

Gender Relations and Sexual Harassment Abroad

Information and suggestions provided below are meant to be a guide and starting point and are not universal to all cultures. Before you depart, try to learn about gender relations in your destination country so that you are prepared for what may await you. Above all, always trust your instincts, and never let anyone try to make you feel guilty for leaving a situation in which you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Keep in mind that it is not your place to try and change the culture; you are there to learn about the local cultural context even though you may not agree with it.

Possible Gender & Relationship Differences

- Many societies remain largely patriarchal; expectations of what is considered respectable for men and women may vary
- Local laws and social norms around what is considered sexual harassment (and who is responsible) vary
- Catcalling may be considered a form of flattery
- Staring may be normal by cultural standards; personal space may differ
- "No" may be interrupted as a "maybe" or a "keep trying"; be firm when saying "no"
- Male-female friendships may not be common or accepted; solo interactions between males and females may be misinterpreted

Avoid Misinterpretations

- Research cultural context, behaviors, and mannerisms to understand local norms
- Dress in clothing traditionally acceptable for your gender in your host country
- Meet with locals of another gender in a group rather than one-on-one
- Avoid eye contact with men you pass in the streets
- When you say "no" don't be afraid to say it firmly and not necessarily politely

Examples of Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

- Catcalling or verbal street harassment
- Stares and hand gestures
- A person being followed by a stranger
- Persistence in asking you out or in making advances
- Sexual Assault

Risk Reduction Strategies

- Do your research before departing
- Pay attention to your surroundings
- Try to blend in, walk confidently, and keep your distance
- Travel in groups or with another traveler whenever possible
- Trust your instincts; if a situation feels inappropriate or makes you uneasy, leave
- Use a firm voice
- Maintain your pace after saying “no” or ignoring any unwanted advances
- If being followed, find the nearest business establishment, restaurant, or taxi. If needed, don’t be afraid to make a scene.
- Be mindful if out drinking- don’t overconsume, watch your drinks (never accept one you haven’t watched the bartender prepare), make sure you have a plan to get home safely

Strategies for Coping

- Know that you are not to blame
- Remember, it’s a different culture and you are not there to change it
- Find a cultural informant- this could be someone from the host culture or a foreigner who has spent significant time in the host culture- that you can talk to in order to better understand gender dynamics and cultural context
- Integrate into the local culture; befriend local individuals
- Take care of yourself and find ways to provide yourself an outlet for your frustrations through stress relievers that work for you, be it journaling, confiding in a friend, taking time for yourself, exercising, etc.
- If you are struggling, reach out to your program, the Office of International Education, DU’s Center for Advocacy, Prevention, and Empowerment (CAPE), or a trained professional (see resources below)

Bystander Prevention

- Assess the situation. If it is safe for you to become involved, you may approach the harasser and tell him or her to “stop”, “no,” or “go away” on the recipient’s behalf.
- Create a distraction. Approach the target of harassment and ask for directions, offer your seat to them, or act like you know each other, even if you don’t. Say, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere!”
- Be available or check in with the person being harassed
- As a bystander, be sure to reach out for support for yourself, if needed, after an event

If Sexually Assaulted

- Contact International SOS for support in terms of medical care, emotional guidance, and legal recommendations
- Have local emergency numbers on-hand (Note: this may not always include local law enforcement)
- Contact local on-site support and consider reporting to DU either privately or confidentially
- Consider reaching out to a confidential DU advocacy resource, CAPE, at cape@du.edu

Resources

- Reach out to your program advisor and/or any in-country, local support structures for additional assistance
- [International SOS](#) can provide a limited number of free phone counseling services or may be able to connect you to local counseling services
- Contact DU if an incident has occurred and/or if you are struggling with things like street harassment and would like additional support
- An outline of resources can be found on DU's Center for Advocacy, Prevention, and Empowerment (CAPE) website:
<http://www.du.edu/health-and-counseling-center/cape/resources/index.html> and DU's Enterprise Risk Management's webpage:
http://www.du.edu/risk/international_travel/gender_discrimination.html