

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT



An Initiative to Make Travel More Inclusive



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Welcome

A Note From GoAbroad.....	3
Our Contributors.....	4
Terms to Know.....	5

### Tips and Tales

What Resources are Available to Me if I am Sexually Assaulted Abroad?.....	6
Switching Cultures, Switching Codes.....	9
Responding to (and Avoiding) Street Harassment Abroad.....	12
Safely Navigating the International Bar Scene.....	15
Substance Abuse/Use, Safety, and Sexual Harassment Abroad.....	17
Avoiding Sex and Establishing Platonic Relationships Abroad.....	20
Sexual Assault and Harassment in Relationships of Unequal Power.....	23
5 Warning Signs of Sexual Harassment/Abuse in a Foreign Relationship...25	
Respecting Women of Other Religions Abroad.....	28
A Man's Perspective on Supporting Women Abroad.....	31

### Get Involved

Questions & Comments.....	34
---------------------------	----

# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR ALL TRAVELERS

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



**T**he [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) estimates that approximately one in three women (35%) worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Sexual violence against women is considered a global public health concern because of the lasting impact on women's physical and mental health.

This doesn't change the fact that travel is an exciting new adventure that changes your life and gives you a more global perspective. You will be exposed to new cultures, try new things, and push yourself out of your comfort zone. However, the unfortunate truth is, these experiences may lead to a few cultural missteps and could leave you vulnerable to sexual violence. Every country has a different set of cultural norms that dictate how men and women should behave and are treated. It is important to be aware of these differences ahead of time so that you know what to expect and how to remain safe and respectful abroad. We want to be real with you and give you all the resources and information you'll need before going off to study/intern/teach/volunteer/work abroad.

Oftentimes discussions of sexual violence focus on heterosexual incidents with women as the victims and men as the perpetrators. **Remember that men are also victims of sexual assault, that women are sometimes the perpetrator, and that sexual assault also occurs between members of the same sex.** These types of sexual assault are far less common, but are no less serious or real. The following articles focus mainly on women as victims and men as perpetrators, but have advice that is relevant to and important for all.

As part of GoAbroad's push for more inclusivity in travel, our writers share their personal experiences, resources, and advice about sexual violence abroad. **We want our readers to be inspired to travel, but to always prioritize their safety and well-being.**

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Erin Hultgren** is a recent graduate from the George Washington University, where she earned a master's degree in Public Policy and Women's Studies.



**Andres Martinez** is a second year law student at The University of Notre Dame Law School. Prior to law school Andres studied abroad in the UK as an undergraduate at Loyola Marymount University.



**Connor McCarty** is currently working on his Bachelor's degree in Ecosystem Science and Sustainability at Colorado State University. His passion for travel has taken him to Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Peru.



**Kaitlyn Merges** is a 24-year-old dual social work and law student living in Chicago, IL. She studied abroad during her undergraduate career in her home away from home, Roma, Italia. #Romesick



**Jen Studt** works as a school counselor in Denver, Colorado. When not traveling, Jen is usually in the mountains skiing, rafting, climbing, SUPing, camping, hiking, or yoga-ing.



**Kristin Hultgren** is a PhD student in Counseling Psychology in the U.S. She enjoyed living in Spain briefly as a pre-teen and has been lucky enough to travel across countries on five continents.



**Marisa Kostiuk** is currently working on her PhD in counseling psychology in the U.S. She is originally from Canada and starting traveling after completing her Bachelor's Degree.



**Krista Boddy** is a Colorado native who has traveled to various countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East for study, service and adventure.



**Katelin Fernholz** graduated from the College of St. Benedict's/St. John's University with a Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Hispanic Studies. She then moved to Madrid, Spain to teach.



**Trey Johnston** has lived in eight countries and traveled to about fifty others, but currently calls Washington, DC home, and has a Master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies.

Want to share your own travel tips and tales? [Give us a shout!](#)



# TERMS YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW

This guide uses varying terminology to discuss the topic of sexual violence abroad. **Each writer selected the term that fit best with their experiences and knowledge.** Here are the basic definitions of the major concepts discussed in this guide:

**Sexual violence:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) defines sexual violence as a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent.

**Sexual harassment:** The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ([EEOC](#)) defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.



**Sexual assault:** The U.S. Department of Justice ([US DOJ](#)) defines sexual assault as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO ME IF I AM SEXUALLY ASSAULTED ABROAD?

By Erin Hultgren

So you've got the travel bug, wanderlust, or whatever you call it; you know that inexplicable call to explore a country different from your own. Traveling is the opportunity of a lifetime that always leaves you wanting to go back for more. You get the chance to make new friends, expand your knowledge of the world, and learn about a culture that is unfamiliar to you. One unfortunate outcome of experiencing these new cultures is that you may find yourself at risk of experiencing sexual violence that will not only impact the remainder of your trip, but your life back home as well.

**Many victims of sexual violence don't report the crime or seek help for the lasting physical and mental impacts.** This rings true especially when traveling because it can be hard to know who to turn to, how to report it, and where to get help. It is important to have tools you can use in the event that you or someone you know experience sexual assault or harassment abroad. We've put together a list of the best resources you should utilize.

## The People Around You: You Are Not Alone

There is no right, wrong, or normal way to respond to being sexually violated. You may feel the urge to pretend it didn't happen, you may want to curl up in a ball and shut out the world, or you may feel numb and detached. Sometimes you might feel inexplicably dirty, angry, or shameful or you may feel totally fine. Don't expect yourself to react in a specific way and allow yourself to be where you are at any given moment. It can be very helpful when you are going through this processing and array of reactions to have someone to talk to.

On the flip side, if someone you know is the victim of sexual violence while abroad, try to be there for them in any way that you can. Sometimes they might want to talk about it, while others times they may simply wish to sit with you. Don't pressure them to talk about it, question what happened to them, or blame them. Victims of sexual violence heal better when they are believed, reassured, and supported unconditionally.

### Friends & Family: Close and Far

Whether they are new to your life or have been around for as long as you can remember, your friends and family are a great resource for you in your time of need. You can talk to those who are abroad with you or loved ones back home—either way you can use them for emotional support. When the people you know and love are aware of what happened to you, they can help support you, connect you to resources, or get you out of an abusive or harassing relationship.

### Program Staff or Supervisor

When you're in another country, it is really important to have someone local or familiar with the language and culture on your side. Every country has a different set of cultural and legal rules when it comes to handling sexual violence and the treatment of victims. Your program staff or supervisor can help you navigate obtaining resources and support in an unfamiliar country while also keeping you safe.

### A Trusted Peer or Victim Advocate

It can sometimes be difficult to tell someone you're close to that you've been sexually violated. You may be afraid of their reaction or think that they won't be able to handle what happened to you. No matter the reason, you may not always turn to your friends and family in your time of need. However, this does not mean that you are out of options for who to talk to. You might find it easier to disclose what happened to a trusted peer or victim advocate. This neutral person can listen to what happened to you, offer to connect you with resources, and offer emotional support.

Many program providers and universities have resources available to their, employees, students, and participants, including access to a sexual assault crisis hotline, a victim advocate, or lawyer. Additionally, many countries have national or local sexual assault crisis hotlines or nonprofits that help victims of sexual violence. It is helpful to research these resources before you go or ask locals around you in case you or someone you know ever needs them.

### Local Authorities: Report It

A seldom used yet important option for victims of sexual violence is to report what happened to the local police and potentially have legal actions taken against the perpetrator. It can be difficult to navigate the local authorities and laws in a new country, especially in a foreign language. However, with the help of your program staff, supervisor, advocate, or even a friendly local, it is a viable option for getting justice.

It is important to note that it is not always safe or feasible to report what happened, as victims of sexual violence in some countries are either not believed or are considered sexually promiscuous. Additionally, there is a strong stigma against believing victims, particularly male victims, in many countries. It is best to know whether or not reporting is a safe and reasonable option before doing so.

### Police

If you are sexually assaulted or harassed, you can usually contact the local authorities to file a police report. This typically entails them collecting evidence, asking you a lot of in-depth questions about what happened, and ultimately investigating. A police report can lead to the discovery of the perpetrator and potentially punishing them. Every country handles crimes differently and has different sentences and punishments for sexual violence.

### Lawyer

Lawyers can be a helpful tool for helping walk you through the country's justice system, helping you understand the potential punishments for the perpetrator, and keeping you safe. They can help you file protection (restraining) orders and keep the perpetrator away from you. In a foreign country it can be beneficial to have a knowledgeable and competent person on your team advocating for your best interest.

