

## Preparation:

The organizational part of my Erasmus started in January of the year I left for Athens. I wanted to spend my Erasmus in the south because of the culture and the good weather in winter. At first, it seemed exhausting to write emails to all the professors for their agreements of points for the Greek modules. All this only to arrive in Athens and find out that you can't do the modules as planned. So I would not stress too much about the learning agreement at the beginning. You will change it anyway. There are cheap flights to Athens, which I took. But next time I would take the green route. You can send your luggage by plane and travel by train. Take a train or Flixbus to Italy, then a ferry to Greece and a train to Athens. It will take you two days and probably cost the same as a flight. But it's a great experience and you'll meet lots of people, especially if you're travelling alone.

Athens has a lot of separate universities, I went to NTUA which is near Zografou and not in the centre as I thought when I booked my flat. Greek organizations are much slower than you think. So just call them if you need something really urgent. Most are very friendly and almost all speak English. As I only received the acceptance letter a few weeks before I arrived in Athens and I wanted to wait for the final agreement that I could take Erasmus in Athens before renting a flat, I was quite late in renting a room. I wanted to live in a shared flat because I had never lived in one before. So I took what I found on 'housinganywhere.com', one of many websites for renting rooms in Athens. Watch out for scam ads. Do not send money to people without a contract! I have heard a lot of horror stories about scam flat owners. I was lucky with my landlord: Theo. He was very kind and immediately sent me a description of the easiest way to find my flat from the airport.

## My flat in Athens:

I lived near Victoria Station and Kypseli in a shared flat (Aristotelous 152). I really liked my room, it was nicely decorated, with a big bed and a chandelier. It was in the middle of a huge common room, a shared balcony and the kitchen. Me and my four flatmates, loved to have friends over or to cook in our flat. It was nice because you could always meet lots of people. It was annoying when you were sick, had to study or just had no social life. In Athens a lot of flat owners organize cleaning services, so our flat was cleaned and we got new sheets and towels from time to time. We never knew when the cleaner would come, but we always looked forward to it.

The area around Victoria Station, especially in the north-west where I lived, is supposed to be a dangerous area that Greeks warn you about. I never felt unsafe. In big cities I would always advise against walking anywhere alone at night, but I have done it many times and nothing bad has happened to me.



Figure 1: View from our rooftop

Although my flat was about an hour's bus ride from my university, I would choose this area again. As we didn't go to campus very often and I never had a tight schedule in Athens, it's fine to take the bus once or twice a week. It was more important to me to live close to a lot of people I know and it took me 10-15 minutes to get to the city centre which is awesome.

### Studies at NTUA:

The campus looks more like an 80s skate park, with posters and graffiti everywhere, but it has its charm. The Greek students say it's anarchy there. The police aren't allowed on campus and generally it's a place full of history and political struggle.

There is a library with lots of places to work and a few tables to play chess. You can always go there if you have time between classes or if you don't want to study at home. I also studied a lot in cafes near my flat, where I worked a lot with friends. In Kypseli and Exarchia there are many cafés with internet access and good Wi-Fi.

There is a canteen on the NTUA campus that is open almost all day. You can eat there for free even without a student card. That was very nice. They serve a lot of meat but also vegetarian meals. After trying the meals, you find out what you can and cannot eat. But they always serve salad and fruit. I think it's a good way to experience Greek culture.

I mainly went to the campus for the Greek course. I didn't have to take the course, but I wanted to know some Greek before I came back to Germany. It was quite demanding and took up some time in the week, but it was worth it. After a few sessions you could read the street signs and after five months you could ask for directions in the street. Greek people are very open to you practicing your new vocabulary.

From Erasmus NTUA you can apply for the buddy program. I can really recommend meeting a buddy. Mine was very helpful and we became good friends over time. He gave me a good insight into Greek culture and helped me with my module at NTUA.

All the classes I could choose were in Greek. After the first few classes where I didn't understand anything, I talked to the professors and told them that it didn't make sense for me to attend the classes. They gave me English material to study on my own and take the exam at the end. It wasn't ideal, but it worked for me.

Since the NTUA was busy with student demonstrations during our exam period, I had homework and oral exams instead. It was more hassle and uncertainty than it sounds here, but it's always fine there. That's what they tell you. Turns out they are right.

### Daily life and free time:

In the beginning, we filled our free time with meeting people at Erasmus events and sightseeing. We went to the beach a lot and explored the street markets to buy fruit and vegetables. That is something I can recommend, buying food at the street markets. It's much cheaper than in the supermarkets. Most of the vendors speak English and they are all friendly. It can be overwhelming and noisy at first, but it's worth a try and you get used to it after a few times.

Athens is surrounded by Hills where you can go for a hike. Piraeus is a nice little city at the sea with a beautiful harbor (not the one with the ferries). It takes 30 minutes to go to Piraeus by metro. From there you can take a ferry or go for a swim on a beach. There are better beaches if you go more to the south.

It is very cheap to take a ferry to some of the islands around Athens. I have been to some islands with friends at weekends. Each island has a specialty, very blue water, nice beaches, historical sites, no cars, just donkeys or pistachio trees everywhere.

In the beginning, Erasmus trips and parties are the best way to meet a lot of people. After a while we explored more parties where Greek people would go. It was great to go with the flow of the night and end up in a Greek flat where young people were rapping in Greek. Greek people are very welcoming and warm.

**Summary, best and worst experience:**

The best thing about Athens is the people. Everyone is so warm and welcoming. The worst is the noise. It's so loud, especially if you don't have a quiet place to go. Life in Greece felt less fast, with more time to make really good friends, travel with friends or alone and to have a great time.