

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

LATINX TRAVELER PERSPECTIVES



An Initiative to Make Travel More Inclusive



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# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR LATINX TRAVELERS

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



Only **8.8 percent of U.S. students studying abroad are Hispanic or Latinx** (compared to nearly 73 percent of white students) while **15.2 percent of international students in the U.S. are from Mexico, Central America, and South America**. Here at GoAbroad, one of our priorities is to provide resources to encourage more Latinx students to travel abroad, and we also want to make sure we do all that we can to make studying in the U.S. more accessible for international students. This Latinx travel guide is part of GoAbroad's push for more inclusivity in travel and international education.

Accessibility is an issue for most students who want to study, intern, teach, or volunteer abroad, but don't have the resources to do so. Beyond just financial resources, if students can't see themselves in the stories, articles, and blog posts written by alumni, going abroad won't seem like a viable option. In a field centered around diversity and cultural exchange, this is a shame. Our writers are contributing their personal stories and travel expertise in order to change that.

More and more, studying, interning, working, and teaching abroad is becoming somewhat of a standard endeavor of college students and recent graduates; this guide was created to help ensure that Latinx students and travelers have all the resources they need to participate in these experiences safely, happily, and successfully. Everyone deserves the opportunity to travel, and GoAbroad is dedicated to providing every student with the tools, knowledge, and confidence they need to do so.

This is an open book (pun intended). It will continue to grow as we share more stories and add more voices.

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

# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Niki Kraska**, after intermittent volunteer stints in South Africa, Guatemala, and India, decided to quit her job in the U.S. to pursue a life of full time international volunteering and writing. She uses her experience working in non-profits to volunteer wherever her heart leads her and plans to pursue an international master's program to further her impact, because, Ubuntu.



**Charleen Johnson Stoeber** is an introverted lover of dragon fruit juice. She loves sitting with Nicaraguan children on the side of the street while patiently breaking down North American stereotypes. With a short haircut and watermelon shaped earrings, she is passionate about mental health and the rewards that come with vulnerable travel. Not only does she write for five different blogs, she also teaches art and English classes in the mountains of Nicaragua.



**Raquel De La Rosa** graduated from the University of Chihuahua with degrees in law and accounting a couple of years ago. She first fell in love with travel at the age of 19 when spending a semester in Europe and has been to 20+ countries since. Although being a lawyer is one of the great joys of her life, she recently took a twist to pursue the travel blogging world focusing on motivating mexicans to travel more.



**Daniela Castillo** is a Mexican born girl and a traveller at heart. She's originally from a city called Guadalajara, but San Francisco, London and now Portrush are also places that she's called home. Daniela's résumé might say that she's a writer and illustrator, but the truth is that she's a full-time globetrotter, self-taught blogger and professional daydreamer. Back in 2016 she quit her job, grabbed a backpack and booked a ticket to Europe. Now, a year later, she's still on the road and happily so.



**Paloma de la Fuente** is a Spanish photojournalist who is spending her last years traveling abroad. Her camera is her most faithful traveling companion. She was living in Italy, where she tried the best ice-cream ever. Then she moved to the USA as a Spanish tutor, and she discovered that she was not ready for spicy food. She is currently volunteering in a community theater based in Poland and looking for her next destination.



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





# THE REALITIES OF TRAVELING ABROAD AS AN AMERICAN

by Niki Kraska

While you quietly hum “I’m Proud to be an American” seemingly out of nowhere on that overnight train, you may start to ask yourself, “Am I really proud?”

This question can, and has, stirred a lot of thoughts amongst fellow travelers and myself. Yes, of course, we are proud of our backgrounds and where we come from. Of all the opportunity America has provided a family that came from Mexico or Eastern Europe in generations past.

Also, yes, there are times we may want to hide our faces or say “NOT ME!” when news articles of building borders and banning certain populations from entering the United States flash across the headlines.

**Let’s get real while we reflect on the good and the bad (and sometimes the ugly) that comes along with traveling as an American.**

*\*NOTE: there are exceptions to every point about to be made, of course, and this is written from the perspective of a young, white-passing American traveler (though I personally identify as mixed race – Hispanic and white). These experiences and perceptions will vary for both white and non-white and any-combo-under-the-sun travelers. If you’d like to contribute an alternate perspective, contact us [here](#).*

## Ease of Travel

### THE GOOD...

**Our passport is strong.** Americans can enter 155 nations visa-free. When we do need a visa, it’s easy to pop over to the nearest embassy or mail in materials and receive a visa within weeks (sometimes days). Try telling that to someone who has to fly to another city and have an in-person interview to enter the U.S.

**Our dollar is strong.** In many popular destinations for young travelers, such as Thailand and South America, the exchange rate works greatly in our favor. Living expenses, food, and clothes are affordable and enable Americans to travel longer and farther.

**Plenty of travel rewards.** U.S. based airlines tend to have more generous mileage reward programs. U.S. based credit cards, with sign-up bonuses galore, make it even easier to rack up the miles you need for a flight. If you do your homework, it’s quite easy to obtain a free flight using miles to literally anywhere around the globe. Citizens from other countries don’t have these perks readily available to them (but don’t worry; there are other ways to fly affordably!)

**English is everywhere.** Even when the official language of your destination is Spanish or Thai, Americans can travel knowing that at least some locals, shopkeepers, doctors, etc. can speak English, too. English is now commonly taught in schools to better equip students for a future in our globalized world. Getting around in other countries is that much easier when you have people around you able to translate on your behalf, or at least know and understand the basics of your native language.

