

## Why Greece?

It might sound quite pathetically, but since childhood I had a huge interest to ancient Greek culture and have been studying Mythological books from A to Z. The best way to learn country and people was to live there for a while, though opportunity never came.

When I realized that Ethnological faculty in the Freie Universität Berlin has a partner-university in Greece decision was 50% made. After checking courses and discussing their compatibility with Erasmus coordinator of our faculty I came to final conclusion: to start the Odyssey to Lesbos!



## Application

Application was not as hard as I have imagined. All that you have to do is to follow precisely described steps. Support from my department and good communication with Erasmus coordinator on Lesbos facilitated this process. Here is important to communicate every step and sometimes to ask twice. So once an e-mail with my documents went lost and both me and coordinator had been waiting for each other's answer.

Also the web-site of the University of the Aegean had delays and inaccuracies sometimes so I had to change courses I have chosen from there, because they were not held in the particular semester. By coming the problem had been easily solved with help of departmental coordinator of my faculty, while she translated all the courses from Greek into English. Both semesters I had to do changes in the Learning Agreement and it went without any difficulties.

## Planning and arrival

From the university we have got description of the island, including how to get there. I decided to travel in a light way and flight with Ryanair. I had to do 2 flights: Berlin-Milano-Thessaloniki. Total price was around 60 Eu. After I arrived to Thessaloniki I realized that the only one ferry company which went to Lesbos from there went bankrupt. There were 2 opportunities: to go to Kavala or to Athens. The choice fell on a night-train to Athens and a day of intensive sightseeing in this soaked with history city. From Athens I took a ferry to Lesbos. They leave almost every evening, also in low season and cost 40 Eu (50% only for Greek students).

Also there is a possibility to fly to Mytilene airport from Athens and Thessaloniki, prices can vary from 30 to 80 and up.

## Accommodation



Winter on the Island.

Generally I did not plan accommodation and relied myself on Couchsurfing, which worked out very well. In Athens and also on Lesbos. Consequently we have been hosting people through Couchsurfing, including other Erasmus students from different countries.

Erasmus office did not offer any help with finding accommodation and by the time we arrived there was no student-organization on the island which could help us. (Now there is an ESN section) Finally with help of our friends we were lucky to get a house with 4 rooms for a very good price of 250 Eu. Generally people pay between 150 and 200 for a single room and ca. 300 for a shared flat. It was an intense experience to live with 4 other people (2 share one room) from different cultures and with different way of seeing live and household.

A complicated point was sharing of bills in the spring semester as in Greece not all the bills come punctually at the end of the month. There is a bill which comes every 4 month, which includes also taxes and city-services. Some people with whom I lived did not know that we have to pay for water and electricity, in some countries they did not have to pay indeed. So it was important also to talk about economic use of resources in the house.

In winter it got quite cold and windy so it makes sense to take some warm cloth and a good sleeping bag, or a room with a heater.

2 Erasmus girls have booked their room before coming through some internet page and the price was much bigger than it should. Also when they have decided to change the room to a cheaper one the housemaster wanted to keep money. Though, after university lawyer got involved the master gave up his demands. It's better to look for accommodation through approved channels (university, friends, ex-Erasmus, or other local students).

## Studying

There was no Greek course offered before the mobility start and a teacher for it was found in the middle of the first semester only, what I find very pity. Nobody knew Greek before coming to Lesbos so we all had to accomplish subjects through self-organized studying. I wrote emails to all the professors first (upon arrival) and asked if they would accept this kind of work and when could we meet to discuss it. A very positive experience was a work on self-organized field researches which was supported by professors from anthropological department. Local university library had diverse offer on literature in English for every subject. So Erasmus year gave me the opportunity to deepen knowledge in topics I was interested in and also more security in planning, self-organization and field work.

## Culture and everyday life

Greek lifestyle and timetable generally are very different to North-European. Greeks have more relaxed perception of time, which does not mean they are lazy. Its just different. Except from Athens and Thessaloniki population of Greece lives in small cities with calm, often rural lifestyle.

I stayed in Greece also during events connected with European measures, referendum and “Grexit” discussion. Being in Greece at this period gave me a chance to view these events from insider point of view and to create more precise picture of Greece and European Union in general.

Tradition has big importance in society. Greek hospitality is not only what tourists experience in hotels but the everyday reality. Greeks also cook a lot at home, and by “a lot” is meant A LOT! Traditional Greek meal is a mountain of food, never ending until everybody cant eat anymore. University cantine offered nice food, sometimes Greek, sometimes more international. In comparison to other Erasmus I had a smaller scholarship so I applied by Erasmus coordinator for free food in the cantine and got it (as many Greek students do).

I was positively surprised by a number of student-initiatives being organized in Mytilene. We have visited tango lessons organized by students who learn it at professional school, I was involved in Cretan dances group and group of traditional Greek dances. The most colorful experience was participation in student theater group, where I have learned a lot of people and even had an opportunity to create and show in the theater self-written act. University offered some sport-activities as free gym and football. Also a unique opportunity was swimming in the see whenever you want, even between classes.

I cooperated with students from other faculties in creative activities, connected with projects they had to do for the university. So appeared a commercial for Erasmus in Mytilene (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBrP0ka9Ikc>) and a music-clip (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rnot-CDbBR4>) also filmed in this city. They will give you approximate feeling about the live on the island. There is also an opportunity to make a diving course or to dive with a student group to explore marine diversity of the Island.

### Travelling

An inevitable part of Erasmus is traveling. Lesvos is perfect for 1 day trips as it is just around 150 km in diameter. Also multiple beaches are good for camping and there are enough hills and small mountains for hiking.

Turkey is easy to reach by the ferry, and from there its possible to go south or up to Istanbul with a bus or a plane. Also students in Greece have 50% discount for ferries and public transportation what makes it cheap to travel inside of Greece.

### Conclusion

My year at the University of the Aegean was rich on experience and unforgettable memories. From one side I regret not to be able to follow official courses due to lack of language skills. From the other side I enjoyed unique opportunity to organize field researches in unknown environment and relative independence in research and studies. All around the university was inspiring and new, and helped to improve myself and open new horizons. I can suggest an Erasmus at the University of the Aegean for everybody who seek for more freedom and independence in studies and also in everyday life, who looks for adventures and exotic in surrounding environment and also just would like to enjoy beautiful nature, tasty and healthy food, and amazing open and friendly people.

