

# Travel Abroad

## A&M student chronicles adventures in Greece, Turkey

*Editor's Note:* The following story is a Texas A&M student's personal diary of the Texas A&M Greece/Turkey Study Abroad trip during the 1990 Summer first session. The trip was sponsored by the architecture department, and 24 A&M students participated.

By Jeff Kapche  
(Special To The Battalion)

**I**n the day of departure, my giddy anticipation sprung me out of bed and into the kitchen for breakfast. I stared at the box of Raisin Bran, and wondered how the trip would change me.

Three hours, and a soggy bowl of cereal later, it was time to go to the airport. My pending excitement was increased when I heard Madonna's "Vogue" on the radio. This unusual happiness came from the knowledge that it would be the last time I would hear this hideous burnt-out song until I returned.

The nine-hour flight turned out to be quite refreshing with the beautiful Dutch stewardess with an accent that was a cross between South-African and sex. She was kind enough to loan me a music headset that I was forced to return because the pop channel kept playing "Vogue."

### ATHENS, GREECE

Arriving in Europe, I stepped inquisitively onto Greece, hoping to learn truths about Europeans.

I spent the first week of my trip in Athens — where it's not uncommon to see the same billboard advertisement 100 times in one day (just like home) or wait two hours in a restaurant for a good meal. Besides the excessive heat on some occasions, the weather was ideal with clear and sunny days.

The most interesting thing about Athens turned out to be the National Garden, where one can escape the smog-saturated city, and view ponds, fountains and hundreds of cats running loose.

### Acropolis

One can't go to Athens, however, without climbing the Acropolis. Besides the awesome historical temples and structures, like the 5th century Parthenon and the Erechtheum, the view of Athens from the Acropolis is spectacular, even with the smog.

At the Acropolis, I noticed a woman who had made the climb in high heels and a narrow skirt. In the middle of catching her breath, she decided to smoke on this particularly hot day. She then complained about her sore feet, the heat and the rip in her skirt. I entertained thoughts of pushing her over the side for her lack of preparation.

### Mycenae

The next major excursion was a bus ride to Mycenae — the ancient citadel where King Agamemnon of Mycenae, leader of the Greek army, lived around 1200 B.C. and later fought in the Trojan War.

Walking through the Lion's Gate, my mind wandered back in time to when Agamemnon returned after his victory over Troy following the 10 years of battle. The feeling he must have had while walking through the impressive gate to his city again. What grandeur meets the eyes!...

Suddenly, I was brought back to reality when 300 screaming Greek children ran through the Lion's Gate. Questions I had of the erosion of the fortification walls were answered when the children began throwing rocks off the walls at each other. All you need is a few hundred children a month to destroy a historical site.

After leaving Athens, I concluded that you can not trust things you hear about Europe — whether your sources are friends or the media.

I met an Iranian who was extremely friendly to me. It was interesting to get an Iranian perspective on issues and events. I discovered that many Iranians did not hate America, their attitudes were just products of their own government. Then, the Iranian told me something I will always remember.

He said, "My country is run by the government now, and the people are not happy, don't let them (American leaders) take your country like they (Iran's government) took mine."

### Sailing the Greek Islands

The next two weeks of the trip were spent in three rented sailboats led by Greek captains. Our destination was Turkey, but we visited several islands along the way.

On paper, the trip was well

planned, so there was nothing to fear. Still, some people insisted on taking medication for sea sickness. I laughed at those with weak stomachs and vowed not to get sick, even without medication.

After getting sick, I knew the nude beaches on several of the Greek islands would be refreshing after an intense day of sailing on rough waves.

Although parents may disagree, laying out on nude beaches in the Greek islands is the ultimate form of education.

The Greek island of Ios was a college student haven. The clubs and beaches portrayed an eternal spring break, only with more beautiful and cleaner surroundings.

Unfortunately, most of the clubs I ventured in played exactly what I hoped Europe would help me avoid — that fascist song "Vogue."

Overall, the Greek islands were beautiful, but very hard to compare because each had its own feel and character. However, there were many overwhelming moments of sunsets, black-sand beaches (island of Santorini), ancient ruins (island of Rhodes) and simple, peaceful lifestyles on the smaller islands.

The experience of learning to sail a boat along with the occasional water balloon fight yielded a rewarding sail of the Aegean Sea.