### ...AND THE BAD

**No concept of the “gap year.”** Step into a hostel or join a walking tour abroad, and the majority of travelers will be from Australia or Europe.

There, students and young adults are encouraged to [take a year to experience and explore](#) before venturing into their next level of education or starting a career. Young Americans are led to believe a straight path from high school à college à career is THE path to take in order to be successful.

**Are you jeopardizing your future by taking the time to travel? NO!**

Unfortunately, our workaholic culture might tell us so.

**Misunderstanding and Fear.** [Less than 40 percent of Americans hold a U.S. passport](#) and an even smaller percent actually travel overseas. So even if our passport is strong, we are in the minority if we choose to use it. Many family members and friends don’t understand the desire to intern in France when you could do that in your own “backyard,” let alone volunteer in South Africa or Haiti where “you could get killed.” (insert blank face). Young travelers need a lot of resiliency and self confidence to handle the lack of support and looks of doubt they may receive.

## Views of Americans

### THE GOOD...

**We’re trustworthy.** Usually, when foreigners see an American, they don’t always see a threat. They typically trust our bank accounts won’t default. Some of us have the privilege of avoiding disruptive profiling or mistrust about our intentions abroad.

**We’re educated.** U.S. universities are known for their prestige. When you travel abroad to intern, work, or volunteer you’ll often be trusted and valued due to the expectation that you have received a quality education. You will also always have an opportunity to [fill the high-need of English tutoring](#).

**The “land of opportunity.”** In developing countries specifically, telling someone you are from America sometimes brings a smile and fascination to their face. They ask questions and are in awe of the “American Dream” you must be living. No matter if it’s true or not, it does give you a feeling of pride to see the respect they have for your country.

#### ...AND THE BAD...

**We’re loaded.** From scam artists to your new friend down the street, people see Americans and assume we have money. You’ll be a target due to your clothes and accent, and you will be surprised when others find it hard to believe you are literally spending all your savings (and more) to be abroad. Not all of us are trust-fund kids; we just really value the experience more than the dollar sign.

**We’re promiscuous.** Movies, music, and advertisements sexualize American women. We let go of our inhibitions, seduce men, and flaunt our bodies. Media isn’t real, but unfortunately, especially in more conservative countries, this image makes many believe that American women do indeed want sexual attention, and are OK when you give it to them. We’re not. Let’s just leave it at that.

**We love guns.** Stats make it evident that mass shootings, school shootings, and gun deaths in the U.S. are sky-high compared to other countries. Politics make it clear Americans are not about to give up an ounce of their gun rights regardless. You may be surprised the first time you are asked if you own a gun or if it is legal to pull out a gun on a cop (true question), but after you learn about gun laws in different places and see what’s being portrayed in the news, you’ll sigh, curse the fact that their questions make sense, and explain as best as you can the controversy we have.

#### ...AND THE UGLY

**We’re arrogant.** We live in the best country on the planet, right? That is what we are taught to believe. And some of us do walk around the world acting like it. Those of us who have escaped the brainwashing have to work even harder to show that no, we don’t think our shh don’t stink.

**We’re self-centered.** Surprised when you went to Spain and not everyone could reply to you in English? Or when you went to help the kids in Africa and were asked what kind of impact you think you really can make in one week? Not everyone wants to learn English and not everyone is waiting for the white American to come save the day. Americans who travel, even with the best intentions and open-mind, have to constantly face this stereotype and need to do their research before traveling to counter it.

**We’re ignorant.** We can blame the news for not being more internationally informative or we can blame ourselves for not seeking out the stories, either way, the truth is that most Americans do not know what’s going on in the world. Getting into a political conversation with someone while volunteering in India, having him school you on your own politics, and then not being able to even tell him what type of government his country has is kind of (ok really) embarrassing. It’s hard to justify WHY we don’t know the history, geography, or important news stories of other countries. “We never had to learn” doesn’t really cut it.

So maybe there’s a different question I can ask...

#### Am I thankful to be an American?

I’m sure most of us can say, in unison, YES! Personally, I’ve had opportunities that I wouldn’t have had otherwise and a family that was able to provide my sister and me a quality life regardless of our circumstances.

**Am I proud?** That can still be hard to answer. As we travel, as we experience life in a rural village in Kenya or in a city in Denmark, the pedestal we’ve placed America on can either rise or fall. You start to see all that America has and all that America lacks. You begin to notice that the “equal opportunity” boasted about in our country is not all that equal.

I’ll leave the answer to the question up to you.

## What I do know is that we should keep traveling.

The more we travel, the more we learn, and the more we are able to break away from the negative stereotypes (or hard truths) that exist.

As students, interns, volunteers, and international workers, it is up to us share the positives of America with others, and bring the positives from the world back home. Let’s celebrate this!





# DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT: TRAVEL PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS

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"I selected Mexico because I have a personal connection to the country through my heritage. My family is originally from Los Angeles, with my great grandparents emigrated from Mexico years ago. I wanted to understand a little more about my family and the culture and traditions they might have held. I believed it helped me understand my roots and role as an American today."

- Traci Garcia , Mexico, 2014  
Sol Abroad

"Personally, traveling and studying abroad allowed me to discover myself. In both trips I went without knowing anyone and traveled to two completely different places. Because of that, I learned how to get away of my comfort zone, network, meet and interact with new people of different backgrounds, majors, experiences, and interests."

- Federika Garcia Muchacho, Austria, 2014  
IES Abroad



"Studying abroad has changed me in many ways. I speak more confidently in Spanish knowing that it's better to make mistakes than to not talk at all. I've become more independent; navigating through airports and towns without any adults is at first scary, but it grows on you fast. Also, studying abroad has widened my worldview."

