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Wallenberg Competition Studio  
Travel Award 2007  
Response Paper 07-01-08

I would like to start by saying thank you so much for this amazing opportunity. I am so honored to have participated in the Wallenberg studio competition and will be forever grateful to those who have made this award possible.



### **Trip Schedule**

May 10: 8 hours in Zurich  
May 10-12: Athens, Greece  
May 13-16: Oia, Santorini  
May 17-18: Athens, Greece

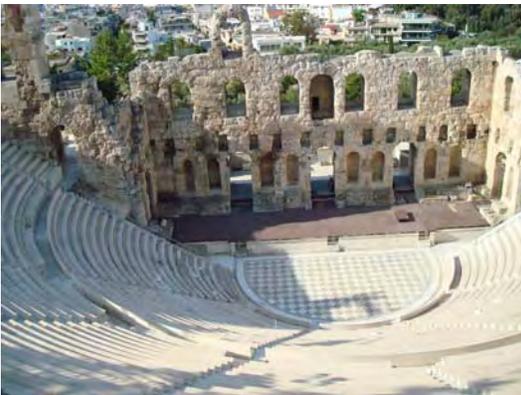
### **Zurich**

My good friend, Elise, and I arrived in Zurich around 10am and had 8 hours to explore before our flight to Athens. We took the train downtown and spent the day there. Zurich was beautiful. It was incredibly clean and very colorful. Almost all of the buildings we saw were picture perfect and there were endless amounts of passageways to go through. We were able to make our way around both sides of the river. It was a beautiful day so we took a nap in a park to catch up on some lost hours of sleep and headed back to the airport shortly after.

### **Athens**

Athens was by far my favorite part of the trip. We arrived at the airport around midnight and when I asked the man at the information desk if it was safe to walk from the bus to our hotel instead of taking a taxi, he looked at me as if he had no clue why it wouldn't be safe (I'm from Chicago). From the moment we stepped foot off the bus, people were nothing but friendly and helpful and the sights were nothing short of stunning. When I saw the Acropolis for the first time, glowing so grand in the dark sky, I was beaming.

We were lucky enough to stay in a hotel that had a rooftop breakfast with a view of the Acropolis. It was unreal to be able to walk out of the hotel and step into ancient Roman ruins.



A wonderfully overwhelming presence of history, culture and beauty encompassed every part of the city. We spent the day finding our way around and taking it all in. We also visited the Benaki Museum where we saw some amazing ancient gold leaf jewelry and pottery. The following day, we woke up early to go to the Acropolis – something I'd only dreamt of doing.

We wound our way up past the two theaters and the Temple of Athena Nike. By the time we approached the Propylaea, I not only saw but felt the enormity and importance of where I was...

The Parthenon was phenomenal. Not even the towers of scaffolding could take away from its power and its beauty. The morning light filled it in a way that made it glow the color of honey. It was great to see all of the reconstruction that was taking place. I felt very fortunate to be witnessing such a major undertaking.

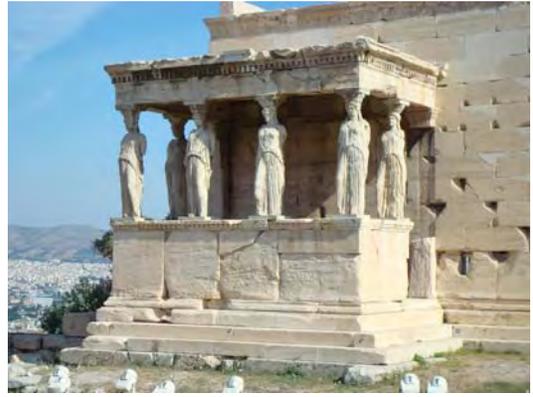
The Erechtheion was also very beautiful. I was excited to see the female figure columns that I had seen in so many books (even though they weren't the originals).

We made our way down and past Hadrian's Arch on our way to the Temple of Olympian Zeus. The temple was spectacular. To one side was a column that had fallen and you could see every individual segment lying on the ground just as it had fell. I couldn't have asked for a bluer sky to provide the perfect backdrop for all of the sights that day.