### Turkey

I spent the last 10 days of the trip in Turkey. After being reminded of the movie "Midnight Express" — based on a true story about the horrors of Turkish prisons — I decided to declare all my possessions at customs in Bodrum, our first stop.

One of the main attractions in Bodrum is the Underwater Archaeology Museum — converted from an old Christian castle.

Dr. Frederick vanDoorninck, professor from Texas A&M, has been working there for the past 14 years on restoring a shipwreck of Syrian glass that is 1,000 years old.

Sheila Matthews, an A&M graduate, works with vanDoorninck for the Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

The "glass wreck" that Dr. vanDoorninck and Matthews are restoring was open for exhibition when our group was there. We were



Photo by Jeff Kapche

The eastern view of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis is located in Athens, Greece.

the first non-archaeologists to view the exhibit.

Matthews explained that preparation for the exhibit was so time consuming because the preservation of the wood and documentation of the glass requires a lot of research and processing. The antiquity of the wreck and the years spent on restoration undoubtedly made the exhibition a highlight of my trip, and I never encountered any "Midnight Express" horrors.

### The Seven Wonders Of The World

On the way to Istanbul, I had an opportunity to see three of the seven ancient wonders of the world.

Unfortunately, my eagerness turned to apathy when I visited the Colossus of Rhodes, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (in Bodrum) because they no longer existed. I still got pictures of the rubble anyway.

### Istanbul

Istanbul is a city that borders Europe and Asia, and its pollution is comparable to Athens. Not only

does Istanbul have smog like Athens, but it has dilapidated factories along the harbor and filthy air from the smell of sulfur and coal.

Unfortunately, the sunny sailboating days were left behind, and the last week in Istanbul was filled with gloomy, overcast days.

Still, other things peaked my interest. The "Call To Prayer" of the Islam religion is strange when first heard, and it's played on loudspeakers throughout the city.

The "Call To Prayer" is a reading for the "Koran" — the sacred book of Islam. It can be heard at any hour of the day because of the religion's strict guidelines on when to pray.

### Mosques

The beauty of Istanbul is found in the mosques — where Moslems pray. The towering minarets and huge domed ceilings are impressive places to congregate for the "Call To Prayer."

Fortunately, by following a few clothing rules — remove shoes before entering and don't wear any clothes that show the legs — one may venture inside a mosque during

the day, providing there is not a "Call To Prayer."

Upon entering the Blue Mosque, which is the largest in the city, I noticed that some Moslems pray when there's not a "Call To Prayer," and unfortunately, they're surrounded by thoughtless tourists.

I felt sick when I saw an American tourist walk between a praying Moslem man and the alter — just to take a picture of the Moslem. Despite the interrupted prayer, the thoughtless tourist was ashamed at himself only for not having taken the picture at a better angle.

After Istanbul, the study abroad trip was over, and I said goodbye to the environmental design and architecture majors I had fun with for the past month. I then traveled to other parts of Europe, which is a novel in itself.

### Coming Home

After making it home safe, the first thing I did was sleep. When I finally arose the next morning, I walked the unforgettable path, as a drunk would, into the kitchen for breakfast. I sat down with the same bowl of cereal in front of me, and stared at the same box of Raisin Bran, but I knew it was not the same person sitting there.

I learned on this trip that one gains understanding when visiting other countries. It's important to realize that differences between the people of the world is only skin deep. People of other countries have hopes, dreams, and desires — just like Americans.

Anyone traveling in a foreign land should remember to go with an open mind. Tasting different cultures and foods like tasting life.

In conclusion, develop your own opinions by experiencing different lifestyles yourself and learn the truth about what is out there instead of having it fed to you by friends or the media.

Later that day, I noticed that MTV was having a Madonnathon, or 24 hours of Madonna videos. The announcer told me they would play all my favorite Madonna videos, including that big European hit... well, you know.

My thanks to Dr. Charles White and professor Weston Harper — both worked hard on putting this successful trip together.

Jeff Kapche is a senior journalism major from Houston.



A&M students hoist the Aggie flag while sailing on the Aegean Sea during a tour of the Greek islands.



Photos By Jeff Kapche

This view from a Greek Orthodox church on the Greek island of Santorini was one of the many highlights of touring the Greek islands. A volcanic eruption created the harbor.

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