- Michael Martinez, Costa Rica, 2014  
SPI Study Abroad



## WHY ISN'T YOUR NAME MARIA? AND 6 OTHER RIDICULOUS QUESTIONS FROM MY SEMESTER ABROAD

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by Daniela Castillo

**M**y first time away from home on my own was when I spent a semester abroad in London. I had always loved the idea of London: a very British city, but cosmopolitan enough to host people from all around the world. I had heard that other Mexicans faced some prejudices while traveling abroad, but I thought London was diverse enough to protect me from stereotypes. I was mistaken.

Don't get me wrong, I absolutely loved my stay in London, and so far it has been one of the best experiences of my life. However, my time there also meant that I had to deal with the constant misconceptions that other people had of Mexico.

I won't deny it, I learned a lot – about the world, about myself, and about what it means to be Mexican in a foreign country. I answered a LOT of questions regarding my culture during my semester abroad, however, I couldn't miss the chance to share some of the most ridiculous ones...

## 1. Why isn't your name Maria?

Of course I had to start with this one. My ears couldn't believe what I just heard. Granted, María is still a common name in Mexico, but since when does that mean that every woman in the country has to be named after the Virgin Mary? There were two other Daniela's in my high school and that was confusing enough already.

When this person asked me the question, I answered with a "Why isn't your name Hans?" and I received the stink-eye in response, but not even then had he realised the absurdity of his inquiry. A girl can only try.

## 2. How can you speak English so well?

This is one of the questions that bothers me the most. I am not saying that I don't like it when someone praises my English, that is a lovely compliment and I am always very grateful to receive it. What annoys me is when someone questions the reason behind it— especially because it's almost always followed by something condescending like "I thought Mexicans weren't good at English" or "your parents must be native speakers." Like I couldn't have learned the language by my own merit.

Like most skills, learning a new language requires lots of practice and effort. A nationality doesn't necessarily determine your language abilities, so don't seem that surprised next time someone turns out to be bilingual.

## 3. How can you speak Spanish so well?

Oh, you know, if you had practiced it since you were born, you would be good at it too.

If there is something worst than asking why someone is proficient at speaking a foreign language is asking why someone is proficient at speaking their native language.

I find it amusing that a lot of people think that we Mexicans speak... Well, Mexican? Whatever that means. No one has the obligation to know the native language of every country, of course, but I thought that the case of Latin America was pretty straightforward: most of the region speaks Spanish. There are some exceptions (Brazil, for example, and several islands in the Caribbean), but 60% of the countries stick to the Hispanic language. So, even if you are not sure, it is always better to ask which is the native tongue of someone rather than assume it.

## 4. If you are Mexican... why are you white?

OK, my old roommate might have not phrased it exactly like that, but you should never pass up a "Mean Girls" reference. Truth be told, she was a bit more delicate and hesitantly asked: "Aren't Mexicans suppose to be, you know... tan?"

I guess that thanks to media representation most people tend to believe that everybody in Mexico look the same. But again, just like with names, we Mexicans come in different sizes, shapes, and colors. Keep in mind that we are a mixed race, meaning that we have European and indigenous blood, so the possibilities are endless! If you ever bump into another pale-looking Latin American, remember that you can't just go around asking people why they are white.

## 5. How are you so tall?

Assuming how someone is supposed to look like based on his or her nationality is a no-no tinged with racism. Of course there are certain cultural and genetic traits that dominate the appearance of a country's citizens. But c'mon! At this point in history we all have a pretty mixed heritage.

Yeah, I might be taller than the average Mexican woman, but how would I know the why? I drank too much milk when I was a child? I have a genetic mutation? My parents adopted me from a foreign country and have kept it a secret for the past 25 years? Physical appearance is something very personal so it should be approached carefully.

## 6. Have you ever used a microwave before?

How on earth would I heat my popcorn before binge-watching Netflix otherwise? (Yeah, believe it or not, we do have Netflix in Mexico, too.

Being serious, access to technology is a sign of economic power and development; so, by assuming that a person is not able to acquire certain technology, you are denigrating them. I get it, we are a developing country and, sadly, many people in Mexico don't have access to basic services. But, that doesn't mean that you can generalise the way of life of 130 million people.

## Come on, people. Ask better questions!

Don't get me wrong, I love getting to know more about other countries and I think asking a local is the best way to learn, but when it comes to cultural identity, you have to be very careful on how you phrase your questions. I took most of these with a good degree of humour, since I knew most of the people who asked meant well, but it is always better to approach to a new culture with a stereotype-free mentality. That way you can learn a lot and not offend anyone in the process.





# HOW TO INTEGRATE IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHILE TEACHING ABROAD

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by Char Johnson Stoeber

It's tough being the new kid in town, especially when you're teaching abroad. You no longer have your best friends on speed dial to join your Game of Thrones binge watching sessions, so you have to start from scratch. If only there was friendship speed dating in every corner of the world. For now, you've got to go forth, where plenty of teachers have gone before, and integrate into your community.

Follow our advice for expertly integrating while teaching abroad and you'll benefit from having lasting relationships within your community.

Each [teach abroad experience](#) is different. If you're teaching English abroad in big cities like London or Montevideo, it's generally easier to make friends your age than it would be to meet amigos in rural Thailand. Being in a large city requires you to take initiative too, especially if there are so many transient foreigners that the locals keep to themselves. In a small town, you might be the first person from outside of the country that people have seen in six months, so curious locals will make you feel like the talk of the town.

No matter how big or how small your locale, integrating purposefully will help you get to know your community members while they get to know you.