## Health Care Professionals: Your Health Matters

Victims of sexual assault face numerous health concerns both immediately after the assault and for many years to come. Many people are familiar with the physical effects of sexual assault, but frequently forget to consider the equally devastating mental effects. Your mental and physical well-being are incredibly important, and utilizing professional health resources will help you heal.

Not all countries have adequate health care or easy access to health care professionals for foreigners. If you can research ahead of time or ask those around you for help navigating the system, you should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible after you are assaulted. Finding immediate treatment while abroad might not always be an option, so it is important to remember to get help once you've returned home.

### Hospital

If you are sexually assaulted, it is extremely important to get yourself immediately checked out

for pregnancy, STD/STI's and physical trauma. You can typically get access to Plan B birth control, antibiotics to treat potential infections, and any other medical assistance you may require.

Some countries may have specialized nurses who perform sexual assault exams while also collecting forensic evidence left behind by the perpetrator. You typically need to be seen by a nurse within five days (although the sooner the better) of the assault if you are looking to have DNA and other evidence collected. This can help if you choose to move forward with a police report.

### Doctor: Abroad and Back Home

In addition to immediate medical treatment, you may require additional doctor's appointments to ensure you are healthy. One hospital visit is not always enough to ensure you are free from STD/STI's and other reproductive health concerns. This is an especially important step if you weren't able to go to a hospital after your assault, you should always be checked out by a medical professional after an assault whenever possible. Doctors can help you treat any lasting physical impacts you may have from the assault and connect you with services in the outcome of a pregnancy.

### Therapist/Counselor

Your mental health is equally as important as your physical health. Many victims of sexual assault experience depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other concerning symptoms. Getting connected with a therapist is an important step because they can help you process and work through the uncomfortable experiences in your mind and body.

Sexual violence is a global health concern and is far too prevalent around the world. As with any potential danger, it is important to be prepared with tools and resources should you or someone you know be sexually violated while abroad. If you feel confident in your knowledge, you can help yourself and others around you access resources and begin the difficult healing process while abroad.





# SWITCHING CULTURES, SWITCHING CODES: NAVIGATING CHANGING MEANINGS AND SEXUAL SAFETY

By Trey Johnston

Preparing to study, intern, volunteer, or teach abroad often has us downloading Duolingo and trying to remember conjugations in another language, but navigating a new country also means navigating a new culture and a whole new set of codes.

What do I mean by codes? If you talk differently when you are with your friends than you talk at work or with professors, then you have already mastered code-switching. We constantly change the way we interact with certain people based on the social situation. What comes off as funny with a friend might be read as incredibly rude with a stranger. This goes beyond just offending someone, however, and can also have an impact on your own sexual safety or the ways you come across to others.

Being aware of the way that codes can change from culture to culture is vital for having a safe experience abroad.

Sometimes words you say and things you do every day, like hugging a friend or just existing with a certain skin tone can take on different meanings when you step off the plane in your new temporary home.

Because each country – and regions within those countries – comes with its own set of meanings, I can't give you a guidebook of exact do's and don't's, but here are some of the topics you should consider when moving around your new home and interacting with people in a culture different than your own.

## K(NO)w-How

Chances are, you've probably heard the expression "No means no!" when discussing consent and sexual assault. While this phrase seems simple enough, it isn't necessary reflective of situations you might find yourself in while abroad.

**Going beyond NO:** In some countries "no" can often be understood as an obligatory statement that precedes an eventual "yes." In more everyday situations, this means you can't accept a gift on the first offer, but it can also often be seen as playing coy when someone is making sexual advances.

For example, if you're going out in Buenos Aires and someone tries to hit on you, telling them "no" is often considered a game. No is seen as a mandatory refusal to maintain appearances and is an invitation to keep trying. If you really want them to stop, you may have to step it up a notch by insulting them. It seems harsh, but it's the name of the game. This is by no means the only or even always the best strategy. It is important to make sure that you feel safe however you choose to respond.

**Consent:** This rule works in the inverse, too. If you're trying to approach someone, take a second to reflect on the norms of the place you are. In many places, people, women especially, may feel they have to be polite even when they aren't interested. Affirmative consent (seeking a freely given and enthusiastic yes) is always best. And if you find yourself on the receiving end of one of those insults, take it in stride and leave. It's not personal, but they are definitely not interested.

## Touch-y Subject

We communicate with more than just language, we also communicate with gestures, expressions, and often touch. When it comes to thinking about sexual assault and consent, these other forms of communication can have a big impact on how we are perceived without us ever thinking about it.

**Personal Space:** I grew up between Brazil and the United States, and one of the biggest differences was personal space. Every time I came back to the U.S., I had to consciously take a step back because it was considered invasive to stand so close. While I grew up having to think about these changes, this distance may not be something you think about unless you're the person someone is standing way too close to.

Standing closer to people than is typical for that culture can often have the unintended implication of sexual interest or aggression. This is especially true for those coming from Asia and South America to Europe and the United States. To help avoid these unintended meanings, observe those around you to see what is typical.

While moving somewhere with a significantly lower idea of a personal space bubble means getting accustomed to casual bumps in public, it can also lead to people abusing that closeness to cop a feel. Unwanted harassment is never okay, but be careful to assess the situation before you respond. In some countries, moral codes work in your favor and calling someone out can be a useful strategy to protect yourself, but in others it may be safer to remove yourself if possible. Being open with friends and locals about the topic and their strategies is one of your best tools!

**PDA:** You have to be careful about what kind of touch, even when consensual, is considered appropriate in public. When I lived in India it was very common for pairs of men or women to hold hands while walking down the street with no implication other than friendship, but that same act would've been interpreted very differently back home in Oklahoma.

This isn't to say you strictly should or shouldn't hold hands with someone in public, but you should be aware that the meaning of your interactions might vary depending where you are, which can also mean finding yourself in a vulnerable situation.

**Gender:** Gender also plays a huge role here. No matter your personal politics, in many places it is seen as inappropriate for men and women to touch each other in public. As with any situation, make sure that you have consent for things like hugs that you might not even think twice about at home.

Similarly, if you are coming somewhere where these forms of touch are rare, take a moment to consider their different meanings. A hug or touch from someone might simply be casual rather than sexual. Consider what seems to be normal for interactions around you. It should be noted that you should always feel comfortable setting your own boundaries. **Just because it is a norm doesn't mean you have to do something that makes you uncomfortable.**

## A Race-y Topic

While the other topics discussed have been things that you can consciously change, the reality of living abroad is that we can't control every element. One of the biggest codes that can affect how others interact with you abroad is your skin color or country of origin.

This is mostly true for times when you go to a country where you are a minority, but can have a large impact even if you're aware of how your race takes on meaning in your own country. For those of us with cultural ties to multiple places, your skin tone or origin might have more of an impact than you expect.

For example, my Trinidadian friend was often mistaken for Dominican when she was in Buenos Aires. In Argentina, Dominican women were associated with prostitution and men would think she was necessarily sexually available. These stereotypes, even though they didn't even reflect her own nationality, often affected her experiences. On the flip side, in India, American friends with very fair skin or blonde hair got a lot of attention from everyone and people often took their picture. While this positive attention can seem exciting at first, it also comes with a darker side.

This label of "exoticness" often comes with notions like "American girls are easy" or that men from certain parts of the world are aggressively sexual. One of your best defenses is to be familiar with the stereotypes before they are applied to you.

## Cracking the Codes

So what do you do to prepare and navigate these new codes while remaining safe and respectful?

**Research:** There are lots of forums and guides out there that talk about what to expect when it comes to notions like personal space. These are often focused on business relationships, but can help you plan to protect yourself from unwanted sexual situations as well.

**Observe:** Pay attention to the way people around you interact with one another.

**Ask:** Some of these topics can feel a bit bizarre to talk about, but ask local friends you make or even program staff if you're with a group.

**Stop and Reflect:** What assumptions have you made about your interactions with someone? How might your own words and actions have an unintended meaning because of the situation? Have you established affirmative consent or are you just assuming someone is interested?

**Pick a sign:** When you are out with your friends, you should make sure to check in on them from time to time. Have a signal in case you or your friends start to feel uncomfortable and want to escape a situation.

**Follow your gut:** While you should keep all of this advice in mind to consider new meanings abroad, you should also trust your gut. Even if something seems like it is a norm, if it makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, you should remove yourself from that situation, if possible.

