

Tips for Living and Doing Fieldwork on the Greek Islands.

Collective advise from US students doing research there.

1. Before you go

- a. You may not have Internet for where you stay. However, you can readily access to Internet if you go to some restaurants or cafés in Hora and other big villages. You may want to download any big files you need before you go.
- b. Note from Anat: You may eventually decide to buy a router stick (you can buy them in country and after you purchase minutes and download the necessary driver from the internet you can check [in theory at least] you email/surf the web anywhere there is cell phone cover). We didn't think this would be a huge deal so we didn't, but about halfway through the summer I started wishing we had from the beginning. (*Note from Johannes: I used to do this, but it is so excruciatingly slow that I gave up on it. Internet seems to be fast enough for anything but live streaming etc.*)
- c. Coordinate the fieldwork with the other members of your research team. Cooperation will be super helpful for you. You need to estimate how much time you need and when you need to do certain things. From my point of view, it is better to divide the time on weekly base, like Monday and Tuesday we will help A and Wed, Thu for B... It is not wise to say let's help A to finish all of their data collection before helping B and C as time run out and B or C are suddenly left without their data. So discuss your work with Johannes, and have several group meetings with your partners to make a rough fieldwork schedule. Even though planning will never be able to anticipate everything, planning is still always better than no planning.
- d. Discuss how you may share costs with your team members. Sharing resources and costs (e.g. housing transportation etc.) is a great way to save money.
- e. Bring some interesting readings with you. When you go to small islets, you may have nothing to do during midday heat because lizards hide and rest. So you may need something to kill time on the Greek islands.

2. Clothes

- a. It is a little bit of chilly during May and early June, especially in the morning and night. Bring a shell (e.g. a thin windbreaker jacket, I got a pretty cheap one at Target and it compresses into almost nothing in your daypack) and fleece with you for these days. Also you will need at least one thin light-colored long sleeve shirt for when you are in field. It can help you stay out of the strong

sunshine. If you have light-sensitive skin consider a UV-blocking brand like Solumbra.

- b. Shoes: bring along sturdy walking shoes (heavy duty hiking boots are almost certainly overkill). Also a pair of Tevas or the like for walking on the beach or wading through water.
- c. Prepare a big hat in the US or buy one when you are in Greece. (they are not expensive there). You may want to bring sunscreen with you - though the European brands available on the island are superior to the US stuff (Anthelios is the best though expensive). The sun is extremely strong there.
- d. Sunglasses blocking UV rays are highly recommended.
- e. Field pants: if you work in the native vegetation, you will need sturdy pants like blue jeans for protection from thorns. Don't even think about tights!

3. Lodging

- ~~a. Get an estimate how much electricity, hot water will cost before you rent a house. The host charged us for additional fee just for turning on hot water.~~
- ~~b. Choose a convenient place to live. If your study sites are on Naxos and far in the east of the island, it may be better to choose a place close to your site. It will save your time and gas cost for daily fieldwork even though it means that you are stuck living in a village. However, if you have to spend most of your time on other islets, it is best to choose a place in downtown Hora. There are some other villages such as Ag. Anna where you can find boats, but in Hora you can find the cheapest grocery stores, restaurant and ferry to other islands. Anyway, much depends where your sites are!~~
- c. Make an effort to get along well with your neighbors even if that means bending backwards to accommodate them. Knowing who of the locals are English-speaking can be super useful in cases where things need to be negotiated/clarified or you need help.

4. Food

- a. Use the big supermarket in Naxos Chora (Koutelieris) which has a large selection of foods and things tend to be cheap. Turn left when you pass the hospital in Hora as you drive to the port. You will find this supermarket on your left. However, they are CLOSED on SUNDAY!!!!!! Prepare some food on Saturday and don't starve to death ☺
- b. If you are a coffee lover as I am, do buy a Greek coffee pot and make Greek coffee every morning. Good start for a new day! Also, you should not miss Greek yogurt! Mix it with honey and walnuts and cinnamon, and you get everything you need to start your work.
- c. There is also a grocery store that opens on Sunday. When you drive to the port and pass the hospital, the grocery store is about 50

meters ahead on your left. They have some vegetables and fruits selling outside the store. You will not miss it.

