
ERASMUS IN THESSALONIKI

I'm Kaan, lawyer from Istanbul and I am glad I did my Erasmus in Thessaloniki. Our LLM master program offers abroad education during the second semester of studies. You can choose several partner universities all around the world. My first choice was Zaragoza, Spain. I knew Spanish, so I thought why not. However, I changed my mind in the last moments due to fact that my all Greek acquaintances highly recommended me to go to Thessaloniki and I would had a great time there. I realized that I would go to Spain alone, without any other students from the program. This was going to be my second Erasmus and the last one was again in Spain. I was up for a change. Plus, I can travel between Istanbul and Thessaloniki by bus and it is rather convenient.

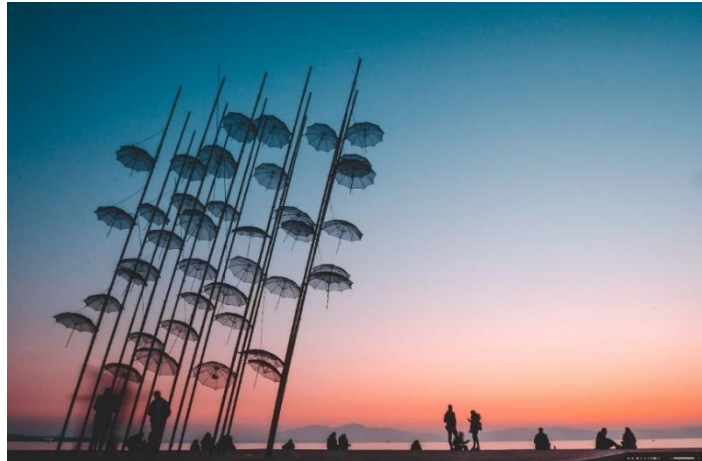


Therefore, I kindly asked to our master coordinator, Ioannis Revolidis, if it is possible to change it to Thessaloniki. He didn't reject and asked to Aristotle University if an extra student can come. Fortunately, they accepted. I am still very grateful to Mr. Revolidis about this.

The planning and gathering the necessary documents were rather easy. I needed to get a visa for Greece as I am non-European student, but I have a German student residency. I didn't have to get a residency from Greece when I arrived there which is obligatory for non-European students. In the middle of January 2018, I went to Stuttgart Greek Consulate and got my visa in 6 hours which usually takes 2 weeks in Turkey. I flied to Thessaloniki from Frankfurt in the end of January. It is true that it was early to start my Erasmus period, but I didn't want to stay in Istanbul when I had time to travel and see new places. Plus living in Germany is at least two times more expensive than Greece.

Thessaloniki is a student city. You can't imagine how many exchange students arrive to the university every semester. After the cold winter days of Germany, Thessaloniki was sunny and had spring-like weather. The first thing to do was to find an accommodation. In my first Erasmus I didn't bother to check student apartments and went straight to a student residency and honestly it resulted way more expensive than I expected. So, with this experience, I rented an Airbnb for 5 nights relatively close to the city center and started to check for agencies. My idea was to find a studio apartment. Unfortunately, every agency expected at least one year of residency. I found an Erasmus apartment from the links that was given on internet. The place was not luxurious yet comfortable enough for 5 months. It cost monthly 250 all included. I also checked if it was a party-friendly place. Another essential point.

The second thing to do was to check-in to the Erasmus office of Aristotle University. Before I arrived, they sent me an e-mail containing all relevant information regarding Erasmus studies. This “info pack” was essential to understand how the Erasmus process and the university work. For example, you need to get an online application for the Erasmus office otherwise they don’t accept you. They deal with hundreds of students. Everything is needed to be super-planned. From there I got my Erasmus card, which temporary until you get you University card. Also, Aristotle University Canteen is free. Yes, it is free. You can eat there three meals every day of the week. When I saw this, I was so happy because I chose my apartment close to the university and I could save lots of money. The food is not bad and sometimes it is surprisingly delicious.



I got my Greek mobile number as soon as I arrived. Because I needed to talk with the agencies. Vodafone GR (not promoting) is the best option for Thessaloniki. When I was registering to the university to get my Aristotle University card, they ask you an Greek number as far as I remember. I didn’t ask to other students if they could give their German or French number etc. The university sent me an SMS that contained some information to log in to the online portal of the university to finish the registration and get the card. The card was picked up from a Vodafone store of your choice. Also, they gave me an Greek number free of charge. It was weird because now I had two Greek numbers. It was free, so I didn’t bother to ask it.

Aristotle University Law Faculty has special English and German classes for Erasmus students due to their significant amount of numbers. Students from our master program only needed to take three classes. When the semester started, I went to 5 different classes for two weeks before I decide which ones I will take. I tried to schedule the lectures into two days and free up Thursday morning. I took “Legal Aspects of Cybercrime”, “Investment Law”, and “Sociology of Law”. If I knew German, I could take more related courses to our master program, but I learned so much from these classes, so I am quite satisfied. The professors were competent and gave us enough time to discuss the topics. They spoke English very well and the lectures had a good pace that were quite reasonable to follow.