**Follow these tips from one Latinx traveler to another and you'll be able to integrate in your community while teaching abroad, without having to spend seven years in Tibet!**

## Don't just teach.

While your job description expects you to teach your students the basics of English, you'll really miss out if you lock yourself in your room with your laptop and bottle of wine after class (though sometimes you just need to do this). Don't miss out on the relationships you could be making.

Whether you're teaching abroad for one month or two years, being visible and spending time with the locals is crucial to building community. Walk instead of taking a taxi to school, and bike down the street where other teachers live so that you can run into them. Integrating can be as simple as dancing with your co-teacher's five-year-old daughter at a wedding or getting schooled at chess by old French men in the park. Next time they see you, you'll be known as more than just that foreign teacher that's just here to drink cheap wine and beer.

## Let it happen.

Make the effort to stop and chat with the people at your favorite stores, with your neighbors, with fellow teachers, and other school staff, like janitors, secretaries, and the principal. Get to know your neighbors, not only because it's embarrassing to not know their names when you're locked out in the rain, but because they could be warm, caring people to pass your lazy Sundays sitting with to beat the heat.

Have at least one excuse to leave your house every day. You don't need to be a missionary and go door-to-door introducing yourself to everyone, but it doesn't hurt to compliment the corner store owner on her new haircut; it'll show you notice her (and then she might sneak a candy into your next bag of groceries). If you and that store owner don't hit it off, then go to another one and talk about the weather or your family with the owners. Small talk isn't a waste of time. It's a way to gain someone's trust and to form solid relationships.

## It's okay if you have ZERO friends your age

Teaching abroad gives new meaning to the saying "Age ain't nothing but a number." In some countries, you might easily be able to meet other people your age, but this isn't the case everywhere. Maybe you're in a town where you're the only person in their twenties or thirties without three kids. Your best friends might be your 60-year-old neighbor or your bright-eyed 14-year-old ESL student, and that's okay.

## Start an after school program.

Share your hobbies in a productive way with your students while getting to know them. You're not just an English teacher, and they're not just students. Whether you could never part with your unicycle or you have the best no-bake cookie recipe on earth, your students will never know these things until you tell them.

But why tell them when you can show them how to ride a unicycle or that you can make baked goods without an oven?

Introduce a part of yourself and your culture to others, or cross linguistic and cultural boundaries by finding a hobby you have in common with your students. Having your students "guest teach" an after school program, like teaching others how to play cricket, will develop their leadership skills in a sustainable way. They might continue meeting after school to get their fitness on long after you leave, and which will make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Find what projects are beneficial for your students, not just those that look good on your blog, too.

## Find a side job.

Having more free time while teaching English abroad than you would at home is a gift and a curse. It's nice to not abhor your alarm clock (if you even need it abroad) as much as before, but it can be hard to adjust to the amount of holidays, days off, and fewer working hours you'll have. Use the teachers at your school to your advantage. Ask them if they know of any work opportunities, and they might just help you snag that bartending job on weekends. You'll pocket some extra cash and you'll have to interact with more locals in your new gig.

## Learn local lingo.

In France, if you say "ouais" instead of "oui," then people will instantly know you've practiced your French outside of your middle school class. In Ecuador, if you say "que chevere" instead of "que bueno," then you'll benefit from sounding more like a local. People will pick up on how easily you use the intricacies of their language. Languages vary not just by country, but by the region of a country as well. Learning the everyday colloquialisms, idioms, sayings, and other slang will help you win the hearts of more people than you'll think.



# HOW TO CONNECT WITH OTHER HISPANIC TRAVELERS ABROAD

by Paloma de la Fuente

## Don't skip school events.

Chances are good that your school will organize celebrations. Even schools with dilapidated desks and no running water will find a way to borrow speakers for a day of student dances, poetry readings, and songs. These are also great opportunities to find your ESL students' elusive parents and tell them how wonderful their student is (or ask them why you haven't seen their kiddo in a week).

Once the parents and students see you attending these events, you'll prove that you care about your students inside and outside of classroom (and that it is possible to bust a move in your seat).

## Get the inside scoop at meetings.

As mundane as it may seem, go to teacher meetings. Once business is attended to, school staff will usually stick around to share food, teaching tips, or gossip about students' home lives. Learn as much as you can about where your students are coming from. You may walk away understanding why little Billy is always falling asleep; maybe he has to wake up insanely early to help his mom at the market.

Then you can chat with Billy about how best to support him.

Taking the initiative to meet people may seem uncomfortable at first, but you'll benefit from the effort it takes to integrate.

Everyone meets people in different ways, so follow the advice that works best for you. These tips will help locals see you not as just a foreign English teacher, but as a part of their community. Becoming visible and respected will take as much patience as teaching requires, but it will be profoundly rewarding.

In today's world it's never been so easy to find home beyond our borders. Traveling and living abroad is a wonderful experience, but it can get a little confusing. Sometimes you want the comfort of home, or as close to home as you can get. Feeling at home is something we all crave, and it is easier if we can share our feelings with people who are all in the same boat with us.

Spanish is the third most widely spoken language in the world, just behind Mandarin and English. No wonder you hear Spanish spoken in the strangest places! Good news, that means you're never too far from a fellow Hispanophone. If you're afraid to travel because of potential language barriers, trust me, you should not worry about it. You will always find people willing to help you. When I started to traveling solo, my English was nowhere near fluent. So, meeting other Spanish-speaking people was a huge relief.

Whether you're planning to study, volunteer, intern, or teach abroad, here are some of my tried and true tips to find Hispanic or Latino travelers in your community.

