

## Study Abroad Story: Isabel Coffey

### Greece

I'm Isabel Coffey. I'm a Classics major with a Creative Writing and Humanities double minor. Last spring, spring of 2018, I was studying abroad in Athens, Greece with the College Year in Athens program. I originally chose to study abroad here because Valpo doesn't offer a lot of the classes I need for my Classics major, so this seemed like a really good option for getting extra Greek and Latin classes I couldn't take here.

And it was [a good option]! But for some reason when I first started looking into studying abroad I didn't really want to go on this program, I was really set on going to Dublin and studying at Trinity College and doing Classics there. Anyway, our study abroad advisors encouraged me to apply to CYA, to do some research and see what it was all about. Eventually, it dawned on me that would mean living in Athens for four months, which would be really awesome. So I decided to go for it. I did my application, got accepted, and as soon as I got there and the jetlag kind of wore off, and the surprise of being in a totally new place where I was totally unfamiliar, I was super glad that I ended up going. It was the perfect fit for me. I met amazing people, both on my program and people living in Greece, and I would not have it any other way.

That's the short version. The long version is so much more. I feel that anyone who has the opportunity should study abroad, because—I don't want to be cliché and say 'it really changes who you are'—but it really broadens your experience with the world and for me it broadened my understanding of myself, who I am, and what's important to me, academically and in my personal life.

The first big thing I noticed when I first got to Greece was that everything is just a lot less intense there. I know this is true throughout Europe, I've heard, but there is a special quality to life in Greece because you live by the water. It's a small country. It's almost like the Midwest of Europe—everyone is so kind and hospitable and open-hearted. Everywhere that I went, whether or not people could speak English (I don't speak modern Greek), they would welcome me into their shops, their homes, show me around, me and my friends. They just made sure we knew where we were, that we felt safe, and were having a good time.

Additionally, everyone's pace and mode of life is slowed down. It's so much more about enjoying the surroundings, enjoying the moment... whenever I would get sick, or someone in my class would get sick, my ancient Greek professor would say, "just take a day off and go to the beach! Sit by the water, take your books, study there. Breathe the sea air." That's how we would get better, that's what she would always tell us. If anyone got sick during a class period, our professors would send us home and encourage us to rest and drink orange juice. The people that owns the coffeeshop downstairs from my apartment would give me orange juice and crackers every time I was sick, and I feel like that epitomizes the philosophy there. You can only do as well on your studies, or in your travels, or in anything you are doing—you can only do as well as you are feeling. If you're not taking care of yourself in whatever capacity that looks like, and if

you're not resting and taking the time to slow down and enjoy, then you're not getting the most out of your life that you can.

It's not to be morbid, like, 'oh, we're all gonna die, we have to enjoy life now.' It's more just, for the Greeks, life is such a beautiful thing. You're by the sea, it's beautiful! The sky! Look at the Parthenon! Everything has the ability to be really wonderful, and you just miss out on it if you don't slow down and just take it in.

I think that's the biggest cultural difference between at least Athens and the small towns in Greece that I visited, between that and here in the United States. Everywhere I've lived, I feel it is much more of an intense, workaholic environment. I came back feeling more like I wanted to do less and get more out of it, instead of trying to do every single thing I am interested in, and everything people expect of me. That's probably the biggest thing I learned about myself and what I want and how I want to live my life.