

IAESTE Athens – Experience report for my internship at the Agricultural University of Athens

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Experience of being abroad

I had the opportunity to spend three months in Athens, which was a great and very enriching experience. I was excited in the beginning as it was the first time for me to be abroad on my own for a longer period and I was not sure what to expect. The process of getting used to a new city, a new culture and language did take some time and was a bit overwhelming at first, but it was even more enriching and worth it. Looking back the three months are packed with so many memories shared with all sorts of great people, both local and international, beautiful places, and lasting impressions.

Experience at work

Working at the food microbiology lab at the AUA was a great experience. I worked on a project examining the spoilage of chicken using different methods to detect the quality of meat (conventional microbiological techniques, spectral imaging technology, fluorescent spectroscopy). The lab was not as well equipped as the labs I was used to in Switzerland, but still they had all the necessary material and most of all, the ambition and motivation was there. The professors and supervisors were always very attentive and helpful in case of questions. It was also lovely to work alongside 6-10 local bachelor and master students, who were all very cheerful and friendly and were more than happy to give insights into Greek language and culture.

Cultural differences/shock

When I first arrived in Athens, I was struck by how lively, busy, and noisy it was. Coming from Switzerland, I had to get used to this at first and paid several visits to the national garden during my first week to escape the noise :). By and by I got used to the liveliness and even enjoyed venturing out into the jungle of roaring motorcycles and speeding cars, trying to not get run over in the process of crossing a road. By the end of my internship, I had become quite good at road-crossing and ignoring traffic lights, although it did take some practice and probably led to some angry drivers.

Athens is a city that never falls asleep. There are many attractions, activities, events, and places to go every day, which make sure you cannot get bored in this city. Some of my personal highlights included visiting various museums and archaeological sites, strolling through local farmer's markets, hiking on the nearby mount Hymettus, walking along the beach, swimming in the sea, watching the sunset on the Areopagus hill, and of course trying an amazing range of foods and drinks in various restaurants, cafes and bars.

Overall, the most valuable experience was meeting people with all sorts of different origins and backgrounds. I learnt a lot about life in Greece just by spending time with my Greek friends in the lab and hearing about their lives. But I was also able to share and exchange experiences about being abroad with Erasmus students, expats and travellers. People in Athens are very friendly. I would have wished to know some Greek, as every now and then I was addressed in Greek. Nevertheless, it is very useful and much appreciated to know some basic words in Greek, such as "Good morning", "thank you", "hello", or "I don't speak Greek"!

During my stay, I was fascinated by Ancient Greek history, which I had known about in bits, but seeing the archaeological remains, brought everything to a very different level. On the other hand, living in Athens and talking to locals also made me understand a bit more about

the current political and economic struggles the country is facing. Every other month we were asked to avoid certain areas of the city due to protests or riots which was a new experience to me.

Overall / IAESTE

Summing up, I had a great time in Athens: working on an interesting research project in a very nice group, discovering the vivid and charming city of Athens, getting to know Greek customs and culture, and meeting all sorts of great people made my stay an incredible experience. Doing this internship with IAESTE was also very helpful, since you have a committee very ready to support you in both the sending and receiving country. First, I was a bit worried when I heard that I was the only IAESTE intern in Athens during that time. But since IAESTE is closely linked to the ESN community, which organise plenty of events and trips, it was very easy to join the community and just as great to get to know people. I would recommend this experience to anyone.