The University is quite old, but it doesn’t mean that the education is bad. In the academic perspective, the law faculty offers a good quality of education. Professors, the library and many other aspects are highly qualified. Never judge a book by its cover. Finding the offices and classrooms can be challenging in the first days but I got used to it after a time. The city is alive 24/7. Lots of cafes and different type of cafes depending on the budget. Without forgetting every souvlaki and gyros places in every corner of the city. I must mention that the city is not that clean in some neighborhoods and we also had some water shortages resulting some discomfort, yet these are minor disadvantages in comparison to its advantages. Everywhere is walking distance and the weather is usually alright for few minute walking. The

history of the city and historical monuments are quite interesting. Most common Erasmus students' hangout places are White Tower, Rotunda, Ladadika and the port.

ESN THESSALONIKI

One of the most essential thing to consider for off-campus/leisure time is the Erasmus social network (ESN) of Thessaloniki. As the Erasmus office deals with lots of students, they handle the various types of events for the students. The system is similar in every city as well as in my previous Erasmus; so, I knew how they were operating. Erasmus officially started with welcome weeks. Two weeks and everyday there were events which I could check it from their Facebook page. The aim was to make people socialize and know each other. The events can be organized inside the city or they can be small trips to the nearby cities. Also, the events are not limited to the welcome weeks. Many of them are announced throughout the semester. Usually you must pay a small fee, but it is adjusted fairly considering the students. For example, we had few taverna nights organized by ESN and they were quite fun with some traditional Greek music.



ESN Thessaloniki has two main places for events; 8ball Club and To Podilato Bar. In 8ball, usually every Wednesday there was an Erasmus party (This was the reason why I freed up Thursday morning). Nice place to enjoy the nightlife. To Podilato was a regular bar that had special offers for Erasmus students. Some events were also held there.

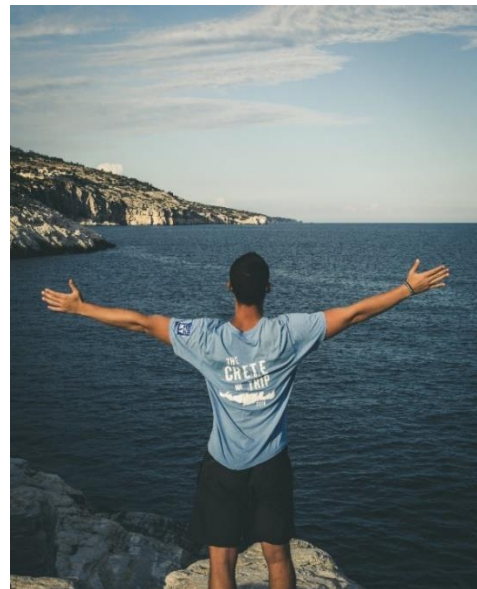
The main event of the semester was the Crete Trip. This huge event welcomes every Erasmus student in Greece. It means around 800 students. This trip has been organized for 8 years and even some people participated more than one time since it is 4 days of entertainment. Indeed, it is huge and surprisingly it is organized by Greek student volunteers. It was in the middle of May and amazing experience for myself as well. Going to this big island takes a lot of time. I chose going with bus + ferry. Ferry takes 9 hours from Athens. However, we didn't sleep much during the ferry and make the most of the time there. The trip included historical places as well as beaches and partying. I would say this trip was the most iconic moment of my Erasmus semester.

Moreover, ESN organized few trips to Khalkidhiki as well, where you can enjoy the paradise-like beaches and nature. It only takes around one hour from Thessaloniki city center and even the university has a camp in the first leg of Khalkidhiki. I went to this camp few times and I wish my bachelor university had this kind of a camp that students can relax after the final weeks and enjoy the beautiful beach. During the semester I went to several cities in Greece with or without ESN. Greece not only contains great beaches or islands, it also offers many locations such as thermal baths, forests and mountains to hike. I tried to take advantage of such places.



CONCLUSION

I must say that Erasmus in Greece was special for me since Turks and Greeks are very similar and have similar traditions due to fact that we were living together for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, both governments are trying to maintain a hostile environment and show each other as old enemies. It is quite sad and disappointing because we must be brothers and look out for each other. I have Greek friends now and we get along very well. I can easily say that Greeks can have better relationship with Turks rather than Europeans. We understand our problems and cultural similarities bind us even though some of us deny it. Honestly, when I was in Hannover, it always gave me the feeling that I was living among different people that had different perspective of life. On the other hand, as soon as I came to Thessaloniki, everything felt like home. Faces, weather, traffic and many other aspects were so similar. That's why I formed a special bound to Greece and maybe this type of relationship is hard to be understood by other nationalities.



The best experience that I had was supposed to be the Crete Trip, but I am certain that it was the whole time I had with my amazing friends there. Many taverna nights we had in the Bit Bazaar and conversations and experiences we had together. I won't forget these times and they have a meaning beyond the whole Erasmus semester. The worst experience was probably the accident I had in the last day of the Crete Trip. I received a strong hit to my ear and I had to rest that day and missed hanging out with friends. Many of us had smaller or bigger accidents during the trip so I would say I had to be more precautious.