

Language Study in Ikaria

I received the Stavros Niarchos Language Study Fellowship to study Greek for four weeks at the Hellenic Cultural Center (HCC). The HCC has offices in Athens and Ikaria, with the bulk of the summer courses offered in Ikaria. I received information about the program in Ikaria from the Internet and a recommendation regarding its quality from George Syrimis.

I arrived in Greece July 27, 2003 on a flight from Washington, D.C. I then arrived in Ikaria later that day and was taken to the village of Arethoussa. The HCC has set up a school and small housing accommodations on a mountainside between the villages of Caravosthamo and Arethoussa. Upon arrival I was introduced to the head of the program and arrangements were made for a placement test and orientation the next morning.

Monday morning I took a placement test and decided with the faculty there that I should join the Intermediate II level. The program consisted of four hours of class per day. There were also additional discussions, dance and music classes, and various activities. I began Intermediate II that night at 5pm. Over the next few days it became clear to me that the level of the class was not very challenging to me from a grammatical perspective. I had already learned all the grammar at Yale, and, in addition, the class seemed to focus on speaking, comprehension, and vocabulary. After a week, I spoke to the teacher about some additional exercises and about my concerns about the level of difficulty of the class. He was somewhat responsive and began having extra discussion sessions at night in which we would discuss various political and social issues. These sessions were very valuable by increasing my vocabulary and the speed of my

conversation. Over the first two weeks I began to feel slow but marked improvement in my Greek.

I enrolled in Intermediate III for the second two week session and found the topics, discussions, and vocabulary more interesting. We still did very little grammar, and that which we did do I had already learned at school. Nonetheless, it was a nice refresher course and well worth it. I continued to improve and one night I gave a 45 minute presentation on the Cyprus Conflict and moderated a one hour discussion afterwards. I was pleased, and improvement in my Greek was evident in my ability to speak at some length in front of other students and teachers. My initial concern with the lack of grammar instruction did not seem to be a significant problem at the end of the course. One major problem was the amount of English spoken by fellow students. It would have been more productive to only be around native speakers because many times during social occasions the group resorted to other more comfortable languages.

I finished the second course and returned to Athens with another Yale student Melinda Delis. We stayed one night in Athens and left early the following morning to return to New York via London.

Overall the trip to Ikaria was extremely educational and also very fun and relaxing. I was immediately and continuously charmed by the island through both its landscape and its people. I encountered minor problems with the difficulty of transportation around the island and the inability to get written documentation of expenditures from many establishments. However, Melinda and I managed to secure receipts from many of our purchases. These should provide an idea of what the daily cost of life on the island was. I have attached some necessary bills, receipts, and documentation of expenses.

I thank the foundation and the committee who awarded the fellowship for a wonderful and extremely productive experience. My Greek family at home was pleasantly and noticeably surprised with my progress. I look forward to continuing my study of Greek and my participation in the Hellenic Studies program at Yale.