

Erasmus report Athens, Athens School of Arts (ASFA) – winter semester 2021/22

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I arrived in Athens in October 2021 to do my ERASMUS semester at the Athens School of Arts (ASFA). I applied for it some time before with a portfolio and documents from the International Office in Bremen, which I sent all together by email to the office in Athens. After I was accepted for a place to study, the Corona lockdown came and my stay was postponed by 1 year. I had to reapply but was accepted again. Since many students had piled up on the waiting lists due to the delay, there were a lot of international students, around 40-50 of us.

Accommodation

I looked for accommodation in advance via Instagram and friends and finally found an apartment locally in Exarchia through a friend. Friends of the friend sublet it and it was very central and well located. Apartments in Athens usually have large balconies. I was able to do a lot of work on my balcony and soak up the sun until November.

Most of the apartments have a stone floor, which cools the houses in summer. However, it is also very cold in winter. Warm clothing is therefore necessary in the winter semester. The heating is centrally controlled, but since the economic crisis in 2008, some of it has stopped working because the heating is only turned on when all residents in the house have paid their bills and everyone in the house has to agree on when to start heating. In theory, heating starts from the beginning of December, but if you're lucky, the heaters actually run a little for 2 hours in the evening from around Christmas. Many air conditioning systems can provide heating as an alternative, but depending on how new they are, this is more like a lukewarm hairdryer blowing on you a bit. Electricity has also become very expensive and everyone has always been encouraged not to use the air conditioning if possible. In the winter semester it is good to have warm clothing with you, as the nights can get very cold.

University

The University is located on the way to the port (Piraeus). The metro stop is Kallithea, from there it is about a 10-minute walk through an industrial area. There are also buses to the ASFA, but since these don't run according to schedule, I and the other students always used the metro (green line).

The ASFA is located in an old factory building. There is a great cafeteria with very nice staff. Everyone buys coffee and snacks here. The cafeteria, on the other hand, is pretty bad. Although there is a meal for €2.50, the quality is unfortunately such that you don't want to eat there. As a vegetarian option, there is always chickpeas in sauce. If you decide to eat there, you can dine there again in the evening free of charge using your receipt from lunch.

The University library is great! It was donated to ASFA by the Onassis Foundation. The building is great, the selection of books is quite good and the toilets are the cleanest in the whole place! I received that helpful advice from Greek students after a while, as all the other toilets are often under water, cannot be locked and are more reminiscent of a club than a university.

The ASFA cats often play in front of the library and try to purr for food. There is a small square there where you can easily spend your lunch break. Another place for a break is the space behind the cafeteria, where everyone meets every now and then and drinks coffee.

You are being assigned to classes. Some of the professors only speak Greek. But you can change a class if you are dissatisfied or don't speak Greek. There are around 15 classes, most of which focus on painting. I was also in a painting class; we did not have a fixed plenary session. The professor and assistant professor kept going around and if you wanted a conversation you could talk to them. Other classes have plenary sessions twice a week. So what happens in classes varies a lot and depends on the professors.

In general, there is only one female professor (without her own class) at ASFA! I was very surprised and irritated by this. Coming from the HfK in particular, this was a very different basic atmosphere in teaching. In recent years there have been repeated cases of aggressive behaviour by professors towards female students. I have heard again and again from various people that this is a topic that students are dealing with locally and that something is bubbling up and something is happening in Athens as a result of Me-Too. The teaching is very traditional. Drawing and painting are taught in the classic way. There are also workshops for mosaics, bronze casting, marble, etc. If you are interested in these, you can simply go to the respective workshops and talk to the teachers. A little patience and persistence is very helpful here. We did not receive a room plan or name from the leaders. It is best to ask the Greek students about the locations of the classes and workshops. They are all very friendly, helpful and open-minded!

In addition to the painting classes, there are also 2 or 3 "new media" classes.

The administration and coordination for international students is sometimes very chaotic.

Unfortunately, the ASFA offers no Greek course. You can learn the language basics on YouTube or take a private course. However, you can get by well everywhere with English.

You need to apply for the student ID card, it takes quite a long time to get it. I received it a month before I left. So unfortunately you can't do much with it.

City of Athens

Depending on where you live, there are of course different tips. Since I lived in Exarchia and mainly student life took place there, I mainly report on that.

On Saturdays there is a market on the street (Kallidromiou) under Lofos Strefi, the park from which you can clearly see the Acropolis. You can buy fruit and vegetables very cheaply at the market. From 2 p.m. the prices are often additionally reduced.

There are cafes all over the city! You can even have coffee delivered. Caffeine 24/7. Freddo Espresso is great. Mostly pretty strong.

I write down the links from Google to the cafes and restaurants that I often and enjoyed visiting. They vary in price range and location.

<https://goo.gl/maps/681GbnhxQ9DaPrdv8>

<https://g.page/AylakPolitikiKouzina?share>

<https://goo.gl/maps/gGjdSrsXiNL66NVAA>

<https://g.page/rakumel?share>

<https://goo.gl/maps/fELVoo1YEqsX4kqNA>

<https://g.page/valteziana-pizzeria?share>

<https://g.page/Warehouse-Speciality-Blends?share>

<https://goo.gl/maps/ZRhYkTk1RqsW9J2G9>

<https://g.page/LULU-Athens?share>

<https://goo.gl/maps/sTKqHWjkfut3LsNo8>

<https://goo.gl/maps/83Wrp4HxRbNiWEZ77>

<https://goo.gl/maps/UbdRfM13BRJ77urh7>

<https://g.page/tafcoffee?share>

<https://goo.gl/maps/97AG2DCFY9Zwfb3KA>

Of course there are all the sights like the Acropolis, the Archaeological Museum etc. These are worth visiting. Since these are described in more detail in all travel blogs and guides, I'll leave them out here.

It makes sense to ask students about off-spaces and galleries in the area. Just like for parties and flea markets, concerts, etc. Because new places are always opening and everything is in flux.

In any case, it is of course good and exciting to exchange ideas with the people of Athens. Through conversations with them, I gained a broader perspective on Europe and better understood and got to know the period during the economic crisis for Greece. One of the first questions you are asked when you say you come from Germany is: "How do you feel about Merkel?" So the Merkel question becomes a bit of a crucial question and you understand that the austerity measures are affecting society as a whole very much and still have a profound impact on social and private life.

Transportation

At the beginning I bought/applied for a Metro student card. With this you can always top up your credit and travel at a reduced price. You actually have to be under 25 to get the card and you can get it at major metro stations. It's a bit arbitrary who gets them and who doesn't. In general, it often helps to be a bit stubborn and ask twice more to see if there isn't a way. It is often said: no, unfortunately that is not possible. But if you then just remain standing there and ask nicely if something can be done, suddenly there is an opportunity. Taking a taxi is cheap. The "Beat" app is best because it has a predetermined price and you don't have to pay the tourist price all the time. Of course, all taxi drivers are happy to receive tips. They often work 12-16 hours a day to support themselves.

The buses run very irregularly or get stuck in traffic a lot, I almost never used them.

Almost no one rides a bike. The roads are not designed for this.

I would recommend everyone to do an ERASMUS in Athens. The ASFA University wasn't particularly exciting for me in terms of content, and the teaching was often a bit too "old school". But the students are very nice and warm. Good contacts were made and I was able to appreciate the infrastructure and workshops in Bremen even more after my stay at ASFA. Athens is very exciting, there are many gaps and empty spaces that invite you to take part in projects and be active. The range between tradition, ancient myths and modernity is omnipresent and it was very enriching to get a wider view and a different perspective on Europe through my stay in Athens.