- d. If you need ice for your fieldwork or experiment, you can go to the fish shop which is around 30 meters away from the grocery in b, in the direction away from port. It is free when I went to ask them for it.
- e. There are some bakeries in Hora. However, if you do not have time to go to Hora and need breakfast or lunch, you can find a bakery in Vivlos, Kinidaros and Halkio. Do remember ask Johannes to show you where the bakery is in Halkio. The spinach cheese pie is so delicious, big and cheap that I have been already missing it. Vivlos's one is the second best and Kinidaros one is the last choice.

5. Vehicles

- a. Before you get to Greece, practice driving stick shift. It is the norm in the country and automatic transmission vehicles are rare or unavailable in many rental car agencies. Even if available they will be significantly more expensive.
- b. If you rent a vehicle, while mopeds (little 50cc motorcycles) are cheaper, cars are more safe and as such should be preferred. In either case make sure you also buy proper insurance – the strong preference is to buy one that is more expensive but more comprehensive.
- c. If you *must* rent a moped, make sure to always wear your helmet. Although mopeds don't travel fast (not needed on the small islands anyway) they are notoriously prone to wipe-outs on uneven pavement. Go slow, especially in turns! Beware of gravel on pavement, which, if you need to lean into a turn, can cause a wipe-out easily. Typical problems arise when you try to break quickly to avoid a unexpected obstacle (e.g. a wandering donkey!) behind a blind turn. Always break using your rear break. A possible, more stable alternative to mopeds are 4 wheel all-terrain vehicles although they tend to be slow. When using them go very slow into turns. They look deceptively stable but can be dangerous.
- d. Drive slow and conservatively when on the islands and look out for other cars. Streets are narrow, have lots of sharp turns and are often full of potholes or completely unpaved. Don't assume that other people will be driving slowly or even responsibly. Honk your horn as you approach blind turns, especially in mountain areas. Expect to have to break very quickly. Typical situations involve flocks of sheep that materialize unexpectedly behind blind turns or pickup trucks having stopped in the middle of street so the owner can chat with a friend. In Hora, car density is quite high, the streets are narrow and pedestrians think that they own the road. Drive slowly, and defensively – you don't want to get involved in an accident, even if it not your fault. Don't assume people drive and park like in the US.

- e. Be careful when you drive a moped in rainy days. It is slippery especially when you turn. It is exceptionally slippery when it rains for the first time in a while, as the rain mixes with the accumulated oil on the road surface to create a dangerous surface slick.
- f. If against all expectations, you do get into an accident call Johannes or the car rental company immediately.
- g. Park your car or vehicles in the legal parking spot in Hora. Police are never tired of giving tickets.
- h. The cheapest gas station according to my personal observations, is on the way when you drive to Angidia. It is closed to the first major fork in the road when you drive from Hora to Angidia (remember to keep driving on the left road). The gas station is about 200 meters when you pass that intersection.
- i. Oil. Except for gasoline, you need to pay for the oil as well. If you want to save money, don't let the people who rent your car help you to refill it. It is much more expensive than you buy the oil from gas station or other stores.

6. Weather

- a. The best period for herpetology field work in the Aegean are the months of late April to mid June in the transition period from the cool and wet spring to the dry and windy summer. This transition occurs at a slightly different time each year and there is always a chance to be stuck in early May on the islands with rain (and no lizards). However, it is better to have to wait for the delayed good weather to show up, rather than missing your window of opportunity and having to try to get your samples in an increasingly hot, dry and windy summer.
- b. Lizards are hard to find during hot or windy weather. Johannes will probably tell you about the dual peaks of their daily activity patterns. If you need to catch lizards, be quick to do your fieldwork in May and June, you will be more efficient in time and money. Moreover, starting in mid June, the Aegean Sea tends to be very windy (the *meltemi* winds). When I was working on Naxos in mid July, I was so desperate because the wind was making the lizards hide away, while the staff in the windsurfing club were laughing and telling me they were making a lot of money because of the same wind. I once had to wait stuck on an island for 4 hours because of windy conditions while they were busy teaching windsurfing to happy tourists. It is WINDSURFING SEASON in July because it is windy! Do not try to herp in windsurfing season!
- c. If it is windy for the next few days, it may best to stay at home, input your data or take a mini-vacation. It is definitely worth planning your research travel around the middle-term weather prognosis. These are the best weather websites:

