

As a LGBTQ student about to travel abroad, it is important to ask yourself, “What are the country’s social and legal policies towards the GLBTQ community and its members?” While many of us wish such a question was not necessary, it is important to consider for one’s safety. During the fall semester of my junior year, I studied abroad in Shanghai, China. A few of my friends mentioned that I might want to research China’s laws concerning the treatment of GLBTQ individuals. I had not given it much thought before, but I realized it might be a good idea. Thankfully, since 1997, homosexuality in China is legal. In 2001, the country removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses.

When I arrived in China, I felt no different than when I was home in the US. Deciding to study abroad in the biggest city in the world (population wise) worked to my advantage. Shanghai is a city filled with people from all walks of life, including many people from the GLBTQ community. While the GLBTQ community is not as visible as those in New York, Sydney, or London, social gathering places do exist. The government still has control over businesses; therefore, do not be surprised if a venue is shut down or is mysteriously closed.

One crucial point I would like to stress. Beijing and Shanghai are two very different cities. Many students wishing to study abroad in China usually have to decide between the two. While I was only in Beijing for one week, I believe the atmosphere there is much more politically and socially conservative than in Shanghai. As a GLBTQ student, if you are considering studying abroad in China, Shanghai is the best city in China for you.

Overall, I felt comfortable to be myself, and that is what matters most.