My fellow travelers helped me overcome fears, answer tough questions (for example, how to vote in my country's elections), and even reach my destination after missing a connecting flight!

## Join social media groups and forums!

Social media is here to make our lives easier. Whether it actually does or doesn't isn't up for debate, but as a traveler social media is a great tool at your disposal to help you find a community on the road. Join online groups and forums to meet people who are living or traveling in your area. Facebook is so helpful to find groups and events for language exchanges. You'll meet other Hispanics and Latinxs, but you'll also be able to connect with locals and hopefully forge some friendships through travel and intercultural exchange.



### Ok, but social media isn't everything—chat with people IRL.

We're all guilty of keeping our faces buried in our screens. Sometimes, we are so dialed into our smartphones that we don't look up, breathe, smile, and listen to everything around us as we travel. Pay attention to the world around you. Strike up a conversation with a stranger. If you hear someone speaking your native language, say hello! It could be the start of a beautiful friendship.

### Read articles and travel blogs.

Reading is cool, remember? Find even more tips and secret hotspots by scouring blogs and articles written by travelers who've been there before you. (Meta, right?) Learn from their mistakes and do as they say, not as they do. Maybe reach out to one of your favorite bloggers via email, or send them a quick tweet, to see if they have any insider tips on connecting with fellow Hispanic and Latinx travelers.

### Be the person you needed while traveling.

In the same vein of treat others how you want to be treated, be the travel mentor you were looking for starting out! Now that you're in on all these social media groups and making connections, reach out to new travelers and help them out. That's what it's all about: give what you want to receive.

### Host an event in your community.

Wishing there was a conversation group in the small town you've settled in for the foreseeable future? Create one! Get involved in daily life abroad and share your interests and talents with the world! Want to teach a salsa class? Cooking class? Discuss books written by Hispanic authors? Reach out to people in the local community, other expats and travelers, and get cooking.

### Be open-minded.

The Hispanic community is a huge group of people from so many different countries. You'll always be learning new slang. Not all words mean the same thing in all Spanish speaking communities. Instead of playing "my dialect is better than yours," enjoy learning new things about a new culture. Share some recipes and take comfort in what brings you together, not what sets you apart.

### Remember to branch out.

Being connected with other Spanish speakers out in the world does not mean that you should spend all your time with them. Hang with the locals and really get to know your host country and culture. That's the true goal of every meaningful traveler.

These days, we find everything we need with the touch of a button. But with all the convenience and ease of travel, we still need to feel that we are a part of something. We need feel, somehow, that we are home, we are safe, and we are part of a community. Connecting with other Hispanic travelers on the road can help the world feel a little smaller, a little less daunting, and will remind you that you can find people to make you feel at home no matter where you are and where you're from.



# BLENDING IN OR STANDING OUT: TRAVELING AS A LATINA

by Johanna Belsuzarri

I've been bit by the travel bug and gifted with multiple citizenships. Being a citizen of the world has always been a draw to me and now I'm living the dream!. Yes, I am American and proudly so, but I am also Peruvian and Argentinian and take pride in being a South American blend.

### The Benefits of Blending

I have a mixed look and no one can really pin point where I am from just by looking at me, especially if I'm just nodding and smiling.

This makes it easier when panhandlers want to sell you something and try every language they know to grab your attention or have you respond... I can just smile and walk on without hesitation leaving them perplexed. I love being able to blend in. It's one of the many benefits of my identity as I travel. Most people receive me very well and when I approach them, they are thoughtful and always kind and willing to help.

While in Luxor they congratulated my friend for being with an Egyptian (me). Assuming I was middle eastern due to my curly hair and tan skin.



While in Hong Kong and China, I am always asked if my dad is Asian due to the slight slant of my almond shaped eyes. Being asked for directions in Germany, Brazil, Vietnam, or in the Czech Republic gives me the seal of approval that I am viewed as a local and not a tourist. In my travels to over 50+ countries, I've learned that blending is far more beneficial than standing out.

Blending in is also helpful when traveling solo as a woman. Whether you're participating in a program and traveling solo on the weekends, or on the backpacking trip of a lifetime, solo travel brings its own joys and challenges. The ability to blend in with locals and fly under the radar helps keep you safe.

### Master the Art of Blending In

Learning to blend in isn't as difficult as you think it is. Any traveler can take steps to blend in better.

**Dress to impress.** The number one trick to blending in is all in how you dress: no labels on your clothes means no labels on you. Keep it simple! No baseball caps, no T-shirts with logos or sports teams on it. Keep accessories minimal— i.e. no guidebooks in hand, no big cameras around my neck, and no gaudy, flashy jewelry.

**Walk with purpose.** Even if you have no idea where you're going, you've got to fake it until you make it. I always look like I know where I am going. As a latina and a woman that's a great strategy to attempt to deter any unwanted attention. Be confident!

**Talk the talk.** Speaking multiple languages is also an advantage. I lean on my Spanish first and then Portuguese and if I can swindle a bit of French, German or Italian, due to my good memory and cramming language sessions on the plane. I would opt for any of those before English, depending on where you're traveling. English is great, but my American accent is detectable and can make it difficult to blend. Once you are categorized by nationality you might be treated a little differently based on preconceived notions.

# “Even if you have no idea where you're going, you've got to fake it until you make it.”

### Sometimes You Will Stand Out Anyway

Even with the best blending techniques, you'll still stand out a little as a newcomer to a country, town, and culture.

Being pinpointed as an American right away isn't always favorable as a traveler abroad. I was studying in Brazil for a year back when George W. Bush was President in 2002. My Portuguese was still a little rough and I was constantly fielding questions from taxi drivers, people at the restaurant, or random people at the market who wanted to know if I was American. My response: “No, I'm Mexican.” The manner in which they questioned my nationality was abrupt and somewhat a mix of hostility and curiosity.

