

Student Experience Report

Erasmus + Student Greece 2022

I received the Erasmus+ Scholarship to Study in Greece in the Spring Semester of the year 2022. My host university is the National Technical University of Athens, while the sending institution is the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany.

Although the duration of the semester was not very long, and I wish I was able to extend my stay, I would certainly say my overall experience in Athens is eminently positive.

The aim of the Erasmus+ program is to bring students from different cultures closer and to strengthen a sense of belonging to the European community. In that aspect, I would say that when you live in a different country for several months, you always take some of their culture with you at your departure.

Since I come from a Mediterranean country (Spain) I had the prejudice that living in Greece wouldn't differ much from doing so in my own country. To my surprise, it was not the case. Greeks, like every country, have their own peculiarities and I enjoyed quite a lot discovering them.

Although my Master wouldn't exactly fit in the stereotypical Greek lectures, I would say I enjoyed experiencing a closer teaching methodology with the Greek professors.

On one hand I am very happy that we were so few in class and that we all were foreigners. This allowed for a personalized teaching in English. The lectures were very dynamic, and we could interrupt the teachers at any time we wanted to ask questions or solve doubts.

This is specially comforting since it was not the case for other Erasmus students. Of course, it depended on the university, courses and teacher, but oftentimes I found Erasmus students that were not required to attend lectures. The reason behind this is that many lectures were conducted in Greek, and so the lecturers decided to propose a project with the deadline matching the end of the Erasmus stay. In reality, this meant that students didn't participate at all in Greek student life and just completed the project in the last weeks. This is an experience some Erasmus friends had, not my case, but it certainly makes me be grateful for having the opportunity or obligation of attending lectures.

I am certainly satisfied with the contents of the courses, they were very well chosen, although the organizations of the modules could be made better for clarity purposes.

It is true this is not entirely the coordinators' fault because there were simply too many lecturers and topics to organize everything according to the contents.

As in all universities I have studied there were better and worse teachers. Conveying the contents of a very specific topic is not always easy, and some lecturers applied more adequate methodologies or simply had a more suited personality/speaking skills to do so. Nevertheless, I can not complain about the overall knowledge of the matter that the teachers had.

I would say attending a different university, as happens when starting a new job, is a very enriching experience, because it allows you to observe new ways of doing things. In this

semester I attended a fairly small class, with just eight students. It was the first time I was receiving lectures in a class with such few students, if we exclude language classes. I would say the main advantage to it is the closeness with the teachers. Being so few, interrupting the class to ask questions is a possibility. In bigger lecture halls with more than fifty students, just asking a suitable question can even look like you are plainly being disruptive. In that sense, we were able to establish a close teacher-student relationship even with lecturers that just came for a couple of days.

One aspect of Greek universities that is worth mentioning, or at least to see if it is convenient to export this practice to other European countries, was the possibility to have lunch for free at the university canteens. Given the rampaging inflation and Greek surprisingly expensive supermarkets, this easily meant we were able to spare 300 € in three months.

Finally, I must mention the great job that the different ESN (Erasmus Student Network) did. Athens is one of the cities with more Erasmus students in Europe, and so there is not only one ESN but around nine, one for each university. NTUA ESN was quite active organizing events for students, but it was far from being the only one doing so. Fortunately, other ESN associations were very open into accepting students from different universities into their activities.

The activities ranged from student introductions, leisure meeting such as city tours or cultural visits to museums to bar meetings or several-days-long trips to Greece's fascinating locations.

I can't stress enough how much of a key role the ESN played in making the Erasmus stay better. I would say they facilitate the accomplishment of the Erasmus objectives: getting to know more of other European cultures. Yes, without the ESNs there would still be many Erasmus around the city or hundreds of thousands of local Greek students, but the networking done by these volunteers simply made the process of meeting them much easier.

It is true that not all Erasmus destinations can afford to have a ESN due to low number of Erasmus or volunteers. Nevertheless, in those cities that could do so and still don't have any ESN, like Bremen, I would seriously recommend to the universities authorities to do the effort to establish such organization. On top of their role counseling recently arrived students, they are a non-profit NGO and self-sustained economically through the membership fee (10 €).

I would certainly say some of my best experiences in Athens were only possible thanks to the ESNs, such as trips to the Peloponnese (Monemvasia, Napflio, Githeio), Meteora, islands or Thessaloniki. I met many of the friends that I made besides those in ESN-organized events.

I would like to give some final advise to students who are considering an Erasmus stay abroad. Make sure you know to what country are going. It is very important to know what to expect regarding weather, people, university quality and life costs. I would say the destination country might be the most decisive factor and certainly determines how you will life for the next few months. So, given the choice between several destinations, it is quite important not only to look at the university prestige, the adequateness of subjects or the amount of money of the Erasmus grant (it varies from country to country), but the country characteristics as well.

Overall, I think this Erasmus+ experience has given me much more than what can be quantified with the European Commission money grant, and I am certain other Erasmus students that went to other destinations will feel the same.

Athens is a vibrant and chaotic city that will certainly trap you with its food, its laid-back approach to life and its people, and I will certainly come back.