



How My Identities Translate Abroad



How to engage in challenging conversations*

Understanding Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the concept that our identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, etc.) are interconnected and shape our experiences and opportunities. When we travel abroad, our identities may be perceived and valued differently than they are at home. For example, you may find that your race or ethnicity is more or less visible in your host country, or whether your gender or sexual orientation is more or less accepted.

It's important to recognize that your identity does not exist in isolation and that your experiences are influenced by multiple factors. By acknowledging the complexity of your identity and the context in which you are living, you can better understand your own perspective and be more open to learning from others.

Multiple Truths

As you navigate your study abroad experience, it's important to recognize that different cultures may have different ways of understanding the world and interpreting reality. This concept is known in anthropology as "multiple truths." Anthropologists understand that there are many ways of seeing and interpreting the world and that these different perspectives are shaped by cultural norms, values, and beliefs. For example, the way we understand concepts like time, family, or authority may differ across cultures.

When we travel abroad, we may encounter different perspectives and ways of thinking that challenge our own assumptions and beliefs. It's important to approach these situations with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others. Instead of assuming that our way of seeing the world is the "right" way, we can recognize that different perspectives have their own validity and value. By embracing the concept of multiple truths, we can become more culturally sensitive and empathetic and learn to appreciate the diversity and complexity of the world around us. It also allows us to engage in meaningful and respectful conversations with people who may hold different beliefs and values from our own.

Engaging in Challenging Conversations

Challenging conversations can be uncomfortable, but they can also be a valuable opportunity to learn and grow. When you encounter cultural differences or conflicting values, it's important to approach the situation with curiosity and empathy, rather than defensiveness or judgment.

Here are some tips for engaging in challenging conversations abroad:

- Listen actively: Pay attention to what the other person is saying and ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand their perspective.
- Be respectful: Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about a culture or group of people. Instead, focus on the individual you are talking to and their unique experiences and perspectives.
- Share your own experiences: Be open about your own identity and how it shapes your views and experiences. This can help others understand where you're coming from and create a more productive dialogue.
- Seek common ground: Look for areas of agreement or shared values, even if you have different opinions on a particular issue. This can help you find a starting point for deeper conversation and understanding.

Reflection Questions

To help you reflect on how your identities translate abroad and how you can engage in challenging conversations, here are some questions to consider:

- What aspects of your identity do you think may be more or less visible or valued in the country where you will study abroad?
- How might your identity influence your perceptions and interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds?
- What are some cultural differences or conflicting values you anticipate encountering in your host country? How do you plan to approach these situations?
- How do you think your study abroad experience might shape your understanding of your own identity?
- What are some steps you can take to learn more about the culture and history of your host country, and how might this knowledge inform your interactions with locals?
- How might different cultural perspectives and interpretations of reality influence your interactions and experiences abroad?
- How can you approach challenging conversations or cultural differences with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others?
- What are some strategies you can use to navigate cultural differences and appreciate the diversity of perspectives and ways of life you encounter?

*Adapted from Diversity Abroad.com

Beyond Guilt Trips: Mindful Travel in an Unequal World, Anu Taranath