

# Oh, oh Souvlaak!

## General information

In the academic year 2016/2017 I went on exchange to the beautiful country of Greece. I studied in the capital Athens for almost four months at the Athens University of Economics and Business (or AUEB as it's called there). I got to meet many new people, have seen beautiful islands and I even learned some stuff at the university. Altogether, it was a great experience I wouldn't want to have missed out on.

## Preparation

The whole process of preparation started from the day I was allowed to study in Athens, and from this day on I had to take care of a lot of stuff. The most important thing I had to manage was to decide how this exchange period would fit in my Dutch academic schedule. This was mainly due to the fact that the Greece academic calendar is not similar to the Dutch one. The Greek academic year starts at the beginning of October (October 3 in my case), and lasts till somewhere in February, depending on the dates of your exams (February 2 in my case). This means that I was going to miss out on the first five weeks of my major (block three at ESE). I resolved this problem by returning to the Netherlands during the Christmas break, and therefore I was able to attend the first three weeks of lectures of block three in Rotterdam. In week four I flew back to Athens to make my exams, and at the end of week five I returned back in the Netherlands in order to follow the last two weeks of lectures and to make my exams in week eight. It is not an ideal solution but as the other option was study delay, I decided this was the lesser of two evils and I definitely do not regret my decision.

As I had taken care of this big issue for me, it was time to arrange other practical stuff. Off course I needed housing. The renting of student apartments in Athens is arranged through a very practical site called <http://stayinathens.com/>. On this site, you can find an overview of different student apartments which you can rent for a Greek academic semester. Prices are relatively cheap compared to the Netherlands, as I only paid €270 a month for a sizable room (approximately 12 square meters), and shared kitchen, bathroom and living room. I lived together with two other guys that studied at the same university, and on the website you can see the nationalities and ages of other people that applied for an apartment. A lot of international students choose to stay near Victoria square, which is located close to the university, but I decided I would like to live closer to the city center so I had to travel thirty minutes by bus to the university. However, this was not a big problem for me as I only had to attend the university three days a week.

Since Athens is within the European Union I didn't have to arrange any visa, and my preparation process was rather easy. For questions I could e-mail the exchange coordinator of Athens directly and she usually replies within a day. For your mobile phone, Vodafone Greece offers special student SIM-cards that provide for 800 MB of internet a month. They only cost €5 and are valid for the entire semester, so I gratefully used this offer. The last thing you should take care of is providing all required forms at both universities within the deadline periods (if you don't procrastinate too much, this shouldn't be a problem), and applying for a monetary grant instead of your free public transport access.

## Arrival

As soon as I booked an apartment at stay in Athens, they asked me to provide them with information about my flight and they sent me the location of their office so I could step by and receive the keys of

the apartment. From the airport I entered the blue metro line (for students a reduced ticket price of €5 applies) to Syntagma Square (located at the touristic center of Athens) where the office of stay in Athens was located. There I received a warm welcome and they ordered me a taxi to my apartment where I got a short tour and received the keys. Everything was already in place and very well cleaned, so I only had to unpack as soon as I arrived. Later that day I went to the city center for dinner with one of my flat mates (the other one arrived a couple of days later), and my exchange period had officially begun.

The next week was the introduction week, which I can highly recommend. The first few days were characterized by getting to know the city, catching all hotspots and getting to know other students. Especially the Greek night on which we got to taste unlimited traditional Greek food and wine was a pinnacle, but I'd recommend you to participate in as many activities as possible. It's by far the easiest way to get to know your fellow students, and most activities are much fun. Then, on Thursday the four-day trip to the Greek island Mykonos (Greek people call it the Ibiza of Greece) started. This was by far the best thing of the entire introduction week and maybe of the whole exchange period. For only €120, all students went to Mykonos where we could stay in a hotel for three nights and lay in the sun at day and party Greek style at night! The only thing that was a little disappointing is that everything (in particular food and drinks) on the island is approximately twice as expensive as in Athens. So in total I spent about €250 during this trip, but it was definitely worth it.

## Courses

After we came back from Mykonos, we only had one day to recover before the academic year started. Fortunately, in the first week there were no attendance requirements, and (like most things in Greece) the year launched quite calmly. After the first week we were allowed to miss three lectures of each course during for the entire semester, which amounts to attendance requirements of 75%. As I only needed 24 ECTS for this semester, I chose four courses of 6 ECTS each:

- **Cost and Management Accounting.** As the title of this course already indicates, it's mainly about management accounting. It relates to the course 'Intermediate accounting', I had to take in the second year of my bachelor and the level of effort I had to put in this course was doable. The teacher was very kind and spoke English fluently, but the lectures were somewhat boring. Altogether I am happy I chose this course, for it was relatively easy to pass and there were no additional assignments you had to hand in.
- **Financial Statement Analysis.** This was the second course I chose and it focuses on auditing financial statements. The course consists of three parts: you have to summarize four academic papers, a valuation project is required, and there is a final exam. I could definitely not recommend this course. It requires very much effort, as my valuation project consisted of nearly twenty pages and it wasn't even the main contributor of my final grade. Also the summaries require much time (approximately two hours per paper), and I put in a lot of time studying for the exam. Furthermore, the teacher was very vague and unkind. During the presentations of the valuation projects she kept interrupting us, or saying we were going to slow. Also, she didn't provide us with a clear description of what was required for the valuation project, but every lecture she said (you had to pay attention, for she didn't write anything down) what should be finished before next lecture. I regret following this course, but it did make me appreciate the other courses more.
- **Principles of Sociology.** This course is an introductory course to the field of sociology. It was my only non-economic course and I found it quite interesting. The teacher used very clear PowerPoint slides, and his English was very decent. Sometimes the lectures were somewhat

boring, but this was also due to the fact that all lectures consisted of three hours listening to our teacher. The content of this course was of a decent level, but it wasn't too hard to pass the exam for you only had to answer two out of the four given questions. Besides the final exam there was also a little assignment we had to write and present. We could do this assignment in groups of four, and it was about the representation of refugees in press discourse. It was very interesting to work together with other students and to compare the differences. Overall I am glad I took this course, and it was probably the course that taught me most.

