

CASE STUDY

Is it me or is it racist?

John Green, Study Abroad Officer, University of Liverpool Management School

“Coming from a mixed background of British and Indian and having brown skin; people often assume that I am from the country that I am visiting and so are very friendly and welcoming, before being totally surprised at my Mancunian accent.

Over the last decade both in the UK and abroad, I have found it difficult at times going through airports and immigration and at times even walking down the street can be a challenge, especially when I am with my wife who is white. People are often taken back when the John Green they were expecting turns out to be a brown man.

The key to a happy experience is research and preparation. Look at the country, the city, the town that you will be going to and read about the local landscape in terms of recent history, politics and views on immigration. Is the place you are going to liberal or conservative in its views? What are the main concerns that could affect you? This isn't to say that you shouldn't study abroad or visit wherever you'd like, but it's important to be prepared for the type of experiences you may encounter, positive or negative.

I also make sure that I'm prepared before every flight. I ensure all of my documents are up to date and I have multiple copies of everything and I keep one on me, one in my bag and one in my luggage. I always arrive in plenty of time at the airport so I don't need to run and so I don't appear stressed whilst queuing in security as this helps avoid any unnecessary attention. Equally, I never have anything in my pockets or wear any jewellery and I always make eye contact with the security guards and come across as friendly and polite. I have found that, for example, when travelling to the USA, if I look slightly more dishevelled than your average person, I will often be stopped and searched, which can be quite invasive and unnerving. Whilst racial profiling isn't always the cause of searches, you have to be aware of it and take the attitude that, irrespective of the reasons for the search, someone, somewhere is being safety conscious.

Whilst abroad, it can be difficult if you're a confident and outspoken person to keep your emotions in check when instances of racism occur, especially if you have had alcohol. In my experience, you can challenge without confrontation; but at the end of the day, this is not your problem, it is theirs and the best thing to do is to remain calm and accept that whilst it shouldn't happen, sometimes the best course of action is to remove yourself from the situation.

Racism or unwelcome attitudes toward race shouldn't stop you travelling or enjoying your time abroad and I would say the vast majority of my travel has gone perfectly fine with no incidents. But not all places are the same, and cities and regions can vary within the country itself, so going forewarned is going forearmed.

I studied abroad in the U.S.A and studying abroad is the greatest thing I have ever done. Without study abroad, I would not be in the career I am now and I would not have met my wife. So don't let anything stop you, whether you're Black, White, Asian, green or purple, nothing should stop you from having a fantastic experience!"