Understanding codes can help you navigate everyday life, but ultimately we each have our own sets of values and meanings. One of the biggest things living abroad teaches you is to be aware of things you take for granted back home and to adapt to different situations. Keeping these topics in mind will hopefully help you stay safe so that you can be prepared for the exciting new experiences time abroad will send your way.

# RESPONDING TO (AND AVOIDING) STREET HARASSMENT ABROAD

By Krista Boddy

Traveling abroad is undoubtedly an exciting adventure, however, there are sometimes negative experiences that even the most experienced travelers will encounter along the way. Part of that adventure is not always knowing what will come next or how the day will unfold, but having some idea of what to expect in a new country prepares us for those challenging moments.

As a young single woman experiencing a different culture than my own, I've learned some of the following tips the hard way. They are not intended to scare or dissuade women from going abroad, but rather to serve as a helpful guide for you to better assimilate into new and different cultures.

## Research Cultural Differences About How Men and Women are Valued/Treated in Society

When traveling, it is important to be aware of the cultural differences that exist between your home country and your host country. In regards to sexual harassment, it is key to understand the differences in the relationships between men and women and how men and women are treated. Before you depart you can research these differences and be aware of how to be safe, culturally aware, and how to interact with men and women.

**Key questions to answer:** How much value do women have in the culture? How do women typically dress in the culture (e.g., head-scarf, long skirts, etc.)?

Is it safe/common for women to be out of the house, on the street, or walking around outside? Should women walk around in groups? Is it important for women to be with men when outside of the house? How do women react to violence from men in the culture? For example, if a woman punches a man in self-defense, it could lead to worse violence in some cultures. It is sometimes best to handle negative encounters with men by walking away or learning the words for "leave me alone" in the native language.

## You Can't Always Trust a Friendly Face

It can be hard to refuse the kindness of others, but if a strange man offers to carry your luggage or help you in some way without being asked, do not accept. Unfortunately, there is usually an ulterior motive behind such kindness, especially for inexperienced travelers. You will typically be pressed for money or sexual favors and may accidentally end up revealing where you are staying. It is best to kindly refuse or ignore the offer. While you don't want to enter every interaction on the defensive, be smart and always trust your gut. Always prioritize your safety.

## Learn the Lay of the Land: Geographically

Do your homework ahead of time and ask locals about areas of town to avoid because of illegal activities or criminal elements (e.g., areas of drug dealing, sex shops, red-light-districts, etc.).



It is best to avoid spending time alone in public places that attract large groups of men, especially during holiday celebrations or get-togethers. And, if possible, take advantage of the buddy system and travel with a friend. It certainly can't hurt to travel with trusted male companions for safety as single women and groups of women are often still vulnerable targets for sexual harassment. But, sometimes you need that girls week/weekend in Barcelona. Just be smart, careful, aware, and safe!

The same goes for women solo travelers. This is not to discourage you; solo travel is a very rewarding experience. At the very least, you might want to try and avoid traveling alone late at night—especially in cultures where women are rarely seen outside of the home.

### Learn the Lay of the Land: Culturally

Since you should have already done some preliminary research, you should understand gender relations in your host culture and adjust your behaviors accordingly. You'll also want to dress appropriately in your host country. Many Asian and Middle Eastern cultures value modesty and you should respect that – have fun with scarves and shawls if you need cover your head and arms, and really embrace the maxi skirt or dress look.

In some cultures it is best not to make direct eye-contact with men you don't know. This can be seen as flirting and can lead to harassment. In public places, it is best to look at the ground or elsewhere to avoid looking unknown men in the eyes. Once you get to know a man in your host culture (as a coworker or friend), it is more acceptable to make eye-contact.

If unknown men try to engage with you, walk away, look away, and do your best to ignore them. If small talk with men is not normal behavior for women (like in Turkey, Egypt, etc.), avoid the awkward chit chat.



### Be Constantly Aware of Your Surroundings

It's exhausting, but something you might already be used to doing back home. It's always a safe bet to try and keep your back against the bus, train, or tram walls, while riding public transportation, so that no one can grope you from behind. Note how close strange men are to you as you go about your business. If someone gets too close for comfort, try to find a companion or friend to walk with and get away from the situation as soon as possible.

### Ask a Local

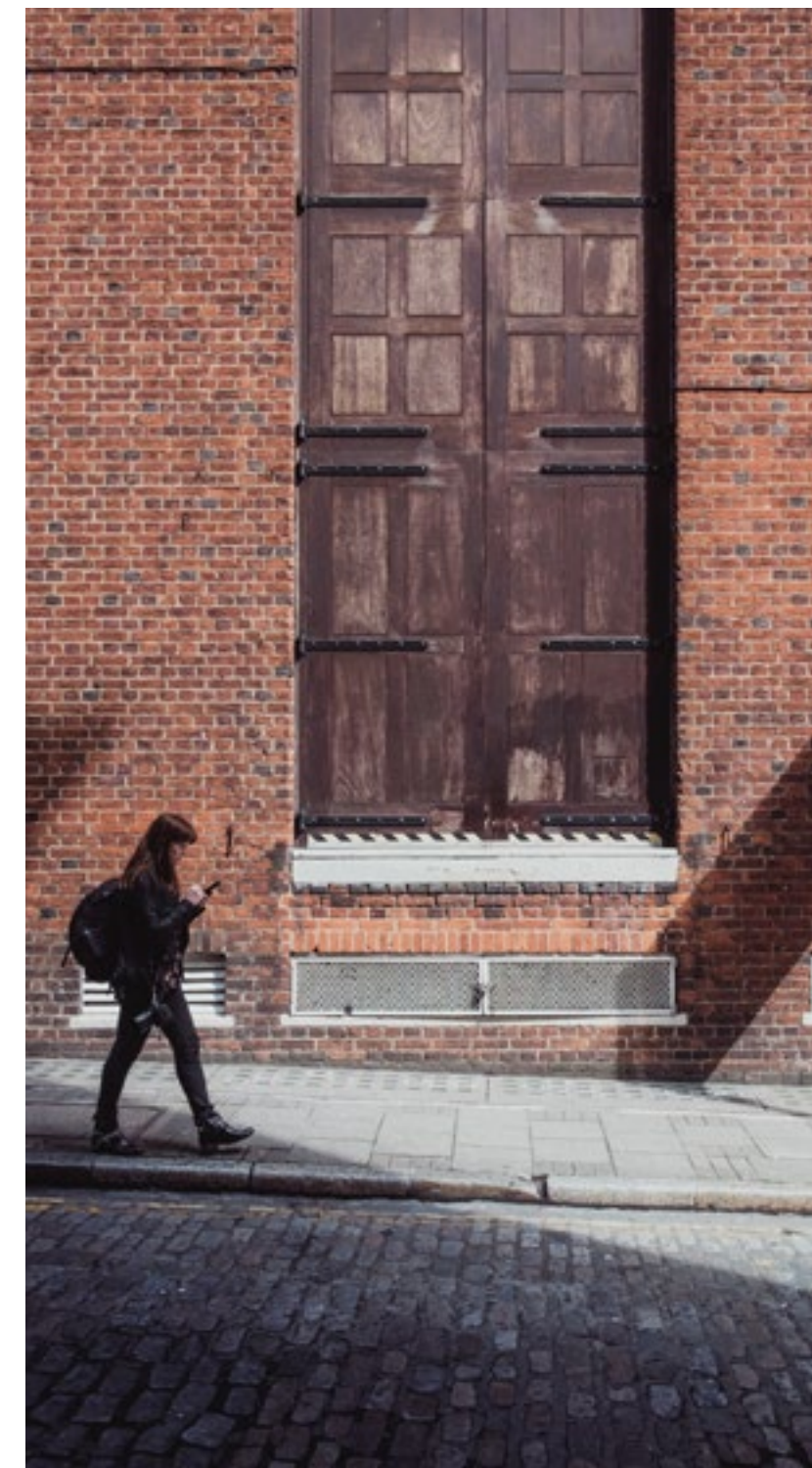
Ask local women how they react to street harassment and take a page from their book. For example, in Turkey, women publicly embarrass the harasser by yelling "Shame!" in Turkish. In this culture, by drawing attention to the offender, this will dissuade would-be harassers from continuing their behavior and de-escalate the situation.

These tips are intended to help reduce the likelihood and the amount of street harassment you might face, but they are not a guarantee you will avoid it altogether. Should you find yourself in an uncomfortable or unsafe situation, remember that it is not your fault and it is not actually your job to prevent it.

