

Athens, a Metamorphosis: The Eyes of an Erasmus Student

The first morning in Athens hit her like a wave, stepping out into the sunlit streets, her heart pounding with a fierce mix of excitement and fear. This wasn't just a move to a new city; it was a plunge into the unknown, a beginning that would reshape her entire world. Every step she took echoed with the promise of change, and she knew, deep down, that nothing would ever be the same again.

Cultural Richness and Unexpected Challenges

Living in Athens as an international student means diving into a world both fascinating and disorienting. The university offered undeniable cultural richness, but also unexpected challenges. Finding enough courses taught in English to validate her semester was a common struggle for many Erasmus students. Some Greek professors, initially reluctant, proved to be accommodating, simply asking for an essay in English at the end of the year. Their kindness was a real support throughout this unique academic journey.

However, despite this, the communication program was not quite what she expected. "I didn't learn much academically," she admits, "but this experience taught me so much more on a personal level."

Understanding English, especially with the Greek accent, was a challenge at first, but perseverance paid off. Taking a semester of Greek to learn the basics was tough: "The pace was overwhelming, we learned numbers before we even finished the alphabet," she recalls. Still, she's proud to now be able to read the local language, a small but meaningful victory in a country that became her new home.

Adapting to the food, customs, and even supermarket products was another hurdle. French cheese was sorely missed, as were the familiar comforts of home. But most importantly, learning to handle daily problems alone, without parental support, shaped her character profoundly.

Discovering Athens: Between Ancient History and Modern Life

Athens is far more than just a city of ancient ruins and legendary history; it is a vibrant, living metropolis full of striking contrasts and unexpected surprises. She uncovered hidden cultural treasures, from the breathtaking Acropolis Museum that brought history to life, to the quaint, traditional cafés where locals passionately gathered over rich, aromatic Greek coffee. Wandering through charming neighborhoods like Plaka, she felt as if time itself had paused, letting her soak in the city's timeless atmosphere.

As night fell, Athens transformed again: its lively nightlife awakened with bustling bars and clubs that invited celebrations that lasted until the early hours. But beyond the nightlife, she embraced the city's rich cultural calendar, attending local festivals that offered authentic moments of connection between Athenians and visitors alike, making the Greek capital pulse with life and energy throughout the year.



Trials That Shape: Solitude and Independence Far from Home

The challenges were numerous and often daunting, but they became essential stepping stones in her personal transformation. “Sometimes, the weight of being so far from home felt crushing, especially on days when nothing seemed to make sense. There were moments when I felt completely isolated, far from family and the familiar comforts I had always relied on. Yet it was precisely in those moments of solitude that I learned to stand on my own two feet, to stop waiting for someone else to come to my aid. This newfound independence, frightening at first, became one of my greatest personal victories.”

An Inner Transformation: Growing Through the Erasmus Experience

Her time in Athens transformed her profoundly. She often described the surreal feeling of being both everywhere and nowhere at once, as if her body was rooted in the ancient streets of the city, yet her mind wandered far beyond, exploring new horizons. “This year taught me that growing up isn’t just about gaining knowledge or independence,” she reflected, “it’s about embracing distance, change, and the passage of time with all its contradictions and uncertainties.”



Sharing a moment with Erasmus friends in a rooftop bar overlooking the Acropolis – a typical Athenian evening.

Living away from home, navigating a foreign culture, and facing unexpected challenges forced her to confront parts of herself she never knew existed. She learned to balance nostalgia with excitement, loneliness with connection, and fear with courage. In that delicate balance, she found not only resilience but also a deeper understanding of what it truly means to grow.

Fleeting Bonds, Lasting Memories

The bonds formed with other Erasmus students were intense and precious, forged in a whirlwind of shared experiences, late-night conversations, and moments of vulnerability far from home. Despite knowing deep down that in just a few months everyone would follow their own path, these

connections carried a unique magic, a sense of belonging in a foreign city, a family away from family. “We all knew that in a few months, everyone would go their separate ways, yet those moments will remain forever engraved in our memories,” she reflected. These friendships, though temporary, shaped her worldview and offered comfort amid uncertainty. They were a reminder that even brief encounters can leave an indelible mark on one’s life, coloring the experience of Athens with warmth and a sense of home.

Returning Home: Nostalgia and Inner Richness

Returning home, she found her room exactly as she had left it: unchanged, frozen in time, a stark contrast to the person she had become. Her hometown felt like a still photograph while inside, she had grown, evolved, and lived through a whirlwind adventure that no one could see. The nostalgia of leaving Athens, with its vibrant streets and unforgettable moments, was already settling in her heart. No more spontaneous weekend trips to the Greek islands, no more lively Erasmus gatherings, no more discovering new corners of a city that had become a second home. Yet, beyond the absence of these experiences, she carried an inner richness, a deep, unshakable confidence and a broadened perspective that no one could take away.

She would tell anyone hesitating to take the leap: *Go*. Step outside your comfort zone. Because at the end of the journey, you don't just return with souvenirs, you come back with a version of yourself you never imagined possible.

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