



How to Engage in Challenging Conversations Abroad

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/study-abroad/articles/engage-challenging-conversations-abroad>

1. Start with yourself

Spend time reflecting on [how you identify](#), what informs your opinions (religion, family, community, etc.) and consider which hot topics trigger an emotional response. Write down your thoughts and expand on why you think or feel the way you do. Understanding your emotional triggers before engaging in a difficult conversation can help you from retorting at an opposing opinion in a negative, unproductive manner. You don't have to accept or reject someone's opinion; but be willing to listen and understand where they're coming from.

2. Are you listening?

Become an active listener and take note on information that you think needs further clarification. If you engage in dialogue with people that share different perspectives, listening to their opinions with an open mind is a great place to start.

3. Embrace the Uncomfortable

Don't limit your perspective on another person's reality by only engaging in difficult dialogue with people who share your identity, beliefs, experiences, and opinions. Having uncomfortable conversations with people that have varying opinions from you can teach you a lot about yourself. Sure, it's uncomfortable but discomfort can produce positive change.

4. [Stay connected](#) to your network

While being in uncomfortable situations helps us grow, being surrounded by community is what keeps us balanced. Your community can help restore the imbalance of emotions that might have been reignited or created by a particularly exhausting conversation. In the midst of a busy schedule, your community at school and at home can help you thrive, not just survive.

5. Stay Informed

No matter what your opinions might be, it's so important to stay informed. Though-provoking podcasts, credible news outlets, diversity and inclusion events on campus can help you combat ignorance and become a more informed citizen in today's interconnected world.

Racial & Ethnic Minority Students Abroad

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/guides/diversity-and-inclusion-abroad-guide/racial-ethnic-minority-students-abroad>

In the U.S. you might be classified by your ethnicity, but abroad, you may be identified first as an American. The people you meet will likely have an opinion about the U.S., and may be eager to tell you what they think, positive or negative.

Whether or not people identify you as an American, they may make assumptions based on your physical appearance. Many people you encounter abroad will show a sincere interest in your culture. There may be people who stare at you or who are eager to touch your hair or your skin. Others may ask insensitive questions about your cultural heritage, physical features, or national origins. If you are abroad in an area where people have had little or no contact with minority students, people tend to be very curious, especially children.

If somebody says or does something that is offensive to you, try to distinguish between a person who is genuinely curious about you and your culture and someone who has bad intentions. You may find yourself in some uncomfortable situations, and always remember to put your safety first. Below are just a few considerations for you to think about if you are a student who identifies as a racial or ethnic minority:

- How is my ethnic group perceived in my host country? What kind of stereotypes are there?
- How should I react if I find something to be offensive?
- Is the person curious or do they have bad intentions?
- Has my host family housed minority students before? If not, will this be an issue for them?
- Am I used to being part of the majority at home but will be a minority abroad? Or vice versa?
- Will there be other minority students in my program?
- Who will I contact if I do face racial or discriminatory incidents?
- Does my program have support staff that will understand and help me through any racial or discriminatory incident I may face?

Tips for Racial and Ethnic Minority Students:

- Remember that people abroad have different cultural norms and tend to be less “politically correct” than people in the U.S.
- The more you integrate with the culture the less you'll stand out, but your skin, hair, or other features may still attract attention.
- Research what kinds of contact and relations your minority group has had in your host country. You may also want to research immigration in general.
- Be aware that people may generalize or incorrectly identify your ethnicity.
- Learn more about other minority students’ experiences abroad. For example, you can talk to other minority students who have studied abroad or find information online.
- Build a support network among other study abroad students so that if you do face racial or discriminatory incidents you'll have support to deal with it.
- Be prepared if an incident does arise, but don't go abroad expecting racism or discrimination.

Country Specific resources from IES Abroad

<https://www.iesabroad.org/study-abroad/student-diversity-access/resources/country-specific>