If you are harassed, first try to get out of the situation as fast as possible and distance yourself from the aggressor. Find a trusted friend or companion to walk you home and to talk with. If the harassment is serious and if you are injured, attacked, groped or threatened, you may choose to report it to local police with detailed descriptions of the assailant and location.

It is important to understand that groping and other unwanted behaviors against women are – unfortunately – commonplace in many cultures and while that does not make it okay, and you do not need to be silent about it, you must play by the rules of your host culture. Some cultures are behind in their treatment of women, minorities, and people with disabilities, etc.

The fact is we can't change cultural behaviors while abroad. However, we can put our health and safety first, and learn to avoid and navigate through these negative experiences as women traveling abroad.





# SAFELY NAVIGATING THE INTERNATIONAL BAR SCENE

By Andres Martinez

Since civilization's earliest days, alcohol has been weaved into the social fabric of our communities. Everyone loves their bevies, and in our modern times it remains one of the easiest ways to experience a culture and meet new people. That being said, anytime inhibitions are lowered you do run the risk of being vulnerable to sexual harassment. It is important to remember a few rules to ensure your night out in your host country is both fun and safe. A lot of these rules are common sense, but are things you should always keep in mind when hitting the bar scene abroad.

## Keep Tabs – and No, I Don't Mean Bar Tabs

Always let someone know where you are, where you will be going next, and an estimated time for when you'll be home. I know this is a very middle school rule but it is important. Someone you know and trust, ideally a roommate or friend, should know where you are and when you expect to be back. Give them a heads up if your plan changes and set up a course of action should you not be in contact.

## Don't Drink Alone

Common sense right? The old phrase of safety in numbers has truth to it and going alone may expose you to more risks than going with a buddy.

It's always best to have a person you trust with you so you can be aware of each other's intoxication level, navigate home together, and be a buffer against potentially aggressive individuals. Plus isn't drinking more fun with a buddy anyway?

## Watch the Bar

Be wary of drinks that you did not see prepared or watch from the bartender's hand to your own. If you have any suspicion about a drink either ask that it be remade or spill it and make it seem like an accident. The point is, if you suspect foul play don't drink it. It's better to look like a fool and have a safe drink than chance it.

## Drink in the (Drinking) Culture

This one is a bit trickier because drinking cultures and acceptable behaviors vary widely between countries. This rule may require a little research. It may be best to ask a local that you trust to explain the bar culture in your host country.

In the United States bartenders will serve women first and more frequently while in the United Kingdom men are often served more frequently. Additionally, in some countries it can be harmless for men to buy women a drink while in others it implies certain expectations and may not be acceptable if you don't already know the woman. Know whether it is safe and acceptable for you to approach someone of the opposite sex and to buy or take a drink from them.

On a slightly related note, it may be helpful to know customary greetings and gauge how far is too far depending on your level of acquaintance. For example, in many countries a kiss on the cheek is typical greeting, even for new acquaintances, but that might not be the case everywhere and taken too far could be considered harassment.

## Don't drink too much

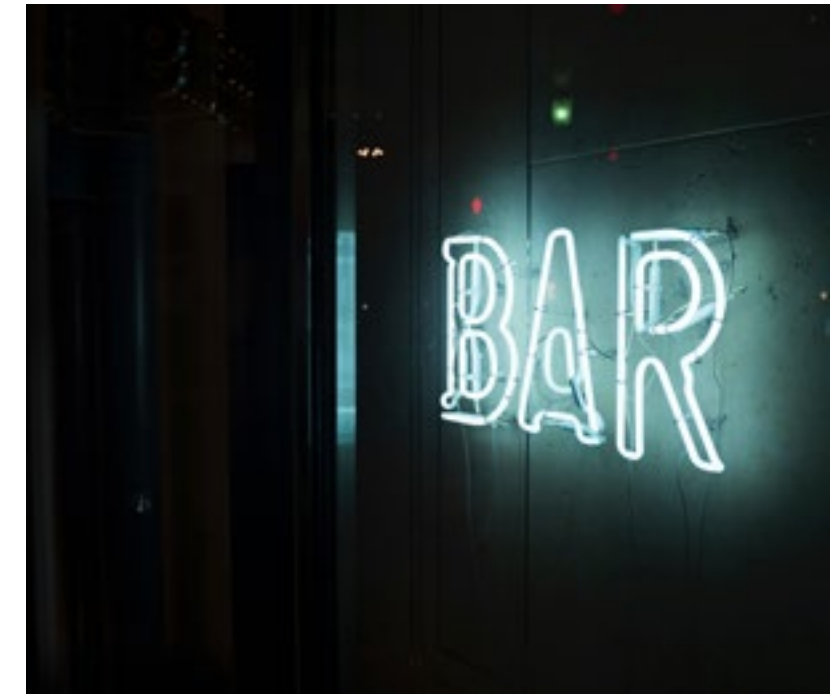
Know your limits and know yourself. Another obvious rule, but important nonetheless. Have a good time but don't be sloppy or reckless. Plus why would you want to waste a day of your travels being hungover? If you or your drinking companion gets too drunk know when it's time to leave, remember to be aware of your surroundings and have someone to look out for you should you pass your drinking limit.

## Have an Exit Strategy

This is more than just locating your nearest exit and following the flashing lights on the cabin floor. While knowing where the door is in case of a fire or other catastrophe is important, you should also have a plan if there is an aggressive person who may be acting beyond what is culturally acceptable. This also includes knowing where you are and how to get back to your residence or another safe place.

## Bartenders are More Than Just Good Listeners

Bartenders, wait staff, and other establishment employees are there to ensure everyone has a good time. If you are in need of help they may be a good resource. Communicate if someone is making you feel unsafe or uncomfortable and ask them to assist you. Most bars will know the taxi system, bus or train schedule and can call you a cab or get you the service you need to get you home safe. In some instances it may be best to have the bar call you a cab rather than trying to hail one yourself.



## Stick with Your Stuff

Leaving your purse on the back of a chair in some countries will make it ripe for the taking without you even knowing. As well as for gentlemen it may be advisable to shift your wallet from your back or coat pocket to your front pocket. Take special care to make sure your passport is secure. Pickpockets are known to operate in places where inhibitions are lowered. You don't want to find yourself unable to get home or settle your tab.

At the end of the day (or evening, I suppose) it is all about having fun in a safe, and yet exploratory way. If you follow these simple rules it could lead to a very fulfilling and memorable part of your experience abroad. *Prost! Salud! Cheers!*





# SUBSTANCE USE/ABUSE, SAFETY, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT ABROAD

By Marisa Kostiuk

So, you have decided to travel. Wonderful! It's been pretty firmly established that travel broadens the mind and provides experiences that you would otherwise not be exposed to. The beauty of travel exists in the challenge of finding your way in a new place while meeting new people, tasting new food, experiencing different cultural practices, learning new languages, and yes, also engaging in nightlife or partying.

I have traveled to six out of the seven continents (excluding Antarctica because I have zero desire to travel there, brrrr...) and either witnessed or participated in a little nightlife. Here are some key tricks I discovered to having fun while also being safe and true to yourself.

## Self Reflection: Know Yourself

It is critical to examine your personal boundaries in relation to both substance use and sexual activity when traveling abroad. If you are unsure about what types of behaviors you are willing to engage in and what types of behaviors you are not willing to engage in, sit down, think about them, and decide (without peer pressure) what you are okay with.

My behavior has always been guided by the belief that how I act demonstrates who I am. In other words, my actions communicate my respectful, proud, and confident personality. It is important to reflect on who you are and what you believe in because at the end of the day it is your mind, body, and spirit. Only you can decide what is best for you.

## Who Are You When You Travel?

I guarantee that traveling will test what you permit yourself to do when you are surrounded by people who want to have a good time and are away from home where nobody knows them. It is easy to become carried away and act in ways that you would not normally when you are trying to fit in with others.

Maintaining strict personal boundaries can be difficult, but also lessens the chance that you will find yourself in a situation that you cannot take back or is difficult to get out of. This does not mean you cannot have an absolute blast and engage in new experiences, it simply means that you get the opportunity to find out what behaviors are a good fit for who you are.

## Self-Confidence: Hold Yourself in High Esteem

It can be challenging to make a decision about what type of nightlife or partying experience fits best for you. This is especially true when you're feeling a little less self-confident than usual.

Traveling is an excellent way to boost your self-confidence, but a lack of self-confidence can also negatively impact your experience abroad if you are not acting in a way that is true to your values, beliefs, and morals. Consistency among your actions and values will help build your confidence. Remind yourself of your worth and your strengths each day (even if it is difficult for you to do)!

