

Iona's Thessaloniki Highlights

The beautiful city of Thessaloniki was perfection. The city centre had lots of fabulous shops and restaurants and all within close proximity to the clear blue Aegean Sea. The outer suburbs contain streets of luxurious housing and was also home to Aristotle School that became a familiar focal point for our visit.

Aristotle School classes were so different to Craigclowan. Everybody shouts, people walk about and write on the board during a lesson and it is considered to be normal, when at Craigclowan we would be in detention. It was so interesting to experience being in a different school and, even though I could not understand the language, it was very educational.

Although there were so many friends that we made, a small group of us formed a perfect squad. Four Greeks, who spoke exceptional English for their ages, were funny, interesting and fantastic company. On many nights, eating in restaurants became the highlight of the day because, not only was the food incredible, the conversations were never boring.

Experiencing the Greek food was often delightful and sometimes challenging. I loved many of the pastries and the souvlaki, which is normally pork on a skewer. One night I tried semolina for the first time and I regretted it, as it looked, smelt and tasted like frog spawn!

Normally on a holiday, I would stay in a hotel, so wouldn't have the knowledge of the day to day life of a local family. However, this trip gave me the opportunity to experience life with two different families and truly understand how their life works compared to mine. The second family that I stayed with had two daughters who love dance. Rachel and I were lucky enough to be able to attend their modern and latin dance classes, which were to a very high level and very exciting to watch.

I came home with so many happy memories of the planned excursions. For example, Mount Olympus and the temples built in honour of the Gods, going to one of the sport stadiums where the basketball team, NAOK, play, as well as visiting the White Tower and enjoying its spectacular panoramic views whilst learning the history of the city.

The day that we did our presentations to the rest of the groups was my favourite day. By the end of every country doing their presentations, I was feeling extremely inspired. I felt that our presentation was strengthened by the fact that we had taken Tunnocks tea cakes and Irn Bru for everyone to try, and the other groups loved them. The Greek presentation was especially inspiring as they had prepared a play to teach us about their inventors.

The Greek culture is very different from ours. There are hundreds of stray dogs and puppies at the side of the roads which made me feel lucky that our pets are more cherished and well looked after. Also, on any wall that was plain, there was graffiti. Some was plain writing but some could be described as art, and was stunning. Smoking was permitted in every restaurant which made the air feel polluted and heavy. It made me realise that we are lucky in Scotland to have clean air places, especially where we eat.

My trip to Greece was memorable and something that I will be able to look back on with pride, happiness and a sense of achievement for the rest of my life. I am so grateful to have been given the chance to go. The Eureka Project has left me with many new friends and very inspired to be whatever I want to be as I go through life.