

CIEE Prague Case Study

“We warn and advise, but they are adults”

CIEE Prague stresses the importance of:

- making sure the person is who they say they are (do they have other online presences that confirm their identity?)
- Letting people know where they are going and when they will be back when going on dates
- Informing local coordinators
- General responsibilities regarding dating safety

However, they do not feel they can or should go any further because the students are not minors.

A tale of caution:

CIEE Prague uses the following story about the first time they saw the impact of dating apps on student experience to have students discuss dating safety:

On November 7, Student Z’s friend informed the GAD Program Coordinator that she is very concerned because Student Z is planning to travel to Venice, Italy to spend the weekend with a man she met on a dating app. They planned to stay in the man’s home in the countryside outside of Venice (known to have limited WiFi access). The Program Coordinator schedules a meeting with the student, in which she explains all the risks of the trip; however, Barbara is determined to go. She feels she knows the man well enough because they had a Skype conversation.

While the Program Coordinator could not dissuade her from going, she was able to persuade her to:

- *Share her travel itinerary with the Program Coordinator and Keliyah*
- *Keep in touch with both of them during the weekend*
- *Book a hotel in town instead of staying at the man’s home*

On November 12, the student informed the Program Coordinator that she arrived back to Prague safely.

Interview with Student

Benefits

I hadn't really thought about [using a dating app abroad] before going on my program. I lived with three girls in Prague (CIEE Fall 2016). They liked meeting locals and going on casual dates to learn about the local culture, so I was persuaded to try it myself. In Barcelona (CIEE Spring 2017), my program was pretty small, and because we spent so much time together, everyone needed to step away every once and awhile. We used dating apps for escapism, and everyone was excited to hear stories about each other's dates. In both places, I found other study abroad students, other internationals, as well as locals. It wasn't a priority, but it was interesting and exciting. I felt like a local! I learned about non-touristy things like where to find a great park, restaurant, or bar... ideas for things to do and places to go. Most people used them the same way, though one of my roommates met a long-term partner (another study abroad student). They are still dating!

I felt like a local!

Safety

It was more of an experiment and less something serious at first, so I wasn't really worried about too much. I took basic precautions, and I only went further with people who spoke English. I quickly realized I needed to avoid some colloquialisms and slang, and that was reciprocated by others, too, so we always intentionally spoke more plainly and straightforward. [Other study abroad students and I] were being very safe about it—getting [dates'] numbers and finding them on Facebook before the date. [Dating apps] doesn't need to be covered in orientation since personal safety and general dating safety is sufficient—as long as you don't scare students, though! My orientations in both cities covered specific cultural differences in dating. It was an interesting opportunity, created connections, and I had awesome experiences. If you are already pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone and trying new things, you should experience it.

We were being very safe

A tale of two experiences:

I went to Vienna for a school trip which is a four-hour bus ride from Prague. After so much travelling and schoolwork, we were tired and bored so my friend and I went on Tinder. That's where I met Konstantine. We started talking, and he was super nice. We didn't have a chance to meet while I was in Vienna, but we continued to talk regularly. Two weeks later, I was supposed to go on a trip to London, but I wasn't feeling it. I hadn't booked a flight or place to stay, and I half-jokingly offered that he come to Prague instead. He accepted! I booked an AirBnB for the weekend, and we had a great time together. After he left we continued talking, and when my program ended I went to stay at his place in Vienna before flying home for Christmas. I got to experience Vienna with him authentically. We went to the Christmas markets, I watched him play in brass quartet—very much couple things. We are still in contact and still sweethearts. Next month I will be headed to Amsterdam, and my Austrian lover and I have plans to meet up there.

We are still sweethearts

In Barcelona, I had plans to go to Carnival in a nearby beach town [with someone I met on Tinder]. On the way, I lost my phone but knew where to meet with him. I missed a stop because I didn't have my phone directions to remind me, so I showed up 10 minutes late. Even though I apologized, he gave me a hard time and would not stop "joking" about how Americans expect the world to wait for them. He also asked to speak in Spanish because he felt his English was not good, but then he had the nerve to make fun of my Spanish! I thought to myself *why am I even here?* I made an excuse and left early. No matter where you are, there are still bad dates out there.

Why am I even here?

Student recommendations for study abroad staff from their home institution, program provider, host institution, and/or site staff on how they can better prepare/inform students about dating apps while studying away

I don't really know anything about dating apps since I have never used one, and people don't often discuss them

I felt that the program provider/host institution did a more than adequate job of preparing/informing students about being safe while going out at night, especially with strangers.

I would say to just bring up the potential "dangers" or blind-spots - not knowing the language, being familiar with the area, being familiar with the dating and hook-up culture of the place you are in, emergency actions (calling 911 equivalent), etc. People will use them no matter what if that is what they want to do. And I do not think you should ban them or say there will be punishments if they are caught using them. We are adults as students and can make our own decisions, but it would be good to just remind students of the potential dangers.

I think it would be nice if they acknowledged the prevalence of dating apps abroad, or even went so far as to recommend safer ones like Bumble (where women make the first move). Some material about safe dating and information safety in dating apps would probably be useful as well so students aren't putting too much identifying info in their short dating app bios.

Bring them up more

I don't care. College students are not kids anymore so I think it's better to leave as their responsibility.

I would say that if the study abroad student is looking to meet new people, in a friend way or relationship way that they should not be afraid of using the app.

For my host institution, include more information about dating apps and social media safety.

I think kids can figure it out themselves.

I don't see dating apps as any different when studying abroad. It should be mentioned in orientations but students should be told to use common sense, similar to going out to a bar or club and being safe at all times of the day.

I guess I would acknowledge that for women especially, it is hard. And to acknowledge the differences of experiences between men and women during study abroad with this issue. That men in many ways had a lot more opportunities to take risks and meet strangers without much fear and I don't know any women on my program who felt that same way. So some kind of acknowledgment of that frustration that we felt that men were able to have different experiences than us.

Talk to students about it

I think an obvious safety warning is good. Short-term trip - not especially relevant to my trip. I think students might use them and there likely isn't a way for institutions to regulate - potentially some benefit to talking about the implications of using them.

Let people use them. Have students using them check in via text periodically while they are away from the group. Don't outright ban dating apps, because students will still use them, only now they will hide where they are and it will be much less safe for them. Just emphasis the safety side of it. Meet new people in daytime, in public, not alone, etc. Remind of sexual safety, stds, etc.

Make people super aware of catfishing

I think everyone who I knew (including myself) who used dating apps while abroad knew what they were doing and what to expect. I did not feel any safety concerns as I always met up with people in public areas, and I did discuss people I met with my friends abroad. I think people knew what they were getting themselves into as many of the safety concerns are the same at home.

I have heard that dating apps are very prevalent abroad and increasing in popularity. It is important to warn students that people like to take advantage of Americans just because we are American, so dating apps may not be the smartest idea. Hang out in group settings. The local universities should talk about cultural practices around dating.

No, it really doesn't need to be talked about in an official way

Mention it, talk about it

Talk about them

Don't make it an uncomfortable topic. Dating apps can be used for more than just hook-ups. Make sure to recognize that.

I think mentioning it could be beneficial but don't "ban" them. It would be good to encourage safe use and not completely discourage them.

Not really. They're pretty straightforward. Don't do anything you wouldn't do in the States.

No, students understand the risk they assume when using dating apps

I would definitely emphasize it in the safety training either beforehand in a manual and/or orientation. It depends on the country what to talk about but always identify the risks and make sure they know what's out there.

I think it something that should be addressed because there were definitely a large group of students whom were using dating apps