## Deciding to Drink Alcohol or Use Drugs Abroad

Important note: always follow the rules laid out by your institution, program provider, school, or employer. They're there for a reason, and you wouldn't want to cut your time abroad short because you did not follow these rules.

So, what if you decide to drink alcohol or use drugs abroad? That is your choice! Ask yourself "when I am at home and decide to party how much do I drink and/or do I use drugs?" Use your personal baseline as a point of reference. If you do not use drugs on a night out at home, how are you deciding whether this is something you are going to do abroad? Ensure you are making these decisions BEFORE you head out for the evening and stick to your decision!

If you decide to engage in an activity that you have never done before, make sure you have a plan. Think about who you are going with, where you will be, how you will be getting around, and what will you be doing. If you are uncomfortable with any part of the plan SPEAK UP! Only do what you are comfortable with and do not let others decide for you.

## Deciding to Engage in Sexual Activities Abroad

What if you decide to engage in sexual activities abroad? That is also entirely your decision! Keep in mind that sexual practices, expressions of sexuality, and sexual expectations can be very different depending on where you are.

Do not assume that whomever you decide to become sexual with has the same idea of what consent, intercourse, or intimacy is because these might be very different to her/him/them.

Again, deciding what type of sexual activity you are comfortable engaging in BEFORE the situation arises is critical. The same decision making process you use to decide about using drugs or drinking alcohol can apply to sexual practices too.

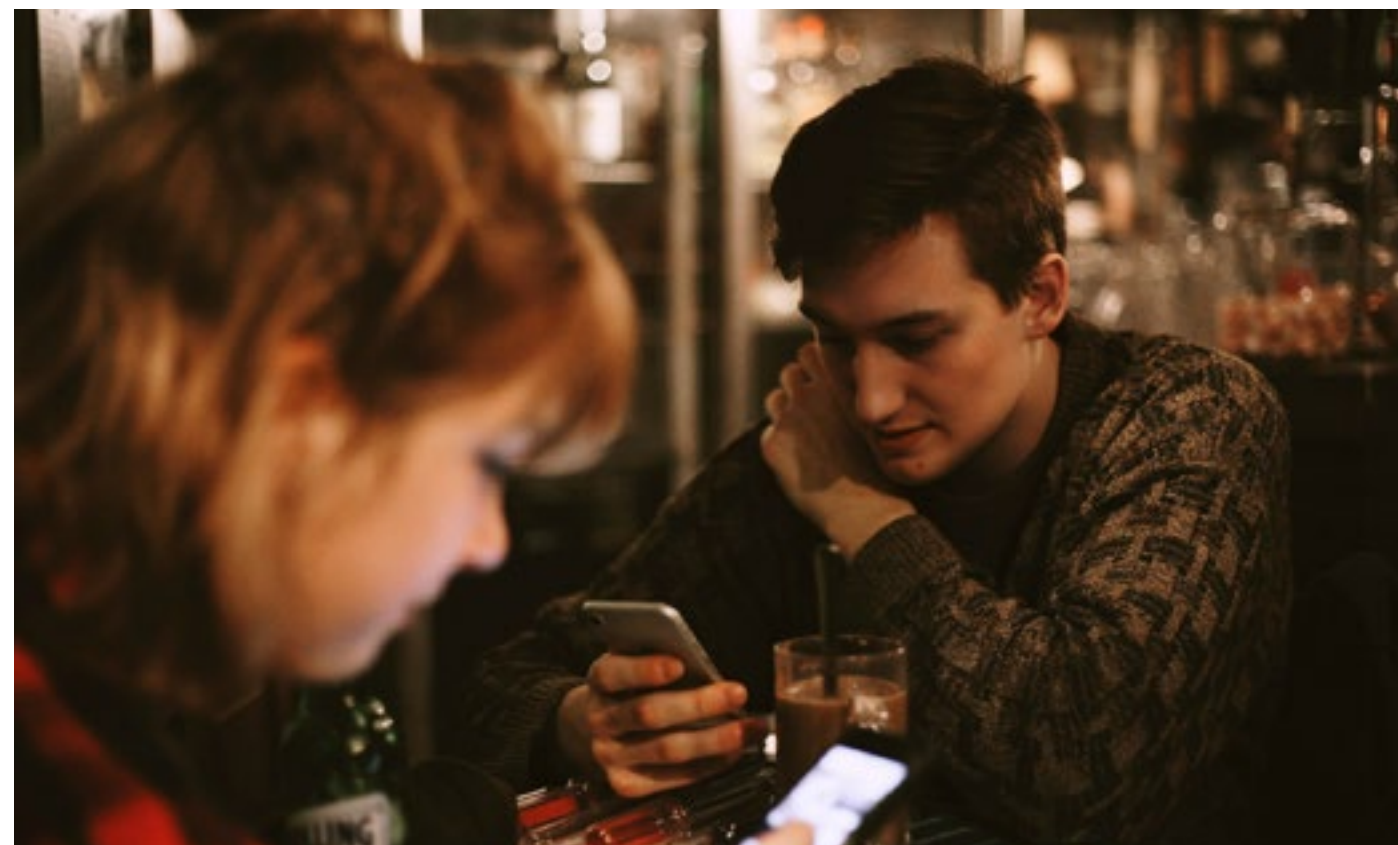
### Deciding to Mix the Two

If you decide to mix sexual activities and drugs and/or alcohol think about basic behaviors you can do that can help keep you safe and comfortable. Keep in mind that consent becomes less feasible once you are in an altered state of mind. Do not assume everyone is well intentioned and has the same idea of what fun, intimacy, partying, and socialization means. Make sure to communicate your intentions, and always speak up if you become uncomfortable.

When you decide to go out with new people or explore new places and intend to use drugs or alcohol as well as engage in sexual activities, make sure to tell people you trust where you are going, what you will be doing, and who you will be with. Always try to keep in touch with friends as best you can!

Personal boundaries allow you to enjoy yourself without compromising your safety. Each of us has a different idea of what partying, letting loose, and celebration looks like. As a result, your definition of fun might look very different from even your closest friends. Figure out your limits ahead of time so that you can have a safe night out while also having a blast!

**“Do not assume that whomever you decide to become sexual with has the same idea of what consent, intercourse, or intimacy is because these might be very different to her/him/them.”**



## AVOIDING SEX AND ESTABLISHING PLATONIC RELATIONSHIPS ABROAD

By Jen Studt

**S**o you did it. No, not that. You decided to travel to wherever it may be in the world! Making it there is not always easy. There can be responsibilities and obligations, financial constraints, and other countless reasons not to go. Sometimes the biggest challenge is the thought of leaving loved ones behind and branching out on your own.

Birds do it, bees do it, but you certainly don't have to do it. Whether you're in a committed relationship, are abstaining from sex, aren't into one-night stands, or simply do not wish to have sexual relationships abroad, it can still be a challenge. It is especially difficult if you are looking to experience nightlife as you travel in a new country. For some, travel is a time of introspection and self-reflection with very little interaction with others, while for others, it is about fun, new experiences, and meeting new people.



This article is not meant to be a guide for the right or wrong way to travel, whether it be solo, in a student group, a volunteer group, or with friends/family, but rather to give some suggestions of how to navigate your experience when you are not seeking sexual relations abroad.

## Be Self-Aware

Know what you are and are not comfortable with and your personal sexual limits. Although you will inevitably be branching out beyond your comfort zone during your international program, your personal limits will probably not change drastically from what you're comfortable with at home.

Being aware before you go if you're willing to engage in sexual activities with others is extremely helpful. The last thing you want when you are traveling is to feel guilt or anxiety after doing something you regret and have it put a damper your time abroad.

It is possible to create meaningful connections and have experiences with new people while keeping it strictly 100 percent platonic. Most of us have friends and peers from school or work we have platonic relationships with, even if the possibility of a sexual encounter was there. This type of relationship also exists while traveling. Though many people like to engage in sexual relationships while abroad and desire international relationships, know that you are not missing out on understanding the culture or having fun if you decide not to engage in these activities.

That being said, sometimes life throws you a curveball. You may meet someone while traveling with whom you do want to explore a sexual relationship. I'd be surprised if you didn't have any of those feelings, at least on some level. At that point, you may decide that exploring those feelings is right for you. In that case, go for it! However, if you do have a partner, be sure you are both on the same page about this.

## C-O-M-M-U-N-I-C-A-T-E

Traveling is one of the most personal decisions you can make, and whether your partner wanted to come and couldn't or didn't want to come, at this point, it doesn't matter. You have decided to travel, without them. I've been there and I won't lie to you, it is not easy.

