

Three sentence summary of project: I attended a Beginner's Modern Greek course run by College Year Athens on the Greek island of Paros for three weeks in June 2003.

It all began on June the 9th, when Leanna and I met at Athens airport, somehow managed to explain to the taxi driver (who knew no English) where we needed to go, and finally arrived at the College Year in Athens Academic Center next to the Marble Stadium in Athens. We listened to introductions and an overview of the program, ate lunch, and were then taken for our first lesson which lasted two hours. During those two hours with Eleni, we managed to learn the characters and pronunciation of the Greek alphabet which then occupied us on the bus trip to Piraeus as we, with our newly acquired knowledge, would proudly pronounce to one other unknown to us Greek words written on shop windows and road-signs -- progress already!

We arrived on Paros very late at night, and had time only to settle into our rooms and go to bed, ready for our three hour class the next morning. The biggest shock of the night was the information that the nearest pay-phone was in the next village and the nearest internet in Parikia (40 minutes away by bus). We really were alone.

That night was the beginning of our three glorious weeks on the Greek island of Paros, in the village of Logaras, learning Modern Greek with two incredible teachers from College Year in Athens. While learning the language, we were also immersed in Modern Greek culture: we were taken to traditional tavernas in tiny villages for dinners, taken for a walk on a Byzantine Road in Lefkes, driven to Naussa and then the old Byzantine Greek-Orthodox Church in Parikia, taken for traditional a Greek dancing lesson and to a traditional Greek celebration of John the Baptist's birthday in the village named after him. Longer field trips were also organized to Delos, Mikonos, Santorini and Anti-Paros to acquaint us with Greek culture as a whole, and give us a broader idea of the setting we were in as well as the history of the language that we were studying.

Despite all the after-hours activities organized, the majority of our time was still spent either in class or doing homework. Classes were held from 9:00 am until 12:00 p.m. and then again from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., leaving us the 'mesimeri' free to do as we pleased -- we were told it

was traditionally Greek to have a one to two hour break in the afternoon, and that even shops closed for this time, while Greeks take their afternoon naps. We, of course, slept on Logaras beach.

The first few days for me were difficult, since they were first days of my complete immersion and relative isolation. After Yale and three weeks in Istanbul where both phones and internet were readily accessible, it was hard to accept that we were really in for the long haul. Leanna and I went to Parikia the next day in between classes to buy groceries and inform our family members that we were fine, while the others went to the beach. That was a pattern that would continue for the first week when Leanna and I didn't make full use of Logaras, but were going to Parikia practically every day.

When we settled in more, we explored Logaras and I went further out for a run with Penelope, we discovered where the markets were and where we could buy phone-cards and where we could send post-cards, where the fresh bread was sold and until when, and eventually there was even a pay phone installed in our village! Our main activities were going to the beach between classes, studying and spending time with the other people in the course and the teachers.

The program helped us achieve our objectives in the following ways. Firstly, we wanted to learn how to speak and understand Modern Greek in order to be able to function in some communicative capacity in Greece. This program gave us both basic language skills, and a solid foundation for further study of the Greek language. Secondly, the program allowed us a glimpse into the country as a cultural entity – the people, the mechanics, the places. We saw how things worked – from the shops closing during the afternoons, to the public bus system. This made us realize that the initial project we wanted to attempt was, as the admissions committee had said, too complex for us to undertake without either language, or cultural familiarity. There is so much more we need to know of Greek, and about Greece, before diving head into as complicated a project – especially one that strives at cultural comparison.

All in all, this was a wonderful experience to learn Greek in Greece and learn the language and culture simultaneously. As knowledge of one inevitably informs the other.