

IDENTITIES ABROAD: UNITED KINGDOM*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for the United Kingdom as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. IEIGI understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to the United Kingdom, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: London

Population: 65,761,117 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): English, Scottish Gaelic (about 60,000 speakers in Scotland), Welsh (about 20% of the population of Wales), Irish (about 10% of the population of Northern Ireland), Cornish (some 2,000 to 3,000 people in Cornwall) (2012 est.)

Religions: Christian (includes Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist) 59.5%, Muslim 4.4%, Hindu 1.3%, other 2%, unspecified 7.2%, none 25.7% (2011 est.)

Ethnic groups: white 87.2%, black/African/Caribbean/black British 3%, Asian/Asian British: Indian 2.3%, Asian/Asian British: Pakistani 1.9%, mixed 2%, other 3.7% (2011 est.)



British citizens have historically existed in a diverse society comprised of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. However, British multiculturalism runs deeper into cultures and peoples from all around the world. Students studying in such a diverse

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destination will be exposed to the food, religion, language, and culture of the world. Some travelers preparing to visit the United Kingdom report having trouble understanding the difference between England, Britain, and the U.K. The [Smithsonian](#) provides a great video explaining the difference ensuring travelers can travel in confidence.

The [United Kingdom](#) is located in Western Europe. The United Kingdom is twice the size of Pennsylvania; slightly smaller than Oregon. The core of the population lies in and around London, with significant clusters found in central Britain around Manchester and Liverpool. The role of the U.K. leading in the 20th century was significantly diminished after two world wars and the end of the empire. In recent times, the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union has raised significant questions about the country's global role in the 21st century despite still yielding a great deal of both economic and military power with additional political and cultural influences worldwide.

Travelers should be sure to explore some of the [Best Places to Visit in the United Kingdom](#). Recognized as a [World Bank High- Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living in the United Kingdom](#) is 8.47% lower than in United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not taken into account).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for the United Kingdom:

- [U.S Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to the United Kingdom](#)

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) [Open Doors Report 2019](#), 39,403 students from the United States studied abroad in the United Kingdom, a roughly 1.1% decrease from the previous year recorded.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

According to a report by the [Institute of Race Relations](#), in 2013/14, there were 47,571 'racist incidents' recorded by the police in England and Wales. On average, that is about 130 incidents per day. With increasing immigration into cities like London, ethnic minorities are moving to areas that can be classified as predominantly white. When traveling in these parts of the country, students, especially students of color, should be aware of any conflicts that have arisen from the movement of these people.

Recently, the UK has introduced significant changes to its welfare state with the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. Government officials and supporters of such reforms suggest they are justified on two grounds: deficit reduction and ending welfare dependency by facilitating access to work. However, some experts contend that such reforms will have a disproportionate effect on racial and religious minorities as well as women. Some reports have noted a [spike in hate crimes](#), especially targeting minors following the Brexit referendum in 2016. Students of color should be familiar with and aware of the current race and ethnic relations while in country.

NOTES:

- The law prohibits racial and ethnic discrimination, but travelers, Roma, and persons of African, Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, and Middle Eastern origin at times reported mistreatment on racial or ethnic grounds.
- The recent resurgence of neo-fascism across a number of countries in the Global North has exposed the insufficiency of liberal legal responses to racism.
- Students of color should carry a copy of identification (or information confirming the traveler's purpose in the U.K) to show authorities in the event of being racially profiled.
- Students of color report generally feeling welcomed in the country and incidents of discrimination on tourists are rare.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Red, White, Blue, and Black: Navigating my African-American Identity in London](#)
- [Minority Rights Group International](#), World Directory of Indigenous People
- [Scottish Colours](#)
- [We Are Black and Abroad](#)
- [Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality While Away](#) (UC Santa Cruz)

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

The law in England and Wales prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, although individuals reported sporadic incidents of homophobic violence. The UK is recognized as being one of the most open and accepting sovereign states in the world. With laws ensuring the rights of LGBT persons dating back to the 1960's, British organizations, such as London Friend, have been created to promote the mental, physical and well-being of members of the LGBT community. Students identifying as LGBT should feel welcomed and embraced by the local community.

U.S. students participating in education abroad programs in the U.K. can generally expect to find a campus environment that is at least as tolerant of and accommodating to the LGBT community on the average U.S. college campus.

