with some trees and simple buildings in the background.

## Bon Voyage

Being Black abroad can be at times comfortable and complex, inspiring and irritating. We hope that this guide has been informative and thought-provoking. But most of all, we hope that it has helped you to feel like international programs can be a part of your future. We'll close with a few words from Diversity Abroad alumna [Arielle Crook](#).

*"Don't allow fear to be your motivating factor as to why you don't travel abroad. Take a risk and step out on faith. As you learn more about your host country, you learn more about yourself; it is a reciprocal process. Once you return, you will realize how much that experience has shaped you and transformed the way you see the world."*

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