

Erasmus+ In Greece

1 GETTING IT DONE

For the first time I learned about Erasmus+ at my collage. I knew about regular Erasmus and always thought of it as a great opportunity to meet another culture and people. I lived in a dormitory among Erasmus students, they have thought me a lot. I was willing to try this myself but as a graduate student it would be extra scary to lose contact with my thesis promoter, so I let it go.

And then suddenly, on one of lectures I attended, a lady showed up and told us about Erasmus+ where you can go to some other European country and work. She presented some destinations and among them I heard about Greece; a country I always wanted to visit. I was well aware that a two-week holiday will not show me how it really is and a three-month stay, work and everyday communication with Greeks will give some outlook on how it really is. I decided to apply.

The paper 'work' turned out to be 'labor'. Everywhere I went someone demanded another document and I grew very tired of going from one to the other office every day. In the end I understood it had to be done so I kept collecting them, sending, signing. I had to provide translations, birth certificate... everything! Finally, when I had everything it got to me that it is finally the time when I should book a ticket. It suddenly became so realistic. I used to go around and say: "I will go to Greece" but it was so distant and even though I was preparing for some time I did not really believe I would go. I booked a ticket and my fate was already set. In a few days I am to be in Greece.

There is a company back in Greece, called JobTrust. They took me under their wing and guided me through the whole process. I kept in mailing contact with them, occasionally a phone call. I was terrified, to be honest, to call them and speak English over the phone. Even though, I was a third year student of English, quite confident in my skills but still... Phone conversation with someone with a different accent. Every time I picked up a phone I had chills that I will not manage to get things done, but I did! They were considerate and let me take my time. One day, they called with an offer of job on one of Crete's four star hotels. I very much wanted to go to Athens, but Crete? An island, so far away. I took it anyway.

I found a plane to Chania while my destination was Agia Pelagia near Heraklion. It would be best to land in Heraklion that is just twenty kilometers away but unfortunately no regular planes from Poland landed there. I was to end up on the other side of Crete, late at the evening. All alone. JobTrust said I just need to ask the driver to stop at Alexander House Hotel in Agia Pelagia. Fair enough. I got into the plane.

2 GREECE AND WORK



I got out of the plane. It was past nine and the sun was already setting. I was scared, it was nearly night, I had a big luggage, a backpack and was alone somewhere that seemed the end of the world at the time. I tried to find a bus that would take me to Chania's main bus station. There was a lot of tourist, I got confused and was looking for a bus for over forty minutes and it turned out that the thing as was looking for was this

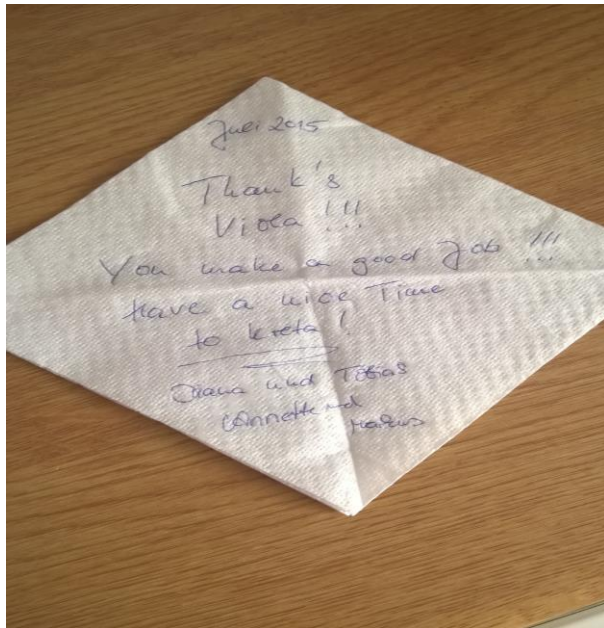
small booth on the corner of the airport. Finally, I bought a ticket and went for a bus.

In Chania I regained some semblance of strength as everyone I talked to spoke English and I had no trouble of understanding. When the bus started I suddenly felt very tired but was afraid to fall asleep. I asked the driver to stop at Agia Pelagia as instructed and patiently waited. In Rethymno the younger driver took off and with him all my English communication. The driver indeed left me at Agia Pelagia, but nowhere near the hotel I was supposed to work in. Literally, he dropped me off on a highway, at least three kilometers from the village. It was close to midnight, highway, myself and the luggage. Fortunately, it turned out that a couple from Netherlands was in a similar situation (minus luggage). We were walking down the hill to the village. After maybe three minutes they saw a car coming. They put their thumb up and the car stopped. I was shocked. I would have never thought of it myself, I would just walk down all the way down. A man stepped out of the car and after a chat he gave us a lift to Agia Pelagia. I was so relieved. He left me at the center and took off. The couple went their own way and I stood at the seaside. I could not see anything, it was dark, I was tired and I had no idea how to get to the hotel. I asked around in some still opened cafés and restaurants. They indeed told me how to reach Alexander House Hotel but I could not find my way to it, it was a switchback. I stopped a car and asked again, two girls inside started to argue about where it is and then decided to give me a lift. They dropped me off at the main entrance.