Relationships constantly evolve and change and everyone will have different conversations and agreements with loved ones back home. My advice is to have those conversations before you leave. That way you can agree upon "rules" and non-negotiables instead of having assumed, unspoken expectations that can lead to arguments, hurt feelings, and disappointment.

If you are looking to stay in a monogamous relationship while abroad I would recommend staying in real contact with your significant other. Traveling has changed since constant online connection became the norm. You no longer have to go to internet cafés to stay in touch and you can see someone's Instagram picture or Facebook post immediately. Make communication with your partner as deep and consistent as possible, as hard as it is with the time difference.

While traveling abroad with polar opposite time zones, my partner and I wrote emails every night for the other to wake up to the next morning. They were check-in emails of our days with one additional aspect where we would tell the other person one thing we thought they didn't know about us. Although we were in a serious relationship and knew each other well, I felt closer to him after having returned from a semester abroad than before I left thanks to our routine emails.

## Set Boundaries with New Friends

New relationships abroad don't have to be sexual in nature. You can make friends and acquaintances and still have a good time without sex. It is best to be upfront and honest with your new friends about your intentions.

If anyone pressures you or threatens to end your friendship if you don't engage in a sexual activity with them, stand strong and be clear. You do not ever have to have sex with someone, or even be expected to be flirty and touchy with someone in order to maintain a friendship.

People generally (should) understand boundaries and are also seeking strictly platonic relationships. In many towns I've been to abroad, including the one I lived in, locals are super warm and inviting. They want to show off their town and make sure you have a good time. When locals are friendly to you, it does not always mean they want to have a sexual relationship with you. Use your judgement, be upfront with your intentions, and enjoy your newfound platonic friendships!

## Have an Exit Strategy

Having an exit strategy allows you to stay true to yourself and your partner. Flexibility is important and necessary when traveling, but if you've evaluated your personal limits and what you're comfortable with sexually, it's key to stick to your plan as it can be easy to let temptation take over. Sometimes you may find yourself in a situation where you're too intoxicated and experience the desire to go home with someone. If you have a well established plan in place before you find yourself in this situation, it is easier to get yourself back to wherever you're calling home— alone.

For me, it was an International Rugby competition in Hong Kong. The night the tournament ended, I found my 21-year-old self at a bar surrounded by a group of very attractive, young, rugby players. As the night progressed, so did the alcohol consumption. I loved my boyfriend at the time, but things did get questionable and could have easily taken a different turn that night. Some players started to become more touchy and one of the Uruguay players even snuck a kiss.

While your intention might be to not get too intoxicated, it does happen. When you go out somewhere, think about how you are getting home beforehand.

Decisions will come up over the course of a day/night about where to go next. Think about transportation options: public transit or cabs? Is walking home safe? Is there cell phone service? Where are the people you are out with going as their final destination? All good questions to think about before ending up in an unknown place.

Traveling and living life abroad inevitably an exciting time in your life. Enjoy it — take it all in and know that it is possible to enjoy your experience to the fullest while avoiding sexual encounters that can be so common when traveling.

# SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS OF UNEQUAL POWER

By Kristin Hultgren

While traveling abroad you almost certainly will find yourself in relationships of unequal power. These could be relationships with a supervisor, host family, teacher, employer, trip leader, etc. While these relationships are generally enormously helpful, comforting, and can provide a 'home base' abroad; there are instances where someone will abuse a position of power by engaging in sexual assault or harassment.

If you find yourself in this situation, remember that sexual assault and harassment are never ok, are never your fault, and are always important to address. Check out the acronym "TALK" below for tips on how to handle this tough situation.

## T – Trust Your Gut

If something feels wrong, then something is wrong. There are lots of ways to know when a situation isn't quite right, but your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions are by far the very best indicators that something isn't okay.



Think back to a time when your stomach churned, when your throat tightened up, or when the hair on the back of your neck stood straight up because you knew you were in danger. Even the smallest butterflies in your gut can signal a biological response to a threatening situation – your body is a finely tuned instrument of self-protection! When you feel those sensations, your job is to tune into your gut and trust yourself.

Trusting your gut can be especially tricky when you are dealing with someone in a position of power (like your boss or supervisor) because you are used to thinking they know 'best'. But, when it comes to you and your body, your gut is the only thing that matters. If something feels wrong, then it is wrong regardless of your position or theirs.

## A – Act Assertively

There are many ways to act assertively in a situation where someone in a position of power is behaving inappropriately.

Assertive behaviors are actions that allow you to uphold your boundaries and utmost respect for yourself without becoming passive or aggressive.

One way to act assertively is to know your boundaries and to verbally express when they are being violated. Think about how you expect to be treated by others regardless of their power over you (e.g. how you would expect your neighbor to treat you) and either write your expectations down, share them with a friend, or hold them tightly in your mind.

When a boundary is crossed, use strong statements to establish your expectations such as: "That type of comment isn't appropriate in my family (culture/religion/country/etc.), so I'd appreciate if you wouldn't do that again" or "I'm feeling uncomfortable and I need you to stop that right now" or "I'm not OK with that behavior (idea/language/action) and I expect for you not to do it again." These statements are firm and assertive, and are worth a try if you feel comfortable addressing the behavior in the moment.

However, sometimes people lose their voice in the moment or sometimes it is unsafe to speak up. If speaking up doesn't sound like an option, another way to act assertively is to leave the situation. If you are feeling unsafe, get out and find yourself a hotel, a peer's home, a consulate, a police station, etc. Getting out is one of the best and most assertive actions you can take. Regardless of the cost, the time of day, and/or the discomfort, get yourself out as quickly and safely as possible.

## L – Let Someone Know

You might feel nervous or afraid to share your experience of sexual assault or harassment with others – especially when the perpetrator is someone who has power or prestige in your community. A lot of times, people feel 'weird' or shameful about what is going on, or even wonder if they are exaggerating the offense or contributing to it somehow (you're not!).

While speaking up can be nerve-racking, trying to hold your experience inside can be much more painful and isolating. Keeping a secret to yourself (even though your gut tells you something is wrong) can bring up all kinds of uncomfortable feelings like anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, doubt, etc.

[Reach out to a friend on the trip, a family member back home, another leader, a peer, local law enforcement](#) or anyone else who knows you and can be with you as you navigate the situation. Speaking to one or more people about your discomfort can help you feel better and can give you support for acting assertively. Beyond this, your confidant can help advocate for you, give you a place to stay, accompany you as you tell others, etc.

Regardless of how isolating it can feel to be in another country by yourself, remember that you are never alone. Do your best to think creatively and let someone, anyone, know what is going on.

## K – Keep It Up

It may take some time to resolve a situation involving sexual assault or harassment from a person in a position of power. Whatever you do, keep it up! Don't stop working to change or leave the situation until the behavior has completely ceased and until you feel safe, comfortable, and respected in your boundaries.

If you try something and it doesn't work, try something else. Continue to reach out to friends and enlist a support system to walk through the entire process with you. It can get tiresome to deal with a situation that lasts over a long time, but it is absolutely important that you persist in protecting yourself, reaching out, and changing or leaving the situation. Whatever you do, keep TALK-ing!



# 5 WARNING SIGNS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT/ABUSE IN A FOREIGN RELATIONSHIP

By Katelin Fernholz

Spending time abroad in an unfamiliar country is hard. Finding friends, significant others, and even just people you can trust can be extremely difficult—especially when you factor in cultural differences. I went to Spain in hopes of spending many years there because I loved the culture and the people. Sometimes I even imagined I would find myself a Spanish man, get married, and settle down with whatever the Spanish version of 2.5 kids and a white picket fence looks like. However, after about a year, I started to see many cultural differences that affected me on a personal level; one of the biggest being relationships with men.

Hispanic men are known to be very *machista*. They believe that men have the power in the relationship and that women are inferior. This is not to say all of them are like that, but many of them are. They will take you out, buy you things, and treat you like a princess, all in exchange for a couple of things... your attention and your body.

## Warning Signs

It is really easy to fall into the trap of a machista/abusive relationship because at the beginning, you feel very special and cared for. The following are some of the warning signs that are common in an abusive relationship abroad:

### 1. They Put You on a (Shallow) Pedestal

They call you *mi amor, bella, or mi vida* and it's all very romantic and special until you realize it's to get what they want. These men will tell you that pleasing the woman in a relationship is very important, however, they expect you to do the same and more in return. It is like a game.

