

Eleni Benson
August 19, 2006

Stavros S. Niarchos Language Study Fellowship: Report

Summary: With the funds that I received from the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation I traveled to the island of Ikaria in Greece where I spent four weeks studying Modern Greek at the Ikarian Centre. I completed levels B1 and B2, including 80 hours of instruction as well as 40 hours of lectures and activities on issues pertaining to Greek culture. The classes were engaging and well organized, and my Greek language skills improved considerably.

Description: The Centre is remotely located on the side of a mountain in Ikaria, about a kilometer from the nearest village of Arethoussa. There are 9 dormitories that fit 18 students; the rooms are cleaned daily, have breathtaking views of the island, and contain small kitchens that are quite convenient. There are several classrooms, both inside and outside, a large common kitchen for communal cooking, and a computer room with internet access.

A typical day at the Ikarian Centre began with two and a half hours of class in the morning followed by several hours of free time in the afternoon. In the afternoons most students studied or took the school's bus, named Aristotelis, to the beach or to the main town of Evdilos for shopping and errands. I generally left the school to either study at a café or to enjoy the various beaches. Lunch was generally cooked in the rooms, or bought from a cantina at the beach. Evening courses began at around 7:30pm and lasted another two or three hours. After class, most of the students and teachers would go together to a nearby taverna to eat dinner together.

Each day was made a little different by the various special activities that were available. These included the screening of Greek movies in the afternoons, cooking traditional Ikarian dishes all together and eating dinner either at the centre or at a house in Arethoussa, speaking with local people about topics ranging from pollution to illegal

immigration, and going all together to the various festivals (panayiria) put on by the surrounding towns. On the weekends we took trips to various locations around the island, such as a monastery and a winery, and went on several very enjoyable hikes.

In general, the morning classes addressed grammar and vocabulary, usually working from the book *Ellinika Tora 1+1*, and the evening classes would involve translating and presenting a story or an article and then singing Greek songs. For me personally, the course was a good review of some of the more complicated grammar that I had forgotten, and it provided an excellent opportunity for me to expand my vocabulary in an environment where I could practice the new words. The most helpful aspect of the course was the fact that we spoke almost entirely in Greek, both in class and while socializing with other students. As a testament to the success of the classes, I visited my Greek relatives in Athens both before and after the course, and the second time I saw them they were uniformly impressed at how much my language skills had improved in just four weeks.

The objective that I set out to achieve in attending the Ikarian Centre's language courses was to improve my Modern Greek skills in an environment that would allow me to expand my vocabulary and become more comfortable participating in Greek conversations. My time at the Centre certainly helped me achieve these objectives, and while I am still far from fluent in Modern Greek, my level of proficiency has increased significantly.