- **Managerial Decision Making.** The title of this course is a bit misleading, for it mainly focuses on linear programming and integer programming. Of course this relates to the managerial decision making process, but it is only a small part of it. However the level of this course was decent, and the content quite interesting. Our teacher was a very kind and capable man, but his English was poignant. He mumbled his way through the lectures, but if you asked him a question he struggled to express himself properly, and therefore your question usually remains unanswered. Fortunately his lecture slides were very clear and the final exam was doable. Besides the final exam everybody had to do a presentation in groups of four, but this was a very easy assignment and almost everybody got the maximum number of points. Altogether I'm glad I chose this course, but I hope our teacher will improve his English next year.

Overall, studying at AUEB requires a bit of flexibility. The university isn't ranked very high compared to other universities in Europe, and due to the economic crisis and accompanying cuts in the education system Greece had to deal with, the university lags behind European standards. For example, the building all international students were located in was very close to a main road so there was a lot of noise, and the classrooms were broiling. Also, there was a very poor internet connection which made it impossible to look things up on the internet during the lectures. Furthermore, not all teachers spoke English very well so you could run into some communication problems. However, all people (especially the exchange coordinator I had to deal with) are very warm and kind and are prepared to help you with everything. Also the level of effort you have to put in is lower than you are used to in the Netherlands, so this compensates for the convenience problems you might run into. I myself think that these little problems are all part of the whole exchange experience, and they help to make you a more independent and self-sufficient person. And, last but not least, they make you appreciate our native education system a whole lot more!

## Finances

### Costs:

• Rent	€270
• Living expenses (food, groceries)	€250
• Night life	€150
• Transportation	€130
• <b>Total</b>	<b>€800</b>

### Income:

• Erasmus Grant	€210
• Studying finance of the Dutch government	€290.68
• Monetary grant instead of free public transport	€89.07
• Student lending	€302
• Savings	€118.25

- **Total**

**€800**

All amounts are monthly amounts. Transportation costs include transportation in Greece, as well as my flights from and to Athens (converted into a monthly amount). As can be seen, I was unable to cover all expenses myself which is why a part of my financing consists of a student loan from the Dutch government. Overall life in Greece is cheaper than in the Netherlands, which is mainly expressed in daily life expenses like groceries or restaurants. Night life is slightly more expensive than in the Netherlands, as you usually pay at least €5 for a beer (0.5 liter). A convenient solution are the parties organized by the international student network ESN. For these parties, your student pass provides for discounts or sometimes only an entrance fee and unlimited drinks for the rest of the night (excluding cocktails). I didn't use any sports facilities, and mobile costs only consisted of €5 for the entire exchange period, so they are not included.

At the beginning of the semester I also spend some money on travelling to different islands (included in transportation costs), as the weather was beautiful and I had never been to Greece before. There are some pretty nice islands on only an hour of boating away. Boat tickets are usually a couple of tens of euros and expenses on the islands are comparable to Athens, as you're visiting them off season. I can definitely recommend to visit some islands at the beginning of the semester, for the temperature decreases and on the islands it's usually five degrees colder than on the main land.

## Daily life

Daily life in Athens is pretty great. The people are very easygoing, and using the bus or metro system you can easily travel through the city. I explored many areas, but even a couple of days before my departure back to the Netherlands I discovered new things. Also, the Greek climate is a huge plus. During the first two months it was plus twenty degrees, and it almost never rains in Greece. However if you're unlucky enough to find yourself outside on a rainy day, you better find yourself a decent umbrella, because when it rains in Athens it rains hard. It happened to me once on a Saturday night, and when I left one of the ESN parties the streets had turned into little rivers, through which I had to clear myself a way. My shoes were so soaked, I had wet feet for the entire weekend.

Another thing that's great about daily life in Greece is the Greek kitchen. Of course everybody knows Gyros, but when you're in Athens you should definitely taste Souvlaki some time. It consists of Greek meat, served in a pita bread with some vegetables (lettuce, tomato), fries and Tsatsiki (traditional Greek sauce). There are tons of Souvlaki bars through the whole city, and a decent Souvlaki usually costs only two or three euros. I can highly recommend it after a long night of partying, but actually it tastes great every minute of the day. Another part of the food community of Athens you definitely shouldn't miss out on is the Poco Poco. The Poco Poco doesn't only serve traditional Greek food, but also French crepes, American burgers or Italian pasta. I discovered it in the first week of lectures, and it was love at first sight. It wouldn't take long before I had dinner there four times per week, and I started to get to know the staff. They have very kind waiters and waitresses, and their food is delicious and priced very decent (when I had dinner, I usually paid between six and ten euros). And the best part is: they are opened 24/7! So if you're in Athens, you should definitely go to the Poco Poco and you will be sold for life. It's okay, happens to everybody!

Poco

Poco: <https://www.google.nl/maps/place/Poco+Poco/@37.9686308,23.7428396,17.2z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0xfc8bc92bbcd9b316!8m2!3d37.9682808!4d23.7438419>

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