While I was in Spain, I dated Venezuelan man for about a year. I, of course, had no idea that he was married – I thought that he was genuinely interested in me because he made me feel special and wanted. He called me pet names and told his friends things like “look at how sexy she is” or “can you believe all of that is mine” when I was around.

In my head I thought this was okay, I thought that was how these men showed their feelings for someone because I had seen it so many times from other Venezuelan men. It's easy to write off this type of behavior as something that these types of men do and therefore something you have to put up with in a relationship. In reality, this is a form of sexual harassment and manipulation that is wrong, and that you never have to accept.



### 2. Inappropriate Touching

No one has the right to make you feel uncomfortable by touching your body. If you don't like it, it's not okay and you don't need to let it happen. Often times men will touch you inappropriately once or twice to see how you react. If you let it happen, they will probably continue and even escalate their behavior. They might even start touching you like that when you're in public.

Sometimes they act this way because they feel that it shows their ownership or dominance over you to those around them. It may feel like you have to let them do it, or that they do it because they feel attracted to you, but usually there is an ulterior motive.

The Venezuelan man I dated would sometimes touch me in ways that I didn't like when we were in public, or even in private. He would be really aggressive, call me names, or say things to me that made me uncomfortable and then tell me it was because he loves me.

I didn't like the way he was acting, but I told myself that was how these types of men treat women and that I just needed to adapt. I thought it was just something I wasn't used to just like many other things that I experienced during my time in Spain due to cultural differences. I only realized later that this is another type of manipulation and abuse.

### 3. Giving You Gifts...with a Catch

Who doesn't like to receive gifts? They make us feel special and thought of. Many people give gifts and expect nothing in return because it feels good to make someone else happy. But, to some men, when you receive a gift, you are expected to give something back.

The man that I dated bought me many gifts during our time together. He used buying me things at first to impress me and then to get me to do things for him, including sex.

I felt obligated to showcase what he bought me and repeatedly thank him for his gifts. I wish I would've known that this type of giving is just another way for men like this to exert power and control over women.

#### 4. Cheating

If someone is treating you like a piece of meat, it is likely that they are treating other women the exact same way, making you replaceable in their eyes. Men who have a pattern of these abusive behaviors and are usually very good at lying, cheating, and covering things up. Unfortunately, no matter what you do, they're always going to want more and they will usually look for it in other places. They believe that women are inferior and the more women they have, the more power they have.

The man I was dating cheated on me multiple times without regard for my feelings. That's when it really sunk in – I really was nothing to him – just a replaceable sexual partner. With men like this, you will never be more than a side girl and you deserve so much better.

#### 5. Stalking

When someone starts to invade your personal space, harass you, and pursue you when you don't want them too, it is considered stalking. When these types of men don't get what they want and feel like they are losing their power, they will pursue you harder. Sometimes it can be aggressive, and sometimes it can just be as seemingly small as their unwanted presence and contact.

After breaking things off with the man I was dating, he started to show up to my house unannounced, call my friends to try and find me, and call me multiple times. Then he would get angry and threaten me when I didn't answer the phone.

This can happen in any unhealthy relationship no matter the culture, however, this man felt like he was entitled to me and that by ignoring him

or avoiding him I was disrespecting him, which I was told "is not how he deserves to be treated."

Men do not have a right to you, stalking is a serious form of sexual harassment, and it is never okay.

#### You Can Get Out

You can get out of these types of relationships. You do not deserve to be sexually harassed, abused, or treated any way that you don't want to be treated; especially because of cultural differences. Your values are much more important. You may feel like you're too far into the relationship or that you aren't strong enough to stand up to a man that seems to have so much power over you, but it's never too late. You have the power to get out of any relationship that you don't want to be in.

There is a fine line between accepting cultural differences and letting them consume you or letting them be an excuse. As women, we need to put ourselves first and think level headed. Don't accept being treated any less than what you deserve because of anyone's cultural differences. Just because women are treated a certain way in one culture doesn't mean you need to let it happen to you. The most important thing you can preserve within yourself is your personal values, especially while you are abroad in a different culture. Stay true to yourself and put yourself and your beliefs first.



# RESPECTING WOMEN OF OTHER RELIGIONS ABROAD

By Kaitlyn Merges

When we leave our home country to travel the world we become a nomad, exploring new and exciting cultures and meeting new people. While everything around us can be new and at times very different from what we are familiar with, we must remember that we are a minority in our host country.

We come from a place where maybe we don't stand out, but abroad, we can inadvertently become that sore thumb in the crowd. When we begin our travels abroad we usually feel excited, scared, nervous, or all of the above, so it is imperative to research the countries we plan on visiting in order to blend in and not cause offense.

A country's culture is built around many things, but one that many may not remember to consider is religion. There are over 4,000 religions with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Judaism being the most prevalent around the globe.

As there are so many different religions, it is important to research what the majority of the country you are visiting practices. If you have a specific city in mind, researching their practices individually can be invaluable as well.

Different religious majorities in various countries have huge cultural influence in regards to clothing, mannerisms, and how women are treated. Women abroad might not always be treated the same as you are used to in your home country. You may be shocked or confused by some occurrences or clothing you may see, but understanding the religion before you arrive can help you comprehend what you may encounter.



## Do Your Research

Women's religious beliefs can have an impact on how they interact or do not interact with others. Some religions don't have strict social rules while others are much more rigid. Before you leave, research questions such as: what role are women expected to take in the religion? Is it appropriate to talk with a woman to ask a question? Or can you smile at a woman and will she be permitted to smile back?

At home we often do not need to think about these questions because we are already familiar with cultural norms. Doing research can help you be aware of the new norms you will encounter.

## People Watch

The internet is a useful tool, but it can only tell you so much about a culture before you actually experience it for yourself. When exploring your host country, understanding the impact of religion on social norms is essential. However, sometimes you jet off for a spontaneous weekend, leaving no time for prior research other than the best flight deals.

So, what do you do when you're studying in Spain and jet over to Morocco for the weekend on a great last minute fare? When you arrive (be it in Fez, Marrakech, or Casablanca,) you should simply take a step back and observe. Find a nice spot, a cappuccino, and people watch. How are the women and men interacting? Are there any religious buildings nearby? What is the standard way of dressing? Sitting and just observing can be nearly as or even more beneficial than any Google search.

## Attend a Religious Service

Another great way to understand how to treat women while abroad is to attend a religious service, even if you do not have a religious affiliation.

You will not only learn about the religion, but will meet locals as well who can help shed light on how to act and what to do.

Often times congregations are welcoming to those who are new and are open to teaching someone about their religion. Research or ask a local where you can go, what time services are available, and most importantly what is appropriate attire. Be sure to pay attention to how the men interact with the women after the service, it can be the best source of knowledge.

## Respect Religious Norms

Understanding and respecting the women who live in the country you are visiting is very important. In many instances, even an action as simple as smiling at a woman can place the woman in danger. In several religions, a woman who smiles back at a man or accompanies a man out at night can be considered promiscuous and gain unwanted attention from other men.

You may be used to smiling and saying hello to a stranger passing by, but while abroad some women may feel the action is sexual harassment. While traveling abroad, you want to feel comfortable in other countries, but you must also remember to make the women of the host country comfortable in their surroundings.

It is also key to ensure your female travel partner feels comfortable wherever you travel. Different religions may have the social norm to treat your friend differently than she is used to being treated. Ensure that the women you are traveling with are knowledgeable of the religious culture and how they should or should not interact with the men and women in the host country. You want to disrupt the culture as little as possible, but you should not be afraid to stand up for your friend.



International travel brings with it Invaluable friendships, memories, and experiences. By ensuring that you are knowledgeable about religious culture and women in the culture, you can create a positive opportunity to learn, grow, and meet new and amazing new friends. You may not always know everything about a culture before you arrive, but the willingness to listen and learn can help you make the most out of your time abroad. These are the times and adventures you will never forget, so read up, observe, be respectful and have fun!

# A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON SUPPORTING WOMEN ABROAD

By Connor McCarty

When spending time abroad, it is likely you will find yourself accompanied or surrounded by women. They're 50 percent of the population, after all. You may be working abroad with female colleagues, studying abroad with a significant other, on a service trip with a group of friends, living abroad with your spouse, or just out and about with women. No matter the reason you find yourself abroad, it is important to be aware of the women you are with and the women around you. Help them (and yourself) have a safe and more enjoyable journey.