Poseidon:

http://www.poseidon.hcmr.gr/weather_forecast.php?area_id=gr

Windguru:

<http://www.windguru.cz/int/index.php?sc=36>

Meteo:

http://www.meteo.gr/cf.asp?city_id=17

And this is for ferries:

Opensea: <http://www.openseas.gr/openseas/index.html>

- d. If you temporarily need to hold lizards where you live, remember to check the weather. Lizards depend on external conditions to regulate their thermal condition. So first make sure they can get some sunshine everyday. Second, Use newspaper or books to ALWAYS create some shade for them and change the location and facing as sun moves. They can overheat and die within minutes when exposed to the full sun.

7. Others

- a. Usually if you only stay on Naxos and travel among nearby islands, your plans are going to be influenced by strikes (a frequent reality of life in Greece). However, if you need something from or to Athens, you should pay attention to ferry, taxi or other strikes.
- b. www.booking.com is better to book a hotel in Europe than the website we usually use in the US.
- c. If you need to stay in a hotel in Naxos town, Coronis (<http://www.hotelcoronis.gr/>) on the harbor waterfront is a very good option. Note however, that you can rent a room somewhere in town for a bit less. You can book directly by calling or through their website.
- d. Bring a big water bottle if you need a lot of water in the field.
Note from Anat: I usually brought at least one huge water bottle, if not two for just one afternoon or morning in the field! When you go out to the small islands especially if you stay overnight, bring at least twice as much water as you expect to need. It gets really hot out there, and we ran out before our boat came. I had to ask the boat driver to bring bottles of water for us when he came to get us!
- e. Greek people are friendly and willing to help and talk. Learn some basic words and sentence will be very helpful.

Hope you will enjoy the time and get as much as you need from this field season!

By Binbin Li
Feb 1st 2012

Additions by Caitlin Weber

1. Create a very detailed supply list before you go to Greece. It will be difficult to find certain items (particularly research equipment such as vials, tape measures etc.) on the islands and expensive to order them. Certain items common in the US may be in short supply. I personally probably bought the entire supply of ziplock

bags on the island of Naxos ☺ Also consider that for bulky or heavy materials you may be better off buying it in Athens than checking additional luggage and paying fees at the airport. Just make sure it is actually readily available!

2. Get an international Drivers license! Nobody will rent you a car without it. I also had trouble using my AMX card as a hold on car rentals. Some companies won't require a credit card at all though. Always check the car before you take it off the lot. Typically it will be on an empty tank. Make sure you get to a gas station BEFORE you go into the field. Gas stations are closed in the early mornings, evenings and some even on Sundays.

3. PNC bank offers an account option that is great for storing your grant funding as there is no withdrawal fee at an international ATM. I recommend setting this up before your travel. There is a minimum balance for such an account so keep that in mind when opening it.

4. Keep track of ALL expenses. This will help you from going over your grant \$\$ and also be useful if the University ever asks where their money went.

5. Drive safely as Binbin said, if you don't know how to drive stick but have an opportunity to learn, I would advise you do so.

6. Coordinate field schedules with your fellow grad students.

7. Always plan ahead! Things tend to take longer than planned particularly if your language skills are not great. You'll want to be prepared for bumps in the road. Prioritize your work and think about logistics.

8. Bring long, lightweight pants, sunscreen, a hat, and light long-sleeved shirts for working in the field. This is going to be particularly important if you plan to be trudging about the fields of Naxos. If you plan to be out in Naxos pastures a LOT you should talk to Johannes and find out where he got those sweet half chaps he had last summer. Also be prepared to wash clothes in the sink. Consider bringing fewer, quick drying items. Check out www.campmor.com if you're short on outdoor gear.

9. Be prepared to talk to people! If you are doing work on Naxos it is very likely that people are going to be curious about what you are doing. Consider avoiding showing off reptiles you find because it may or may not be well received... but do be friendly and let them know what you are doing. Everyone we encountered was very nice—just curious.

