

Erasmus Broadening Horizons

Gillian Murray

Worked in Cyprus

Host University: Cyprus
University of
Technology, Cyprus

Student of Nursing

“As clichéd as this may sound, Erasmus was the best time of my life.”



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Nursing in Cyprus: overcoming the language barrier.

Working in a Cypriot hospital with a limited knowledge of Greek would be a challenging situation for most people. Gillian Murray, a nursing student from Glasgow, explains how Erasmus helped her overcome the language barrier and feel like one of the locals.

In the summer of 2012 I jetted off with my best friend, and fellow nursing student, to the beautiful island of Cyprus. I still remember the buzz of meeting at Glasgow airport, laden with suitcases and a healthy amount of nerves.

When we arrived, we knew we were in paradise by the rush of hot air, the beaming sun and the sound of the waves. Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) helped us settle into our apartment and showed us around the amazing city of Limassol, our new home.

We had the next couple of days to relax and familiarise ourselves with the area before commencing our nursing placement in the hospital. Being the first nursing students from Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) to go on an exchange to CUT, we knew we were ambassadors of our university and to nursing students back home.

On arrival at the hospital, we were greeted by friendly staff and a mentor from CUT who happily showed us around the departments and introduced us to members of the nursing and medical staff. We were shown the ward where we would be working and after some orientation we began to help with caring for the patients.

What became evident very quickly was that although the majority of the staff had a good understanding of English, many of the patients did not. Immediately I felt guilty about my limited Greek and, although staff assisted in translating, I felt that it was my duty as a nurse to understand my patients' needs. I realised that I had taken having English as my first language for granted and I regretted not learning more Greek before arriving.

With those thoughts in mind, I was really looking forward to the Erasmus Intensive Language Course (EILC) which CUT had arranged for us. Throughout the next four weeks our teacher, Costas, took us through the basics of Greek, then onto more complex grammar. In Scotland my high school did not make taking a language subject compulsory and so learning a new language from scratch was challenging.

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Costas was excellent and explained words and phrases in scenarios which we could use in everyday life. We also met other Erasmus students and travelled all over Cyprus, visiting temples, amphitheatres, monasteries, markets and mountains; all whilst incorporating our learning and conversing with locals.

After the course I returned to my placement in the Cypriot hospital where I used my new language skills. I now understood essential requests, like when a patient needed some water, pain relief or to sit up in bed. I even started to teach some patients a few Scottish words. People were so happy when I spoke to them in Greek and I went so brown they often mistook me for a local. Yes, Scottish people can tan!

On return to Scotland I felt like a new person. Glasgow is particularly diverse, and in the hospital where I work, I regularly come into contact with patients whose first language is not English. In particular I have found my non-verbal communication skills have improved from the time I worked in the Greek hospital, prior to learning the language. I have even met a few Greek patients who me.

“Although I have mainly focused on the language side of Erasmus, the whole experience was truly amazing.”



Beach heart-©-Susan Buchan

It gives me great pride to say that earlier this year I was offered a place for the MSc in Public Health/Environmental Health at both GCU and CUT, achieving a fully paid scholarship at GCU. Throughout my interviews and application, my Erasmus experience shined through. It has had an impact on every part of my life, both personally and professionally, and my enthusiasm for it was evident in every interview and personal statement. Without it, I would not be where I am today.

Although I have mainly focused on the language side of Erasmus, the whole experience was truly amazing. Living independently; making new friends all over the world; learning to budget; understanding health issues in another country; learning new nursing techniques; immersing yourself in a new culture... I could honestly go on for days.

At the end of my time in Cyprus I felt like a real local! I will never forget the day I had to leave my Erasmus family, my new brothers and sisters, but one year on and we are still as close as ever. To anyone reading this that hasn't been on Erasmus - DO IT! It will be the best experience of your life.