

MY ERASMUS EXPERIENCE

February 7th. Some cloud and a beautiful coastline, and the many solar panels that lined the runway as I touched down at Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport in my British Airways flight from Hamburg via London Heathrow. There was absolutely no hassle getting through immigration on arrival, all I did was show my passport and within 30 minutes I was standing outside with my suitcases in the fading light of a cool Mediterranean sunset and the sound of traffic.

I will not venture as far as recommending a means of travel but based on personal experience I believe that the best way to get from Oldenburg to Athens based on comfort, convenience and quality service is via Hamburg with British Airways or Aegean Airlines. British Airways though will include a change at London Heathrow. Aegean is a direct flight. For those interested in the finer details of flying, BA is part of One World while Aegean is part of Star Alliance. Note that some Aegean flights are operated by Lufthansa and are usually more expensive.

Cool mornings, warm afternoons and cold nights, gradually getting warmer and warmer as spring turns into summer. Getting lost on the train. Meeting warm, friendly, beautiful and kind hearted people. Jogging all the way to the Piraeus port to skinny dip into the cold Mediterranean. Walking to and from classes on the tree-lined streets always on the lookout for some vehicle-yes the drivers there are crazy! Eating Greek pastry at the University Cafeteria accompanied by cappuccino freddo, espresso freddo or greek coffee (boiled not drawn). Evenings spent sitting in the balcony of my apartment overlooking the city, finishing a report or studying for a three hour exam.

Those will always be my memories of Athens.

Coffee, Greek style:

http://www.illy.com/wps/wcm/connect/it/community/ricette/cappuccino_greco

I booked my apartment a few months before leaving because I heard the rumors, which eventually turned out not to be so true, of how difficult it was to find accommodation in Athens. The truth is a few weeks before leaving Germany ESN Athens sent me an email with a list of more than a dozen houses to choose from, which for a start made quite a good impression. I already had a place so I kindly refused. The reality is that there are many places to live in Athens. It is a good idea to plan ahead and to make anticipated arrangements, also having a contact in Athens does help quite a bit, however the difficulty of finding accommodation is exaggerated.

I got my first experience of Athens Sunday evening traffic on my way to my place.

TIP: A Taxi costs approximately 35 EUR to the Center of Athens [Zografou, Sintagma, Ilisia], the train from the Airport costs 10 EUR and the bus denoted by an X, so depends on where you're heading X95, or X97, costs 6 EUR.

A 50% discount is given to students but only if you have a Greek Student ID which means that you can get a discount except when just arriving or leaving Greece, there you pay full fare.

*references are just a guide and based on personal experience between the dates February-June 2016. Prices and routes may be updated and it is the reader's responsibility to confirm before travel.

**Industrial action in Greece sometimes cripples the metro line however I have noticed that the X95 is the most reliable. Always works and is always on time.

I arrived at my apartment and it was even better than expected. The Greeks do know how to treat their guest. The landlady was waiting in the apartment when I arrived and she even came with some typical Greek pastry, Greek salad and a bottle of Raki. It was awesome. She then gave me a tour of the apartment, her contact details and her schedule in the event that I needed anything.

Erasmus Athens had a list of activities planned, for the first week as part of a welcome package, and subsequently every week during the semester. For the most part the activities were well planned and coordinated, with the occasional exception. The Greeks were quite open, very friendly and also very persistent, once even sending a car over because the house party they had planned was really far away. The locals did their best to make us as a group fit in. The idea is simple: get drunk, meet people. In the end it depends on the focus of each person, their discipline and what their main objectives are to decide what they want to do on any particular occasion. In my group, the outings became less once the semester started in full, however it was nice to know that whenever a break was needed there was an activity available in which we could participate. It was not only partying though, there was karaoke, field trips to archeological sites, visits to islands and also the ESN Athens for Refugees Program.

TIP: Be careful with Greek rose wine

One of the fun things about Erasmus gatherings is the wide scope of nationalities present. It's just incredible having people from the UK, Syria, Turkey, Israel, Iran etc, just hanging out together. Most of the people were quite nice although a few from the Baltic and Balkans (Estonia and Czech Republic specifically) had quite disgusting attitudes. In the greater scheme of things the philosophy is that eventually one would meet people like that everywhere and it is definitely not a true representation of a complete nationality, still it contradicts a bit the selling point of Erasmus as a large multicultural family.

Just to mention the not so interesting but likewise necessary aspects of the Erasmus+ travel, there is quite a lot of paperwork to be done before and after the course. However I have found both the staff in Oldenburg and Athens quite friendly, very open and flexible; qualities which make the necessary documentation very easy to realize. All documents to be read and filled in were made available and whether via email or in person someone was always available to help. Most issues, and there were only few, were solved within a few days.

Regarding Studies, I can only comment on NTUA.

My experience was awesome! The staff at NTUA is more than just a group of teachers at a University, they are a Family. They look after you; they are interested in hearing of your needs, your problems, and your concerns. They are willing to help.

The courses are top notch, well planned, well presented and all by experts in their various fields.

I can only speak positively of the experience.

In conclusion I fully endorse the Erasmus+ program experience.

Success in the end depends on the individual but everything needed for academic and social excellence is made available. If given the opportunity to repeat the experience I would definitely do so, it is worth every minute.