NOTES:

- The age of consent to any form of sexual activity is 16. The age of consent is the same regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of a person and whether the sexual activity is between people of the same or different gender.
- Homophobic and transphobic hate crimes have more than doubled in England and Wales over five years, a [Guardian analysis](#) has shown. The rate of LGBT hate crime per capita rose by 144% between 2013-14 and 2017-18.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Global Gayz](#), A gay-owned charitable travel and culture website focused on LGBT life in countries around the world
- [United Kingdom Equaldex](#)
- [LGBT Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel (see Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [Coming Out: The Abroad Edition](#)
- [Frommer's Tips for Gay & Lesbian Travelers](#)
- [Resources for LGBTQ+ Study Abroad Students](#) (NAFSA Rainbow Special Interest Group)

DISABILITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

The governmental law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in several sectors including education, employment and access and accommodations. The government not only provides programmatic services and increased access to information for those with disabilities but also effectively enforces applicable laws.

Students with disabilities have often chosen to study abroad in the UK because of its relative advancements with accessibility. Many grassroots organizations (such as [SCOPE](#)) have taken on the mission of highlighting access challenges for persons with physical or sensory disability. While medical services are widely available, free medical care under the National Health System (NHS) is allowed only for UK residents, certain EU nationals, and some visa holders. Although you can purchase many prescription and non-prescription medications at pharmacies, some common U.S. medications may not be available and thus it is recommended by the [U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor's prescription. As a precaution, travelers should check with the [Embassy website](#) to find a list of medical facilities.

NOTES:

- The United Kingdom does not quarantine cats and dogs that meet the certain requirements from approved countries ([Pet Travel](#)). All requirements also apply to [service and emotional support animals](#) when traveling abroad.
- If students are hearing impaired, or traveling with someone who has a hearing impairment, they should check with potential hosts to determine whether they have: visual adaptation aids for telephone ringers, smoke alarms, fire alarms, doorbell, audio loop systems, amplification on telephone handsets and televisions with teletext.
- For travelers with visual impairment, it is important to check whether accommodations welcome their guide dog, as well as: having markings denoting changes in floor space and height, braille instructions for appliances and controls and use of large print.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Mobility International USA](#), Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities
- [Information for Students with Disabilities Traveling Abroad](#), U.S. Department of State (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)

- Frommer's Tips for Travelers with Disabilities in [England, Scotland](#)
- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications](#), Transportation Security Administration
- [My World Has Expanded](#), a UCSC's student's experience as a deaf person abroad
- [Accessing Information and Insight in the UK](#), studying abroad with a learning disability

RELIGION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

The U.K. has changed dramatically over the years, becoming incredibly diverse with different religions being practiced daily. This diversity has increased significantly from the movement of people across open borders. These persons bring with them fascinating culture and devout beliefs. However, some beliefs are at times misunderstood or misrepresented and as such can bring with it hostility and prejudice against foreigners. The climate around Islam has encouraged British Muslims to launch the "Inspired by Mohammed Campaign". The purpose of the campaign is to educate and inform Brits about Islamic values and rights. The campaign is promoted by the Exploring Islam Foundation (EIF).

NOTES:

- During and after the 2016 referendum to leave the EU (Brexit), considerable intolerant political discourse focused on immigration and contributed to increasing xenophobic sentiments.
- Certain politicians and some policies portrayed Muslims in a negative light.
- Religious travelers should feel encouraged to celebrate their personal religious beliefs.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Religion in the United Kingdom](#) Best Country: Always There Where You Are
- [Jewish Communities in the United Kingdom](#)
- [Exploring Islam Foundation \(EIF\)](#), Inspired by Muhammad
- [Being Black and Muslim in London](#)

WOMEN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

Many individuals in the UK understand that to treat individuals differently on account of sex or gender is unfair, but are less sensitive to the broad picture of sexual discrimination. A variety of laws work to provide equal rights to males and females. Among them is the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, which protects individuals from being discriminated against in employment, vocational training, education, and other areas due to their sex. These laws don't, however, guarantee that study abroad students will not face discrimination while in the U.K. Rather they ensure that students concerned about gender equality will be in a society that in many ways resembles the U.S.

NOTES:

- The United Kingdom ranked 21st (out of 153 countries) in the [2020 Global Gender Gap Index](#) conducted by the World Economic Forum.
- It is usually safe to travel around alone, including for women travelers. However, since women travelers have been more likely to be targets of high-risk crimes, it is recommended that travelers are vigilant of their surroundings and make a conscious effort to travel in groups as often as possible.
- The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, and prohibits sexual harassment and provides civil penalties.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Pink Pangea](#), The Community for Women Who Love to Travel
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#), Great Britain's national equality body
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Sexual Harassment and Prevention In College Students Studying Abroad](#)

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook](#). Accessed online in July 2020
[IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet United Kingdom](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in July 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.