

# **Field report Erasmus: Thessaloniki, Greece in winter semester**

## **2021/2022**

I am solely responsible for the content of this report.

I spent my semester abroad at Aristotle University City of Thessaloniki in the period from September 16 to February 17. It was an unforgettable time that had a lasting positive impact on my life. Especially in a pandemic, an international exchange is of great value.

### **Planning, organization and application:**

Due to the desire for a change of scenery and the recommendations of fellow students, I took it upon myself to apply for an Erasmus stay in January 2021. After some research and submitting the required documents, I had submitted my application. One could choose three destinations and had to prepare letters of motivation for each and also submit a letter of suitability.

After a few weeks, I received a commitment for my favorite city already in March. However, this commitment was revised a few weeks later. Instead, I was offered another destination (also chosen by me) - Thessaloniki. After some email correspondence with Aristotle University, I applied there on the online portal and waited. This waiting would take on a whole new meaning during the course of my stay. But already in advance, I did not regret it. I then selected some courses of interest to me from the list of the partner university and asked my chairs at RWTH about course credits. I was granted 13 credits at RWTH and thus I planned to take 28 credits at Aristotle University, including Greek courses. Finally, I found out about my health insurance and liability insurance abroad and made travel arrangements. Satisfied with my outcome, I packed a large and a small backpack in early September and headed to Greece for almost half a year.

### **Arrival & Housing:**

After arriving in Thessaloniki, I spent the first week in a hostel to go apartment hunting locally. After two days I had a few viewings and decided on a centrally located apartment near the Rotonda. There I lived with an Erasmus participant from Spain and a Turkish woman living there. The flat-sharing life was quiet and a good balance to the eventful everyday life. The apartment was generally very inexpensive since the rent already included electricity and heating costs. Here you should pay some attention and inform yourself about the average apartment prices. I would also advise this option to all future Erasmus participants, as many fellow students had problems with apartments booked online. In addition, you can also visit the apartment on site and better assess the importance of the location.

To explore the city, you can resort to free walking tours. These offer a lot of interesting information, and you only pay as much as you want in the end. Furthermore, you get tips for restaurants and bars, which really pay off.

### **University:**

Parallel to the search for accommodation, I registered at Aristotle University as an Erasmus student. This was the beginning of a bureaucratic battle between the university, non-officials

and fellow students. Problems like having a Greek phone number or being directed to other offices can be easily solved by bringing a fellow Greek-speaking student. The student card was sometimes only given shortly before the end of the mobility and some supervisors did not contact you for the first time until a few weeks before departure. If you can accept this and not be put off by unanswered emails and phone calls, you will have a much less stressful time. In retrospect, this gave me a serenity that you sometimes miss in everyday life in Germany.

The campus of Aristotle University is very spacious and winding. Due to my course of study (industrial engineering), I attended events at both the business faculty and the engineering faculty. While the business courses were full of Erasmus students, I represented the Erasmus students in the engineering courses almost alone. Accordingly, the economics courses were held in English and consideration was given to the Erasmus students. Unfortunately, this was not so pronounced in the engineering area. Nevertheless, I was able to attend almost all of my chosen courses there and complete them in the end. The lectures were mostly without compulsory attendance with project submissions during the semester. There was an oral exam at the end. Alternatively, in two courses I was able to turn in a term paper instead of attending class. This was not in line with the international exchange, but I was able to travel more independently.

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is very engaged and offers many opportunities to communicate with other Erasmus participants. However, I mainly used this offer only in the first two weeks. After that, I was well networked and had my own friend groups. The university's canteen also deserves special mention, as it provides three meals a day for free. Depending on the Corona location, you can even sit together with hundreds of students in the large dining hall, which was one of my highlights. This also served as a great meeting place, and you could exchange ideas about the day's schedule and discuss evening activities.

### **Language and leisure:**

The Greek language is very different from most European languages, both in terms of the alphabet and pronunciation. Therefore, I can only recommend language courses. They helped me a lot during my time there and made everyday life much easier when shopping or working in restaurants.

During my stay I explored almost all of Greece and spent a lot of time in nature. In the city itself, I took advantage of the bouldering halls and the coastal promenade for jogging. There are also many excursions and activities organized by the ESN, such as the trip to Corfu or a tour of famous bars or restaurants. I used these offers in addition to my own plans. I especially liked the excursions to Meteora, Mount Olympus and the Peloponnes. If you have a week of free time, you can also consider visiting one of the beautiful islands like Samothrace. So far, I have not regretted any excursion.

While most of the fellow students went back for the holidays, a few stayed in Thessaloniki to celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve together. These evenings have remained very much in my memory, since almost everyone came from a different country. Together with a few Greeks, we put together what was probably the most international Christmas of my life. Everyone cooked more or less traditional dishes and told about typical Christmas customs.

**Miscellaneous:**

The city's traffic is somewhat chaotic due to its hillside location. There are large streets parallel to the coast, which are permanently busy with buses. However, uphill one had to walk most of the time. This was not a problem because the distances within the center were within walking distance. Due to the extreme traffic and the laissez-faire attitude of many road users, I cannot recommend a bicycle. Especially since bus tickets for students also cost less than 50 cents per ride.

The weather was mostly sunny and the sky blue. However, temperatures were only between 0° and 10°C, especially in December and January. In combination with a strong coastal wind, this led to some wintry weeks. However, the consistent sun provided a pleasant feeling of well-being during the day.

**Conclusion:**

Despite or especially because of the Corona situation, the stay abroad has been very good for me. The change of scenery and the new international environment have broadened my horizons and advanced my personal development. In addition to all the wonderful experiences and the eventful everyday life, I made a lot of friends. Therefore, I can only recommend an Erasmus semester to everyone and can only confirm the increased European feeling. In my eyes, it was a very meaningful and unforgettable experience.

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Paul Quarz