I entered and was greeted by a rather shy clerk. He was surprised I was so late, but he showed me to the restaurant where I had a cold plate and then I met a barkeeper. He told me I am to work at the bar, starting the next day. I was prepared to work at the restaurant... Well... okay then. In my work agreement it was said I would work eight hours and no night shifts. Bar seemed like a night shift but I did not mind. I was thrilled to work there, I knew I would handle.

The next morning I had some time for myself. I went for a small tour around Agia Pelagia. In the daylight it was the most beautiful place I have ever seen. People were kind, helpful and everybody spoke English!





At the evening I started my first day at the bar. The hotel I worked for was an All-Inclusive type and I had to pour the drinks from the regular offer. I learned quickly and received positive feedback. Even though I worked until late at night I felt happy about the job and was quite confident I was doing it right. I had a good time and was liked by the guests.

I worked for some time at the bar only until the management told me they needed my help at the restaurant, too. It is when it started to be a bit rough. I was at the restaurant from one to three o'clock and then I started bar work at five. I had very little time for myself.

It was not always easy for me. The work was hard, at the beginning I changed places often, until I got a room, something like a flat all for myself. It was not

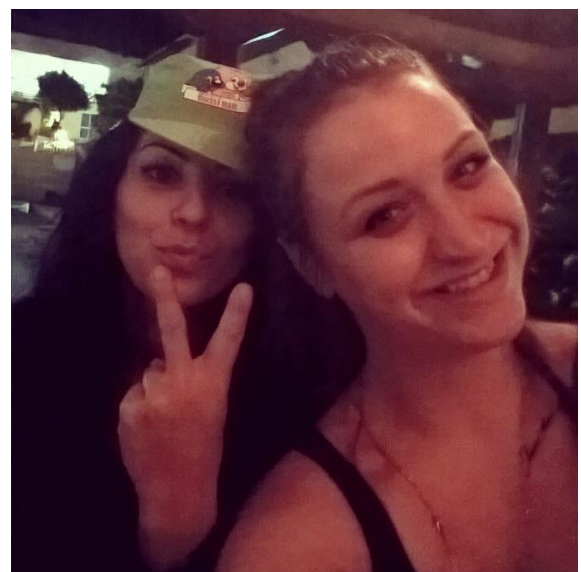
a luxury but I had what I needed. I had good neighbors and even a Polish girl lived just next to me. All of us worked a lot and we have not got the time to get to know each other well, but we were friendly.

The biggest pain was the lack of washing machine. I had to do all my laundry by hand. And it was required to have a fresh white shirt every day. I had a place to dry my clothes but I had to be very careful. My flat was just next to some other hotel and every day they put the water out of their air conditioning system out. Straight on the place where I dried my clothes... I bought a nice pair of shoes for work and they did not last for two weeks. The sole just decided to take off. I had to be fast at work so there was a lot of running around. Soon, my clothes became too big for me and I had to do shopping.

Despite it all, when I look back at all those things I choose to refer to them as small inconveniences because I had good time working. I made a lot of friendships and I still keep in touch with some of the people, not only staff but also with guests.

I very much wanted to see the culture. Greek culture is simply amazing. They do have their heart in the right place. They are very kind and even though often tired – still smiling. I saw hard working people who kept their spirit to the end, never complaining. They simply live the life and I learnt a lot from them.

There were of course things that surprised me to an extreme, for example, car driving. I think I will never get over it. Once I was at the public bus and the driver scratched the whole side of a bus on a concrete wall. He did not seem to be bothered. They ignore most of the rules but still are considerate when it comes to other people on the road and I can tell as I took





my first car ride after passing driving exam. I am not an excellent driver and they did not honk on me (that much as I deserved it...).

The hotel paid me pocket money for my work, they provided me with food and accommodation so I had not a lot of spending, also I got tipped for my work at the bar so I had some extra money. I decided to save them for travels. I had the pleasure to visit Knossos, the labyrinth palace of king Minos. And the most beautiful beach on the island – Elafonissi.

Crete is a marvelous place to be. I am very happy I got the chance to work and live there. This is an experience I will never forget.

At the end of my traineeship I asked if I could take a couple of days for myself and the management of the hotel said it is

okay. I wanted to see some more so I took a trip to Athens. It was always my big dream to see Acropolis and going there was like a cherry on the top of a cake.

I am very happy I decided to go on Erasmus+ and if I ever got the chance to do it again I would not think about it for a second, I would just pack my big suitcase and went. So far, it is my biggest adventure. An adventure that thought me of life and that a hard work pays off.

I had a lot of support from my collage and everyone involved. Even though the whole trip was scary and I was often confused I managed to overcome it with their help.

All the pictures that are presented here belongs to me.



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