Politically, America was not winning any popularity contests on the world stage and was a little rocky in international relations at the time. In this case, my blended identity gave me an escape and prevented new acquaintances from judging me or boxing me in. So, blending in is a blessing if you can pull it off.

Ironically enough, when I am in Argentina, they think I am Brazilian. In Brazil, I'm a local, in Mexico, I am considered Argentinian and then outside of Latin American, I'm either assumed to be a local or of Asian descent.

### Back to Blending

All in all, it's been a blessing. Being a savvy traveler goes a long way in connecting with people, understanding customs, traditions, and their way of life. Mimicry is the highest form of flattery after all, and “when in Rome” you should do as the Romans do. Try the new foods, sit on the floor, eat with your hands or with chopsticks, or however locals chow down. Be curious and learn everything you can about new cultures.

I am not just one thing or just where I am “from.” Rather, I am blend of all countries and places that I have been to, as they all leave their mark and they all inspire me. I am a global citizen. My friends and fondest memories are sprinkled all over the globe. They are reminders of my travels, connections, and the wonderful people that create the fabric of my life. Being Latina has its challenges and it's perks, but I am more than that and offer more than just a stereotype of my identity and heritage.





# NOT MANY LATINXS TRAVEL: HOW MY INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE MADE ME STAND OUT BACK HOME

by Raquel De la Rosa

I still remember the day I had this super important interview for an agrochemical company back home. To be honest, I wasn't expecting much since I had just come back from a year abroad studying and traveling in Asia and the job seemed to me to be out of my league. But somehow, the CEO had learned some things about my profile that he found interesting and gave me a call to schedule a meeting with him. So here I was, a little intimidated by the situation, but still curious about how it would develop.

"I need someone to get in charge of all the legal stuff in the company" he said – and I sighed thinking I was under experienced to take that task – but not only that, he continued, "I heard you have traveled and speak more languages, is that correct?" And suddenly I started feeling more confident and conversation began to flow in a natural way.

I mentioned my first solo travel to Europe when I was 19. How I found a job online to afford living there and how I started with French.

I mentioned Asia, how I got a scholarship to learn Mandarin and some of the perks of going somewhere new every time I could, and all of the sudden he offered me a job with a good salary and asked if I could learn Japanese so that I could get involved with the company's international affairs.

Suddenly, all of the things I used to consider irrelevant for my resume some years ago, and even as a waste of precious time I should have been using for study or work experience back home, weren't such a waste at all. Turns out, experience you acquire through your time volunteering, working, teaching or studying in another place does a lot more to help you professionally than it does hurt you. It broadens your opportunities in so many ways.

Of course, you still have to have the stuff to back it all up, but the skills you gain through travel are what give you leverage to stand out from the crowd in the working world.

**"They aren't investing in pieces of paper (your resume, your degree), but in someone who's willing to learn, able to empathize... and react and adapt quickly..."**

You see, people want to invest in people. They aren't investing in pieces of paper (your resume, your degree), but in someone who's willing to learn, able to empathize with people who seem to have nothing in common with you, and who can react and adapt quickly when things come up—because they always do.

I don't want to sound cliché or like a broken record, but sometimes, the reason things are repeated so often, is because they're true. And for me, it's all about the ways you grow as you travel. People say you become more aware of global issues, more open minded and more skilled if you seek out meaningful travel opportunities, and I agree 100 percent. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't open ourselves to the world as much as we should.

In Mexico, for example, only 5 percent of the population is estimated to be proficient in English, even though knowing the language can improve your salary by 50 percent. Imagine the doors that knowing two or three more languages can open for you personally and professionally.

Very often, finances are a big barrier for not learning, traveling or doing more. Financial concerns are valid, but truth is, money is not the only thing holding us back from these experiences. It's fear. Fear of wasting time, of not being good enough or skilled enough, of people different from us and places completely different from what we know.

Money is a resource that we can achieve through saving habits and multiple incomes and there are tons of funding options and programs we can choose from to meet our needs. What we really need is determination to achieve our goals, and stop underestimating the value of travel as a window for new opportunities and experience.

For me, traveling with a purpose and using my time abroad wisely has been a major game changer in my life back in Mexico, and I can assure you, it will be worth it for you as well.





# HOW TRAVELING ABROAD CONNECTED ME WITH MY LATINIDAD

by Cecilia Polanco

Many Americans are still getting used to the idea of gap years. In the Latinx community, they are even more unheard of and controversial. I identify as Salvadoran-American; I was born in Los Angeles, California, raised in Durham, North Carolina and my family is originally from El Salvador. I'm a first generation college student and a first generation U.S. citizen. When I was thinking about college, a gap year was not part of my plan, but in my far and wide search for scholarships I came across the Global Gap Year Fellowship at UNC Chapel Hill. I was open to any opportunity that was funded, and was especially excited about the Fellowships' service component. I wouldn't have taken a gap year if it wasn't for that scholarship, but I am so glad I did.

## Hold Up, What's a Gap Year?

It was hard to explain to my parents at first what a gap year was. I was still grappling with what it meant, and while I recognized that it was an opportunity with a lot to offer, I wasn't able to put that into words in English yet, much less in Spanish. My parents also didn't go through the public education system in the United States, which means that they didn't experience first hand what honors and AP classes were, what the process of applying to college and for financial aid was like, so they showed their support by instilling in me the value of education, and keeping me fed, clothed, and housed so I could focus on school.