10. Don't flush toilet paper... ..toilets are smaller than the us and not designed for large amounts of waste.

11. Expect to only have internet at cafes.

12. When it is time to leave the island, figure out what needs to be packed up and stored early on to avoid a last minute rush.

13. Enter and back up your data every day. Keep a log of detailed field notes typed and organized, you never know when this will come in handy.

14. Bring a couple water bottles, day pack .

Important health and safety additions

There are a number of things that can potentially cause trouble on the islands. Be aware and avoid these:

1. Drowning (next to vehicular accidents the most dangerous situation).
Even though the Mediterranean is warm and quite salty (making you float

easily) you can still drown in it. Be careful! If you don't know how to swim talk to Johannes and avoid travelling in fishing boats. Watch out for hypothermia after staying too long in the cold water.

2. Other dangers of the sea include sea urchins (don't step on them, or more importantly look what you step onto under water in rocky areas!) and jelly fish (generally not a problem but generally it is a good idea to avoid touching their tentacles).
3. Sunburn and (rarely) sunstroke. They strike generally early on in the field season before you learn to respect the sun. Especially if you have a fair complexion use sunscreen - or even better - physical barriers (hat, sunglasses, long-sleeved shirts and long pants). There is a reason why locals wear long pants! Everyone has different limits but the midday sun (11am-3pm) tends to be the most dangerous. If – against all expectations - you do get sunburned, and end up laying in bed at night in misery consider applying cold yogurt.
4. Snakes. This is an obvious one: unless you have to do so specifically for your research, you have no business handling nose-horned vipers (the only dangerous species in the Cyclades). If you do see one, just avoid it, they are not aggressive. If you do get bitten, go to the health center. You will probably be in a fair amount of pain, but ultimately there are rarely any long-term consequences and certainly no fatalities (especially from the dwarf island form). Still, don't mess with vipers!
5. If you do have an accident of any sort, go to the health center in Chora. The doctors there speak English and emergency medical care is free. In case there are any costs you may have to front them but your university travel insurance will cover them. Keep all receipts.
6. Last but not least: Alcohol. Be mature and responsible! Remember that you are representing the research group, the university and your home country and any kind of infraction reflects badly on all.

Additions by Wan-Chih Cheng 04/02/2013

Clothes

1. Prepare one or two pairs of sturdy shoes (e.g., hiking shoes or boots) if you need to go to the field and walk around your study plots for the whole day everyday. There are loose rocks in many areas on the islands, and some slopes in Naxos are steep, a good pair of shoes that fit your feet well will make your fieldwork a lot easier and happier.
2. A long sleeve but lightweight shirt is a good investment due to the blazing sun. A hat and a pair of sunglasses are helpful doing fieldwork, and also sunglasses are necessary when you have to drive in the morning and during the sunset.
3. If you need to go into those spiny bushes very often, a pair of *very* thick or puncture-proof pants (I don't know if this thing really exists :p) will be your best friend. Regular jeans may not be enough to protect you, make sure that you bring something that can protect you from those needle-like plants, for example a pair of half chaps that can cover your legs and thighs. Last summer I wore my winter jeans to the field in Naxos, I still got A LOT

of scratches on my legs from the spiny plants. I also wore half chaps sometimes, and it did help, but remember to check the thickness of the chaps when you buy it. Greece is very hot, even though I was wearing a relatively thin half chaps, I can still feel my lower body is burning and sweating like raining.

4. Letting the laundry shop take care of your dirty clothes may be expensive and not efficient since people in Naxos live at a slow pace. If you choose to hand wash your clothes (which we did last summer), you will need to take more effort when you try to wash out the never-go-away dirt from your jeans. But we are doing fieldwork!!! I am sure you can live with dirty jeans or pants for the whole summer. Dry-fit clothing will be helpful when the sun is sucking all the water from your body, and it dries out really fast after you hand wash it. Due to the high heat and direct sunshine, your hand-washed clothes will be dry in one day.

