

Aristotle University Thessaloniki

I was lucky enough to get a left over place (the one and only for AUTH I believe) for the summer semester of 2017, so the usual procedure of writing letters of motivation and waiting for confirmations was not something that I had to go through. I picked up the normal procedures at about the learning agreement stage. The course selection at AUTH was not huge, and it was a little bit unclear what was being taught in which language – I would encourage any students going there in the future to just make a very ‘provisional’ learning agreement, because when you arrive, the Erasmus coordinator from the economics department will send out a list of the courses available to students for that semester, which are taught in English. It’s worth mentioning that although it is a rather large University, it is not there to cater to international students who are not going to be studying in Greek, so there will likely be about eight courses that you can choose from (Accounting, IOS and Management seemed to be the specialisation fields).

That said, the staff there were extremely friendly and helpful, and were always reachable whenever there were any pressing issues to try and solve before arriving (again, I would emphasise, wait until you arrive to sort everything out, it is much easier to do it there).

Being an EU member state, I didn’t apply for any kind of visa or residence permit, though I had all of my documents stolen within an hour of flying into Athens, so it would have been difficult to prove my identity in any case.

Before arrival there were a few different programs that you could choose to participate in, one of them being the buddy program, which was exceptionally useful, both on a friendship level and having someone who ‘knows the ropes’, or more precisely the language, and can help negotiate the treacherous waters of Greek bureaucracy.

There were two facebook groups which were of utmost help, both for meeting people and for asking any questions about....well anything really. They were Erasmus in Thessaloniki by ESN (this is the official Erasmus Student Network facebook group, and you could connect with other students, find out about events, ask questions about your studies etc.) and Accommodation in Thessaloniki by ESN, which is where find offers from people subletting, wanting to rent a flat together, offering rooms etc. They were both very useful and I would recommend being added to both groups, even before arriving.

Once you’ve arrived, everything becomes a whole lot easier. The world slows down to Greek pace, you can visit any professors that you need to see, check which courses are running, and enjoy the finest keta-käse the world has to offer. I stayed in a hostel for the first week, to give myself time to find a flat that was suitable. Considering that Thessaloniki is a city of over half a million people, the flats were extremely affordable – if you were to stay for a year, you could rent a downtown 2br apartment for about 280EUR a month, though typically most Erasmus students on short term contracts would pay between 150-250EUR a month for a room in a flatshare, including all bills. I opted for a serviced apartment which was about five minutes walk to the University, and cost I think about 340EUR per month. Having the Erasmus group was excellent for finding places to stay, both with locals and with other Erasmus students.

The University itself was awesome, everyone was so chilled out that I started to feel a bit German, trying to get all my documents in order within days of arriving. Strangely, although there were far fewer contact hours than at Viadrina, the work was equally as engaging in a much different sense.

Autonomous learning and better time management were crucial, when working with such ambiguous deadlines and assignments, as well as much more reading outside of University (which would normally be replaced by lectures at Viadrina). This is more than likely a product of the lack of academic staff who are willing to teach in English, and the low number of Erasmus students in the economics faculty (my largest class had four students). You could learn Modern Greek for free, but I chose not to, as I'm a purist who would only entertain the prospect of studying Ancient Greek.

In terms of life in general, things are really favourable there – the setting is excellent, students get three free meals a day at the university cafeteria, free entry to all of the museums in the city and many of the attractions (such as the white tower), the weather is lovely, and the food is sublime. Being there in summer semester, the price of fresh fruit and vegetables from street vendors was perhaps half of what you would pay in Kaufland in the same season, though processed food in supermarkets is similarly priced, if not a little bit more expensive. Eating in the Tavernas will set you back less than 10EUR for basically an all you can eat/all you can eat banquet – though I am not sure if things are more expensive if meat dishes are ordered. Vegetarian food in any case was extremely cheap.

For any kind of outdoor activities it's also great, there are beaches nearby, the hills at the back of the city are great for cycling, and jogging along the esplanade is a must do to blend in with the locals, or with those people who wish to blend in with the locals.

One other awesome thing is that there are parties in the University campus almost every weekend, and because the buildings are so dilapidated, the administration don't seem to care that there are thousands of students partying on the grounds and in the buildings on a Saturday night. One weekend, eight friends from Viadrina flew down to Thessa for a few days and the party would have rivalled the best that Berlin has to offer.