

## TRAVELING WITH THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY ALUMNI TRAVEL PROGRAM

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**Athens, Greece and the Greek Islands of Poros, Hydra, and Aegina. Come travel with the Boston University Alumni Travel Program.**

I remember when the brochure arrived. For a moment I was tempted, but then the "yes buts" set in. "But we've already planned our vacation this year. But October (when the trip was scheduled) is such a beautiful time in New England. But we can go another time and besides I've been there before." Before was 35 years ago—the year I graduated from college.

And so I didn't give the trip another thought—at least not for a few days. Then a second brochure arrived. The photos were the same. The dates were the same. The itinerary was the same. The only thing that was different was the name of the college: "Come travel with the Boston University Alumni Travel Program." My undergraduate school, Simmons College, and my graduate university, Boston University, were teaming up for a travel adventure. The first go round it was easy to pass on the brochure. When the second arrived, it felt like someone—or some alma maters—were telling me something. Thankfully, I listened.

As our October 1 departure date approached, materials about the trip began to arrive. There was information about our hotels, our schedule, the lectures we would attend. But perhaps the information that most piqued my curiosity was the list of participants. There were forty travelers and they were listed by school affiliation and place of residence. The BU grads were also listed by year of graduation. I looked over the list and wondered who our fellow travelers were. Of the thousands who received

the mailing, many, like me, had initially said to themselves, "looks good" and put it in the trash. Others may have held on to it, considered going and then had reasons not to go. Perhaps there were some "two-fers" like me, who didn't get the message until the second brochure arrived. And then there were those who probably took one look and said, "Go for it."

Not surprisingly, they were a spunky crew. The group included several people who had graduated college in the 40's and others, a few years younger. Although I had assumed that everyone on the trip was either a BU or Simmons graduate or spouse, there were other family members and friends who recognized a good thing and came along. There was a mother traveling with her two daughters and there were two pairs of sisters traveling together. One woman was traveling abroad for the first time and another had traveled three years in a row with Alumni College abroad. For most of us, it was our first time on a tour, first time participating in an educational travel program, first time traveling with BU or Simmons.

And so off to Greece we went, where some things change, others stay the same and the Greeks have it right on both accords. Athens—dirty, unkempt, noisy Athens—has been transformed into a sparkling clean city, complete with new roads and a subway system that features a small antiquities museum at a nearly every stop. In Athens, you can visit a McDonalds, go to a sushi bar, or shop for designer clothes. The island of Poros, where we spent six of our eight nights, probably remains very much as Henry Miller described it in his 1941 book, *Colossus of Maroussi*, "Coming into Poros gives the illusion of a deep dream. Suddenly the land converges on all sides and the boat is squeezed into a narrow strait from which there seems to be no egress. The men and women of Poros are hanging out of the windows, just above your head. You pull in right under their friendly nostrils as though for a shave and a haircut."

Athens is for going and doing. Poros is for being. We were fortunate that our trip was for both. Book ended by day long visits to Athens, we spent most of our time with Poros as our home base. And what a relaxing, inviting home base it was. We stayed in a friendly, modern hotel, where every room had a balcony overlooking the Aegean. Days were filled with adventures and learning, but when there was free time, there was Poros to enjoy and explore. We could walk across the street to the beach, or hike into the hills behind the hotel past lemon and pomegranate trees. Or we could walk—or ride—into the island's main town, a harbor lined with colorful boats and rows of tavernas (local name for restaurants). The town, which is built on a hillside, climbs up from the harbor, its winding streets hold more tavernas, cheerful tourist shops, fruit, vegetable and fish markets and a few hotels. The townspeople decorate their front gardens with multi-colored hanging gourds and many flowers and no one puts a fence or gate around their entranceway.

Yes, there was time to sit at a local taverna or wander among colorful souvenir shops, but our Alumni Campus Abroad was, as described, "dedicated to lifelong learning." There were daily lectures and educational events, which nearly everyone attended and there were wonderful day trips to the nearby islands of Aegina and Hydra, each extraordinary in its own way, and to the UNESCO world heritage sites at Mycenae and Epidaurus. Whether in the hotel conference room, or on a bus or ferry or hydrofoil boat, we learned about the history of ancient Greece, about ancient Greek civilization, Greek art, cooking and contemporary Greek life. As promised, the alumni campus gave us the opportunity to simultaneously be serious students and playful travelers. Which brings me to what was probably most important to me about the trip: reconnecting with my college and graduate school.

Before the trip, I wondered how BU and “Simmons-y” it would be. This was important to me as I had very positive experiences at both institutions and yet, felt somewhat disconnected from them. I live in Newton, not far from where I was a student, but see the schools only as an occasional visitor. As the trip approached, I found myself longing for more of a connection. To my delight, the trip went a long way towards reconnecting me with the college and university which mean so much to me. Throughout the week, there were many conversations that brought back wonderful memories of both Simmons and BU.

Although I had somehow assumed that all the other BU travelers would have attended the university as undergraduates, I was delighted to find two other School of Social Work alums on the trip. Maurie Davidson was in the class of '67 and Nancy Flynn, class of 90. Similarly, other graduate schools were represented. Robert Abrams, LAW '71 (and CAS '68) and both Bob Eaton, '67, and Skip Crocker, '56, were from the School of Management. But regardless of what part of BU's diverse landscape they hailed from, people were interesting, friendly, eager to connect and to expand their horizons.

There were also conversations and experiences that helped me—and others—look forward, contemplating where our alma maters are headed. Perhaps the most meaningful BU experience of the trip came on the last night. We were in Athens and those of us who attended BU were invited to a BU reception. When I saw the invitation, I assumed that it was for the BU alums on the trip. Little did I know that there are approximately 500 BU alumni living in Greece and many of them would be attending the reception. I did not know, also, that the guest of honor at the reception would be a BU graduate who is now a member of the Athens City Council. Standing there, in a large ballroom and listening to Councilwoman Yvette Jarvis speak about her

experience, first as a young African American woman from New York who went to BU on a basketball scholarship and later, as an American making her way in Greek society, I was so proud to be part of the Boston University worldwide community. As the photos of BU flashed on a screen and the Greek BU alumni applauded, I realized, all the more how much BU has done to bring people together from all over the world.

On our last night of the trip, there was a graduation ceremony. In order to "graduate," each traveler had to say one word in Greek. Most of us got up and translated a simple word to fulfill the requirement, but one graduate said what I think all of us were thinking and feeling. "I shall return to Poros."

I, too, will return to Poros. Many times I hope. But upon our reluctant return home, there was another brochure waiting from the Boston University Alumni Travel Program. This time I will take a more careful look.