Our final stop before heading to Piraeus port to catch the ferry was the Ancient Greek Agora.

We wandered through the restored Stoa of Attalus II looking at all of the gorgeous sculpture and pottery on display. We walked up the hill to the Temple of Hephaistos which was once again- a classically beautiful structure. Looking out from the top of the Ancient Agora was another stunning view of the Acropolis – Rising high above the Athens, looking down upon its people.

We took the train to Piraeus and got on an overnight ferry to Santorini.









We arrived in Santorini just before sunrise and took a taxi to our apartment in Oia. The driver stopped at one point to show us that we could see both sides of the Island from that particular spot. Santorini couldn't be prettier.

Once again, we were very lucky to have found an amazing affordable place to stay with the greatest owner ever. He let us into an apartment at 6am and took great care of us for the rest of our trip. We decided to take a walk around the island before the cruise ship tourists arrived. It was the best time to explore- there were no pedestrians in sight with the exception of the garbage donkey and man (which was a sight in itself). The whitewashed buildings were shining in the early morning sun and the views were calming but breathtaking.

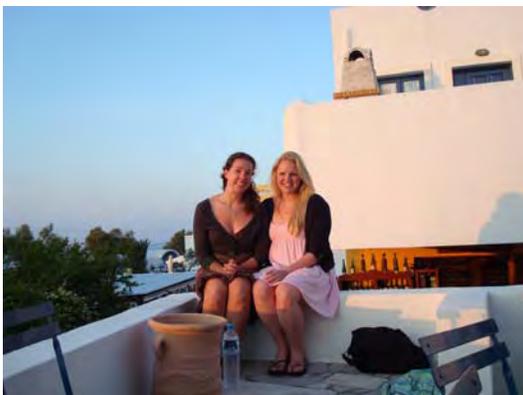
Unlike Athen's, which was filled with locals and tourists alike, Oia was swarming with tourists for a good part of the day. However, the great part about that was running into people from Michigan and Chicago. One of the guests at our apartments was even a retired professor from U of M. We met some really wonderful people where we were staying and spent a couple nights cooking dinner together on a small grill outside while watching the sunset (Oia is well known for it's sunsets).

We went on a sailboat excursion to the Caldera and felt the heat under our feet when walking on the volcano, we swam in the hot springs and had lunch on a small fishing Island nearby.

We rented an ATV and drove about an hour to the opposite end of the Island to find the one and only Red Sand Beach. We also swam at the black sand beaches.

The architecture was so unique. The whitewash of the buildings took on so many different hues throughout the day- Shining in the morning, almost blinding mid-day and soft golden in the evening.

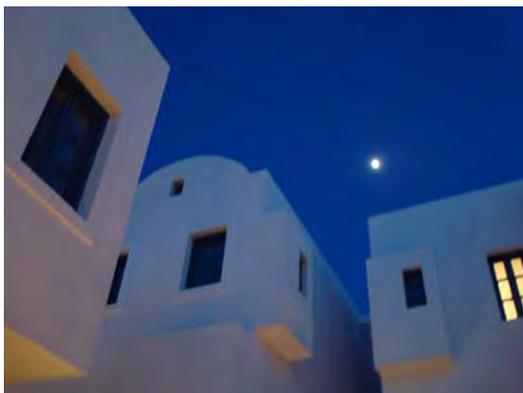
Santorini was incredible but I was very excited to spend the last day of the trip in Athens.



On our last day (in Athens), we strolled through the National Gardens and caught the changing of the guards. A chatty cab driver had jumped out to show his passenger and narrated the whole process to us. It was perfect. We were able to see a great deal of things in a fairly short amount of time.

Overall, my trip was incredible. It was everything I had hoped it would be and more. The architecture was moving, the art was elaborate and the locals were happy and welcoming.

Once again, thank you for providing me with this opportunity. I will always remember this trip with great pride in knowing how I got there.



-Lauren Hepner