Equipment

1. Start preparing your equipment three or four weeks prior to your departure. I bought most of my equipment from Forestry Suppliers, and it took five days to be delivered after ordering online, so just give yourself plenty of time to have chances to modify your equipment list.
2. Equipment you think is common in the U.S. might not be found in Naxos, for example, an insect net or big rubber band. Athens is five-hour ferry away from Naxos, so don't expect you can get your equipment conveniently from the big city. If you are not sure whether a thing you need is sold in Naxos or not, feel free to ask.
3. The Greek electricity grid runs on 220V which means that you should check that all electrical devices you bring along operate properly. Most do (e.g. laptops), but confirm by reading the fine print of the electrical specifications (generally printed *on* the device. If you don't, and you are unlucky, you may have the scary and dangerous experience a friend had, watching her hair dryer blow up a few nanoseconds after it was plugged in. You should also bring along at least one (potentially 2-3) plug adapters, although you should still be able to purchase them locally.

Fieldwork and Experiments

1. Invest in a sturdy field notebook. Take copious and careful notes of what you do in your research. Write your name and your contact information in the front in case you lose it. You will be surprised how many things that you thought will never escape your memory, slowly, inexorably fade away. Paper does not forget! Write your notes clearly and in a way that somebody else may still understand it. Make regular back-up photocopies (a cheaper alternative may be to take digital photographs of each page). Make sure to enter the relevant data in your computer daily. It will be less work and you will not lose too many data (like many graduate students before you) if you lose your notebook. Email your entered files periodically to yourself so they get backed-up on the university servers and the cloud.

2. Remember to take photos of what you do and what might clarify your experiments, for example, clear photos of the flower species you focus on, or your study plots, or the contents of your bug pitfall traps, or even photos that have you in it standing next to a goat (maybe this is a bad example :p). Taking pictures of yourself doing various parts of your research will also going to be key for future research presentations you will certainly have to give.
3. Night in Naxos is humid, so if you dry your samples collected from the field under the sun, please take them back into the house after sunset to avoid getting moist again. However, if it is really inconvenient for you to have your samples back in the house, just give it more days to dry, so plan your schedule carefully. For example, I put my 50+ bags of bulky vegetation biomass on the rooftop of our house, and they were on the rooftop for about two weeks until they dried.
4. There are many days in Naxos that are windy, and the situation becomes worse toward the end of summer. Think through your experiments and schedule by leaving ample of available time. No-wind days are precious!
5. Not all the things will go as smoothly as you think. As a matter of fact things *will go wrong* on way or the other – this is the nature of fieldwork! Just be open-minded and be ready to face challenges. BE FLEXIBLE and ready to modify your methods, your fieldwork schedule, or even your sleeping time! Keep reserves (of time and other resources) in case something goes wrong.
6. You might feel stressed much of your field season, as most of us were. Remember things have a way of working themselves out in the end. Maybe you can skip your data-entering schedule and go to a nice beach to relax on a windy day which you can't do your fieldwork. (Hope Johannes doesn't see this suggestion... :-)
7. If your fieldwork includes interviews of local people, make sure to schedule ample time to finish it. Naxos people rest a lot, and they are not going to be in the field/available for you most of the time. Overall there is often surprisingly little time that is appropriate to find people to chat.

Others

1. Keep track of the shared expenses, like rent, electricity bills, and equipment shared among lab members. Because there will be lots of things more important than the money that will be on your mind, if you don't record this in detail at the time it happens, you will soon forget how much you paid a week ago, even if it happened to be a big amount (like house rent!).

List (non-complete) of useful items to take with you to the islands

Fleece (important early in the season and on windy days)
Shell jacket (important early in the season and on windy days)
Rainpants (*if* you will travel in a zodiac between islands)
Broad-rimmed hat (can be bought cheaply on the islands)
Sunscreen (can be bought on the islands)

Sunglasses
Bandana

Flashlight (headlamps work particularly well)
1 pair Sandals
1 pair of light hiking shoes
Swimming attire
Camera and binoculars
Notebook and writing utensils
A couple of good books to read
Cell phone and charger (compatible in Europe?)
Adapter
Swiss army knife (if so, don't take it in your carry-on)
Daypack
Laptop