## Be Aware of Your Surroundings: Cultural Norms

First and foremost, you should educate yourself on where you are going. Do research and find out what is socially appropriate and respect the cultural norms surrounding how women are treated in that culture. There are several things you will need to know before you go:

Is it acceptable to buy a stranger a drink? Is it even acceptable to approach a woman you don't know? How do local men interact with women? Is it a patriarchal society? Is there a lot of *machismo*? Is there gender inequality?

It is also important to understand how the women around you will be treated in the culture.

Will it be acceptable (or even legal) for the women around you to go in public by themselves, or will they need a companion to venture outside? Are women at risk of being harassed, violated, or abused?

These are all questions you should research and be aware of. The answers will dictate how you (and your party) can and should act in certain situations. You don't want to step on any toes, cause offense, or put anyone at risk.

## Be Aware of Other Men: Bystander Intervention

Have you ever been in a situation where you feel like someone should have stepped in and said something? Maybe a man was buying a woman too many drinks or even drugging them. Perhaps you've witnessed "guy talk," when a friend or co-worker was being disrespectful to or about women. Or maybe you've seen a woman being catcalled or inappropriately harassed on the streets. Each of these are all-too-common occurrences and more often than not, nobody says or does anything to stop it.

It can feel awkward and uncomfortable to stand up and say something in these types of situations, especially in a foreign country.

However, it's important to keep in mind that the woman is likely feeling far more uncomfortable than you and that you're not the only one who disagrees with what's happening. You'll probably have some support from those around you if you speak up.

There are several ways to intervene safely if you encounter one of these situations. First you can try distracting the aggressor. This will give the woman a chance to slip away. You can also ask the woman directly if she is okay and if she would like to leave. If the guy is simply un-observant, this will help clue him in to how he's making the woman feel.

Another trick is to get others around you involved. This is especially helpful in other countries as you can seek guidance on the culturally appropriate way to step in. Ask other bystanders what they think you should do and if they would help you. If all else fails, call the local authorities. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

Just remember that you're trying to de-escalate the situation; don't put yourself or others in danger. Refrain from "taking it outside," you're better than that and violence does not solve the issue. Bystander intervention should never progress to violence.

## Be Aware of the Woman (or Women) Around You: Know the Situation

It should be said that this section applies to all women: friends, sisters, mothers, colleagues, girlfriends, "it's complicated" partners, neighbors, strangers, and just about any other woman you can think of. No matter the context, pay attention to the situation around you and know how women are acting and feeling.

As mentioned before, do research on what is socially acceptable where you are traveling. The women in your life may need you to escort them around the new city.

# "Bystander intervention should never progress to violence."

It could be a safety concern or it might just be comforting for her to travel with a male companion. Know these things so that you can offer to help and be there should she need you.

It is also important to be able to read body language. Do the women around you look awkward? Do any of them seem uncomfortable? Do they appear scared or frightened? These are your cues. It may be time for you to step in and do something. Or if you're the one causing her to feel this way, it may be time for you to step away and reevaluate your behavior.

Lastly, communicate. Ask the women in your life and around you what their needs, wants, and boundaries are. This will let you know where they are at and how you can help. Intervene if another person is making her feel uncomfortable, offer to walk her home if it seems unsafe, and back off if you are being too forward. Be observant and communicate so that you can do the right thing.

## Be Aware of Yourself: Don't Be "That Guy"

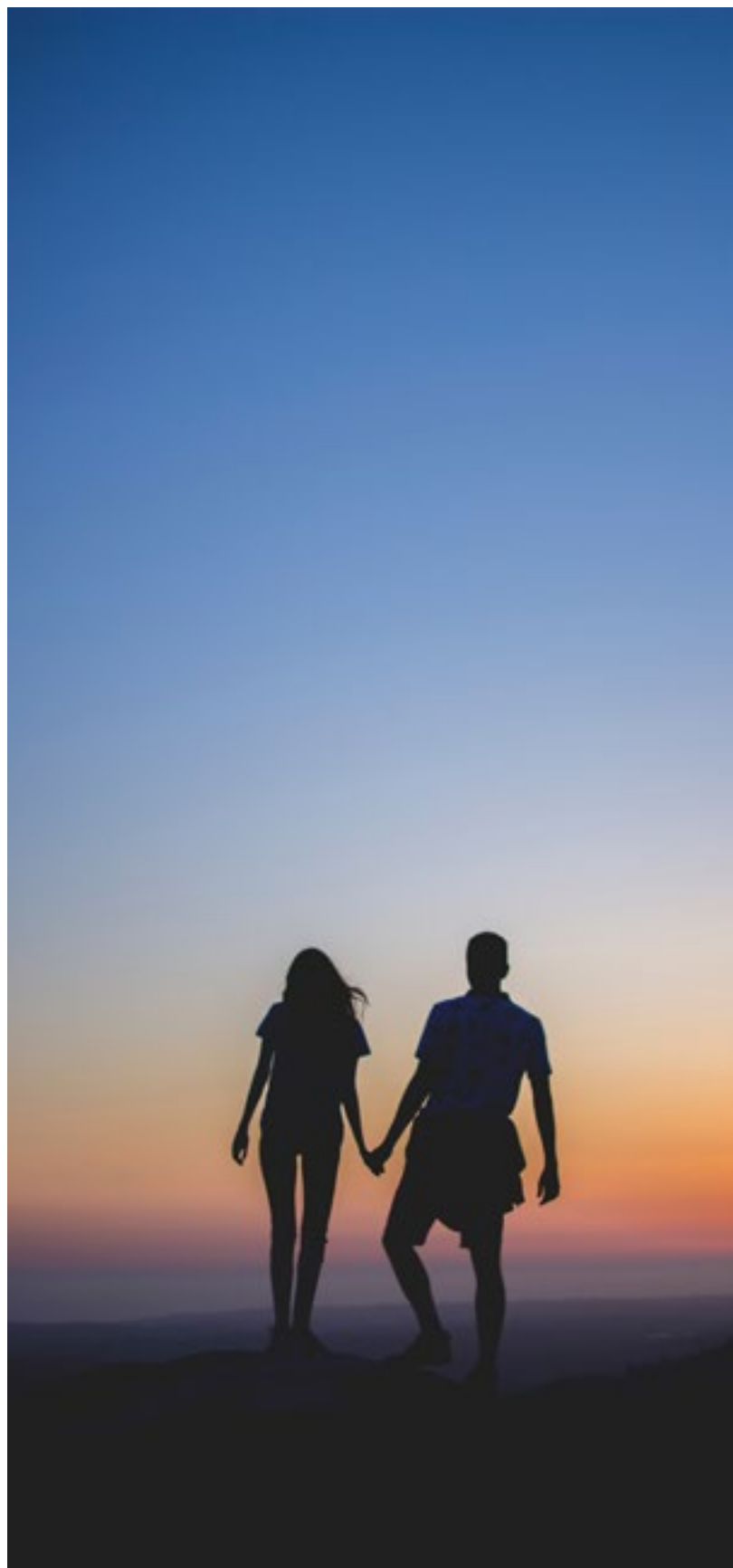
Oftentimes men feel the need to save women like the knight in shining armor riding in to save the damsel in distress, the prince climbing the castle to release Rapunzel from her stone prison, or Mario defeating Bowser to save Princess Peach.



Sorry to break the news guys, but these are all fiction. In reality women are empowered with their own abilities, behaviors, and voices. You are there to offer help, not to impose yourself (or your manliness) on her. Let her know that you are available, but don't force your "help." She'll let you know if and when she needs it.

You can buy her a drink, walk her home, or even sleep in the same hotel room, but that does not imply that any strings are attached. Do not expect anything. And as mentioned before, if they seem uncomfortable and they're talking to you, then chances are you're making them feel uncomfortable. Do the math, you're the discomfort factor. Simply excuse yourself from the situation. It's ok, there will be other opportunities and other women.

It is always important to help those around you stay safe. Whether you know them or not, their care is still in your hands. Be aware of where you are, of others around you, and of yourself. These small conscientious decisions will help to create an enjoyable and secure haven for everyone involved. Just remember to be aware. Now go out and explore the world!



## INTERESTED IN SHARING YOUR STORY?

We want to hear from you! [Contact us](#) to share your experience.

## HAVE SUGGESTIONS OR RESOURCES TO ADD TO OUR COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE?

Email [content@goabroad.com](mailto:content@goabroad.com)

This Guide will continue to expand as more and more resources are shared and developed, be sure to check back frequently to get the most up to date version.

Want to Share our Guide with your Students?  
Feel free to add it to your own website or resources:  
<http://bit.ly/SexualHarassmentAbroad>