Taking a gap year was a huge risk for me, and for my parents as well. I had faith in what this experience could provide for me, and they had faith in my capabilities, which at 18 is a big deal. They trusted my decision to take a gap year was the right one for me, although there were some concerns around why I would work so hard to get to college and then not go. Would I want to continue school once I got back? Would I lose momentum? Would I not be as academically strong? My parents had concerns about their baby girl traveling abroad by herself, but they trusted me and my decision and off I went.

There is something I want to make clear about talking to Latinx parents about wanting to take a gap year. Their fears and worries are legitimate, so hear them out even if their first reaction is to say no. Their feelings and reactions are influenced by their own experiences, having migrated or travelled internationally before. Your parents concerns should not be seen as a barrier especially if it's because they don't understand what a gap year is and don't yet understand the value. They will. And when you choose to take a gap year, it must be for you; your friends and family will get the message later.

## What My Gap Year Taught Me

I split my gap year into two semesters: the first I was in Europe, home based in Italy and did some travel around Europe. I worked on an organic farm in Tuscany, volunteered in soup kitchens, and churches, making the effort to find free volunteer opportunities in a foreign country where I didn't speak the language.

My second semester I wanted a bit more stability so I signed up to be an Au Pair in Australia with a military family. An Au Pair is pretty much a maid and a nanny, and the stability of living in one place allowed me to get a feel for living and volunteering somewhere long term. I talked to my parents often, to update them on where I was, what I was eating, and what the weather was like.

They were fascinated when we skyped and it was Friday evening for them and already Saturday morning for me. We missed each other so much, it was hard to video chat sometimes. But from conversation with my parents, and talking to them in particular about working on the farm, as a maid and nanny, I realized a few things about myself and my gap year choices.

When I thought of service, I didn't automatically think developing world, whereas a lot of people do. I was in developed countries my entire gap year. I realized something about my choice of service; I worked in jobs that were stereotypical of Latinx and immigrant people. I worked on a farm picking olives from trees for olive oil, and I cooked, cleaned, and took care of someone else's kids and home. Why did I chose to do that? Those were the easiest opportunities to come by that were also the cheapest to participate in, but what I recognized about my situation is that I chose to do those jobs, and at any point could choose not to do those jobs; a luxury that those who typically work in those jobs, don't have. It was a humbling experience that allowed me to recognize ways in which I was privileged, and I felt that it was an ode to those who have come before me and who work those jobs so that their children don't have to. I felt a connection with the generation of workers that pathed the way for me and so many of the children of immigrants that pursue a better opportunities than their parents had.

When you're abroad, you start to think about yourself and who you are. Not just how you identify, but also who you are in the context of where you are. As I found myself thousands of miles away from my loved ones, in a country foreign to me, where I didn't speak the language, I couldn't help but think about my father. My father fled civil war in El Salvador at 26. He left his wife, two young daughters and another on the way. He migrated to the Los Angeles, California and worked tirelessly to live and save money to reunite his family. My conditions were very different. I was younger, female, and pursued opportunities in another country as a luxury, and from a place of privilege.



However different our experiences were, I thought back to that young man who risked everything for something better, and for a second I could slightly relate. Immigrants are global citizens and borders are bullshit, but I'll table that for another time.

My gap year taught me so much about myself; much of which I didn't realize until time had passed. Since my gap year, the lessons I learned and the experiences I had continue to influence and inform my values and decisions. I also learned a lot about being American when I traveled abroad. In the U.S. I was American; I had the birth certificate, grew up there and spoke the language. But, I was also not American, in way that American is equivalent to whiteness both domestically and abroad.

So when I met people abroad (I met a lot of people), the usual, "So, where are you from?" would result in I'm American, from North Carolina. Sometimes people would say, North Carolina, that's near North Dakota, right? Or they'd say, "Okay, but where are you really from? Or the ever abhorrent "What are you?" I didn't care to defend my American-ness abroad, because whether people believed me or not, I was traveling the world with my navy blue passport emblazoned with a gold eagle, and that right was not up for debate.

### Learning How to Tell MY Story

Having to talk about myself and introduce myself over and over again taught me that in order to do so honestly, I had to tell people a story. A story about my parents and their migration journey, from El Salvador to California, and from West coast to East coast from L.A. to Durham. I realized that the terms Latina and Hispanic meant different things, and their meaning and my use of those terms either reinforced or resisted stereotypes, misconceptions, and a simplification of how diverse Latinidad is.

I started saying I was Salvadoran-American, to honor my parents, their sacrifices, and the beauty of our culture, and also to own the rights and privileges I was born with as an American. In my mind, I am the best of both worlds. I carry with me my ancestors and my parents history, and also an identity that I get to define; I get to decide what being American means for me.

In a cliché way, my gap year helped me find myself and understand who I am, who I wanted to be, in the context of my place and space in the world. I'm stronger and more confident because of it. My Latinidad, my Salvadoran-ness is my strength, and I'm so thankful that my world was opened so I could realize it.

# STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIPS FOR LATINX STUDENTS

by the GoAbroad Writing Team

Regardless of your identity, the decision to study abroad is daunting enough. Now factor in being an underrepresented Latinx student. Yeah. Daunting might not be a strong enough word. Now factor in the cost of study abroad? Bye-bye cuticles!

Most students will cite finances as the biggest thing holding them back from taking the plunge and signing up for their dream study abroad program. Not only do students have program fees to deal with, possibly in addition to tuition at their home institution, but exchange rates on top of differences in cost of living; it's just a lot to undertake. And while there is a lot of funding to promote study abroad programs, there aren't so many geared toward diverse students and travelers.

