

## **Impressions from Greece under the Erasmus Programme**

### ***Background Introduction:***

*The Erasmus Programme (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is an EU-funded education, training, youth, and sports initiative aimed at promoting academic exchange and cooperation in Europe and globally. Originally launched in 1987, the programme is named after Erasmus of Rotterdam, a Dutch Renaissance humanist who advocated education, freedom of thought, and cross-cultural understanding.*



*The current Erasmus Programme, known as “Erasmus+” for the 2021-2027 period, covers a wide range of areas, including higher education, vocational education and training, adult education, school education, as well as youth and sports projects.*

*Hong Kong Chu Hai College has established a partnership with the University of Western Macedonia in Greece, which is a participant in the Erasmus+ programme and has a dedicated Erasmus+ coordinator. For this exchange programme, our college selected two students to participate, marking the first such student exchange initiative for the institution. I was honored to be one of the participants.*



In the summer of 2024, Professor Rogach of Ng Teng Fong . Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute informed me of the opportunity to go to Greece as an exchange student under the Erasmus Programme for approximately three months. Thanks to the meticulous arrangements

of the school and professors, I successfully obtained my visa in mid-September and arrived in Greece by the end of the month. The host institution was the University of Western Macedonia, which has five campuses, two of which are located in the northern Greek highland town of Kozani. These are the Koila and Zep campuses. Koila, the older campus, has an artistic vibe, characterized by graffiti-covered walls. The Zep campus, on the other hand, has a more academic atmosphere with a strong focus on learning. After living and studying in Greece for three months, I'd like to share some of my impressions.



Zep campus



Koila campus

## 1. Greeks Are Honest and Kind-Hearted

Before going to Greece, I had read on social media that public safety in Greece was poor, leaving me feeling apprehensive. However, my actual experience was completely different. Here are a few stories to illustrate this:

### *The Kind Stranger:*

I entered Greece through Thessaloniki, the country's second-largest city. The airport was simple, with no luxurious decor. Upon exiting, I took a bus to the city center. It was an old, articulated bus with faded paint on the handrails and worn-out seats. There was no ticket seller—only a coin-operated ticket machine. I stood there helplessly with a banknote in hand, unsure of what to do. Just then, a plainly dressed man inserted coins and handed me a ticket. I was so overwhelmed by gratitude that I didn't know how to respond. When I offered him the banknote, he smiled,

waved it away, and turned to look out the window. At that moment, he was an angel to me! This kind stranger taught me how to treat strangers in the future.

*The Honest Taxi Driver:*

Upon arriving in Kozani, I took a taxi to the student dormitory. The driver enthusiastically loaded my two suitcases. Upon reaching the destination, I gave him the fare and went into the building to confirm the address. To my horror, I realized that I had left my backpack in the taxi, which contained my valuables and documents. Panicked, I rushed outside, only to see the taxi reversing down the narrow street—it was the driver, bringing my forgotten backpack back to me. When I retrieved the bag, I tried to offer him extra money, but he adamantly refused and drove off. I was deeply touched by his honesty and kindness!



Student dormitory

*The Friendly Gentleman:*

The second day in Greece, I dined at a nearby restaurant. While eating alone at an outdoor table, an elderly man, about 70 years old, approached and started talking to me in Greek. From the bits of English he used, I gathered he was curious about where I was from. When I said I was from China, he excitedly exclaimed, “I love you! I love you!” Over the following weeks, I often ran into him, and although we didn’t understand each other’s languages, we had lively and warm conversations. He even gave me small gifts like coins or snacks. Though I prepared a gift of tea leaves for him before leaving, I unfortunately didn’t get the chance to see him again.

## **2. Greek Cuisine Is Simple, Healthy, and Delicious**

Meals were mainly provided in the school cafeteria, with a different menu every day of the week. Greek cuisine, part of the Mediterranean diet, features salads and olive oil as staples, uses less salt and more herbs, and relies on tomatoes, cucumbers, and cabbage as primary vegetables. Proteins like chicken, eggs, pork, and fish are common, while lamb and beef are usually grilled. Potatoes and rice serve as the main carbohydrates.

The food was so tasty that I often finished every bite, earning recognition from the cafeteria staff, especially those in charge of collecting trays. Eating out in the city was equally delightful—every restaurant exceeded expectations with delicious food and excellent service. Local wine was particularly noteworthy—affordable, high-quality, and sometimes even complimentary. Greek bakeries, too, were amazing; I often felt like I was sampling Michelin-starred pastries.



### 3. Greece Is a Kingdom of Art

At first, I thought Greece looked run-down, with graffiti-covered walls reminiscent of an urban ghetto. But I soon realized that Greek graffiti is a form of high-level art. In Athens, I even saw a tour guide explaining graffiti created by a renowned artist about the European Union. Over time, I noticed that shops and restaurants were tastefully decorated, each with its distinct style. Libraries hosted weekly exhibitions, and paintings and sculptures were ubiquitous. Even small cities with populations of just 50,000 frequently held concerts and theater performances, featuring famous Greek artists in intimate settings.



Greece is truly an artistic paradise. Even as someone not well-versed in art, I could sense its omnipresence in Greek culture.

Greece, the cradle of Western civilization and a meeting point of European and Asian cultures, is worth visiting, exploring, and experiencing. The genuine kindness and beauty of the Greek people have left me enamored with the country. If given the chance, I would love to visit again.



**Sharing by:**

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