Here are a few top scholarship geared toward Latinx students and minority students. The programs listed below all have the common goal of promoting financial accessibility and diversity in study abroad. So, now you just have to track due dates and apply!



### HACU IES Scholarship

[This scholarship](#) is open to students who are currently attending a Hispanic-Serving Institution that is a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities ([HACU](#)). HACU represents more than 470 colleges and universities committed to Hispanic higher education success in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Latin America, and Spain. HACU is the only national educational association that represents Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).

**Award Amount:**

- Summer: Up to \$2,500
- Semester: Up to \$5,000

**Deadline:**

- Fall/Academic Year: May 1
- Spring/Calendar Year: November 1

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Apply to/ accepted to and enroll in a summer, semester or academic year program.
- Demonstrate financial need.
- Priority is given to first generation students and/or Federal Pell Grant recipients.

## Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF)

The [HSF Scholarship](#) is designed to assist students of Hispanic heritage obtain a college degree. Scholarships are available, on a competitive basis, to high school seniors, undergraduate students (all years), community college students transferring to four-year universities, and graduate students.

**Award Amount:** Awards are based on merit; amounts range from \$500 to \$5,000, based on relative need, among the scholars selected.

**Deadline:** Depends on when student chooses to go abroad

**Eligibility:**

- Must be of Hispanic Heritage
- Minimum of 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale (or equivalent) for high school students
- Minimum of 2.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale (or equivalent) for college and graduate students
- Plan to enroll full-time in an accredited, not-for-profit, 4-year university, or graduate school, during the fall of a scholarship cycle (year)
- U.S. citizen, permanent legal resident, DACA or eligible non-citizen (as defined by FAFSA)
- Complete FAFSA or state based financial aid application (if applicable)

## Diversity Abroad Scholarships

DiversityAbroad.com connects diverse students, recent grads, and young professionals to international programs and job opportunities. The organization offers a wide variety of exclusive grants and scholarships to minority, low-income, and first generation students. Most are co-sponsored with specific program providers and eligibility requirements, submission requirements, and deadlines will vary between scholarships.

**A few to consider are:**

- [Diversity Abroad & CISI Planning Scholarship](#)
- [Diversity Abroad & FIE Scholarship](#)
- [Diversity Abroad Overseas Ambassador Scholarship](#)

## Fund for Education Abroad (FEA)

The [Fund for Education Abroad \(FEA Scholarships\)](#) was established in 2010 to help independent study abroad programs. Since then, they have sent roughly 100 students abroad from all over the United States. Applicants should be participating in an academically rigorous and immersive study abroad program that ideally includes a language component. FEA offers Dedicated Scholarships to applicants that meet general eligibility requirements and fit specific demographic, regional, or semester criteria.

**Award Amount:**

- Up to \$10,000 per year (\$5,000 per semester)

**Deadline:**

- Cycle of applications accepted annually in the fall, check their website for the most up-to-date info.

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the U.S.
- Currently enrolled as an undergraduate at a college or university in the U.S. (graduate students are not eligible)
- Study abroad program must be eligible for credit at the student's educational institution
- Study abroad program must be at least four weeks long (30 days)

## BENJAMIN A. GILMAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

[This scholarship](#) is not only geared toward minority students, but all students of limited financial means to pursue academic studies abroad. While most students from the U.S. end up choosing countries in Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand for their study abroad destination, this scholarship encourages students to choose more challenging locations.

The Gilman scholarship program supports students who traditionally have been underrepresented in study abroad, including, but not limited to, students with high financial need, community college students, students in underrepresented fields such as the sciences and engineering, students with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and students with disabilities.

**Award Amount:** \$5,000

**Deadline:** Depends on when student chooses to go abroad

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the U.S.
- Good academic standing as undergraduate student (both four-year and two-year institutions are acceptable)
- Must receive a Federal Pell Grant during the term abroad
- Must be in the process of applying to, or accepted for, a study abroad or internship program of at least two weeks for community college students and four weeks for students from four-year institutions, in a single country and eligible for credit from the student's home institution

## API Diversity Scholarship

[API's diversity scholarship](#) seeks to support participants from a variety of backgrounds. It provides the opportunity for students with traditionally marginalized identities to study abroad. Students are encouraged to apply for multiple API scholarships in addition to outside scholarships.

**Award Amount:** \$250 to \$750

**Deadline:** Depends on when student chooses to go abroad

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Minority students, U.S. military veterans, non-traditional students (30 years old or older), students with a disability, and/or LGBTQ students
- Participant in an API program

## David Porter Need-Based Diversity Scholarship

The David Porter Need-Based Diversity Scholarship was created to give minority students the opportunity of studying abroad. This scholarship, also affiliated with IES Abroad, was named in honor of David Porter from the IES Board of Directors. It seeks to provide opportunity to groups traditionally underrepresented in study abroad and international education.

**Award Amount:** \$5,000 off an IES Abroad program fee

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Recipients must attend a private college or university that is a Member or Associate Member of the IES Abroad Consortium.
- Your home school must have a policy of transferring at least 75 percent of institutional aid for study abroad.

With one round of scholarship research out of the way, all that's left is for you to apply and start stamping that passport! You want to make sure you're making them an offer they can't refuse, so [follow these guidelines](#) to send in a seriously kick-a\$\$ application and cinch that scholarship.

With any of these scholarships in your back pocket, your dream of studying abroad will become a reality. You'll have every opportunity to go out and explore this big beautiful world and pursue your education and passion abroad.





## KEEP EXPLORING

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

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

Email [erin.oppenheim@goabroad.com](mailto:erin.oppenheim@goabroad.com)

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