



The Slovenian-Greek Bilateral Meeting (Crete, September 2012)

The trip

Greece in September—a dream come true.

Ever since we have started planning this bilateral meeting we were left wondering if anything would happen to prevent us from visiting Crete. Everything just seemed too good to be true, if you know what we mean. However, it was not a dream and our journey started on 14th September when we boarded the plane to Chania.

It was a short flight from Milan airport to Chania where we took the bus to Sises where our hosts were already eagerly awaiting us. Sisses is a very small village on the way from Rethymnon to Heraklion and the bus driver checked with us twice if Siser really is the place where we want to get off the bus. This happened at the bus station where we were getting the tickets as well. “Sisses? Are you sure?” We were sure, though. And it was at the Sises bus station that some of the kindest people in the world were waiting for us. Everybody wants to make one’s guests feel welcome and appreciated, but we have never seen anything like the reception and the hospitality of the Cretan people, especially Eleftheria, her staff and our host families. Thus the Greek adventure has begun!

“In hospitality, the chief thing is the good will.”

– Greek proverb



Crete

The People

If you like the people, you will like the place.

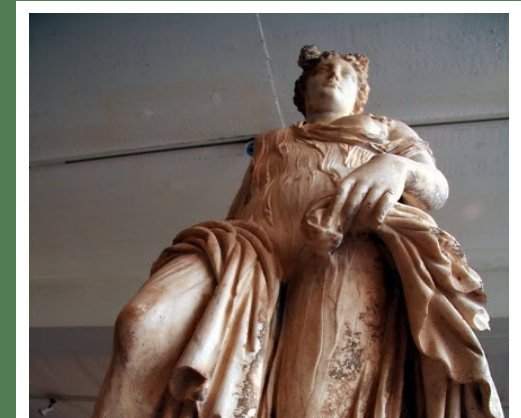
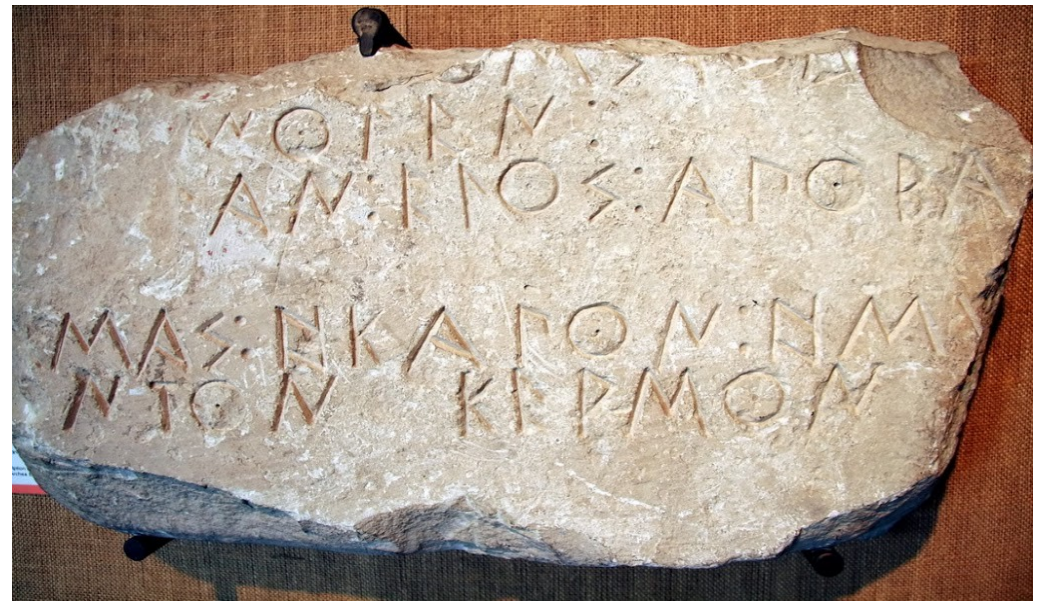
It is as easy as that. The more you feel connected to the people the more you will enjoy your stay with them. As a partly Mediterranean people we are drawn to others like us, but it never dawned upon us, how immensely we were going to enjoy spending time in Crete.

It started on the first evening when our new Greek mothers prepared dinner. And after dinner a snack, and then breakfast in the morning, lunch, dinner, and a thousand snacks in between. We connected over food and began feeling like a part of the family, a family we never knew we had. So strong was the connection tears poured down our cheeks when it was time to say goodbye. Just like leaving a loved one behind.

The History and Culture

Greece, Crete. Need we say more?

Need we say more? We were visiting the cradle of modern civilization with all it's wonderful reminders of how Europe we know today came to be in the first place. We were inspired by the museums, architecture, culture and the stories behind the stone, storm and war battered walls we were passing on the way. It felt like every little stone or rock had a story to tell us, a story from long ago. A truly remarkable experience.



The School

The primary school in Sisses may be a small local school with less than 40 pupils, but this is what probably makes them a family. A kind and loving family where each one counts as much as the next one and where no one is a number and pushed aside.

Not only were we shown around the school and other near-by schools, but we were invited to join them in the classroom as well. We learnt Greek for the first time, did some Math (universal language, thank God), had Crafts and P.E. and participated in a variety of workshops ranging from making traditional Greek sweets, olive oil, typical souvenirs and more. And to top things off, we even had a sports day with a short hike and a picnic at the end. The hike proved very educational and it was an experience to walk among trees completely unusual to us. We could pick fresh figs from the trees, oranges, tangerines, pomegranates and more. But no pears, apples or plums like we are used to in Slovenia. They were currently out of season we were told, but we didn't mind. Who wants an apple all the time? Especially if you can have a fresh pomegranate instead...

“The school of Sisses felt more like a school of ONE than many.”

– Peter Firšt



The Food

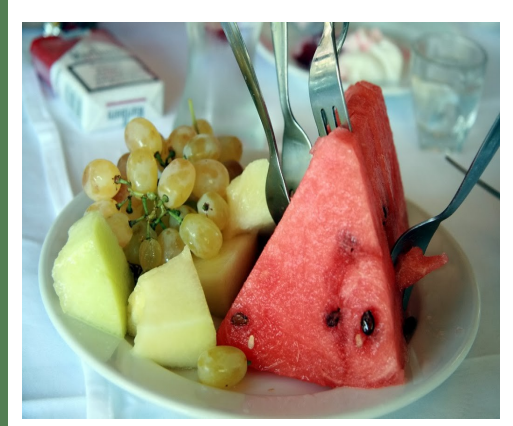
Food is very important for us Slovenians but this might be something we share in common with all the Mediterranean nations.

Every time someone comes there has to be food and plenty of it. And not just one variety or a single dish. There have to be numerous ones and tasty ones at that! God forbid the guest would be left sitting behind the table with nothing on it, or worse even, our guest was served so little he or she has finished it all! The shame! The horror!

We soon came to realize our Cretan friends were no different from our mothers and grandmothers who would spend their whole day behind the stove trying to feed us “properly”. It was a pleasure to see how well we connected and bonded over food and WHAT FOOD it was!

Fish, pork, cheese, fruit, desserts, vegetables, salads, etc. You name it, we have had it. The students started complaining almost immediately that there was far too much food to eat, but did not have the slightest wish to turn anything down or not even taste it.

Besides having had the opportunity to sitting down for a meal with our guest families we were also introduced to some typical Greek dishes like tsatsiki, pita gyro, thyme honey, a variety of desserts and grilled dishes. We even had a workshop with some kind Cretan ladies who shared with us their old recipes and we prepared some delicious dishes together. Snails included. Yummy! By the way, how does a barbecue on the beach sound?



The friendship

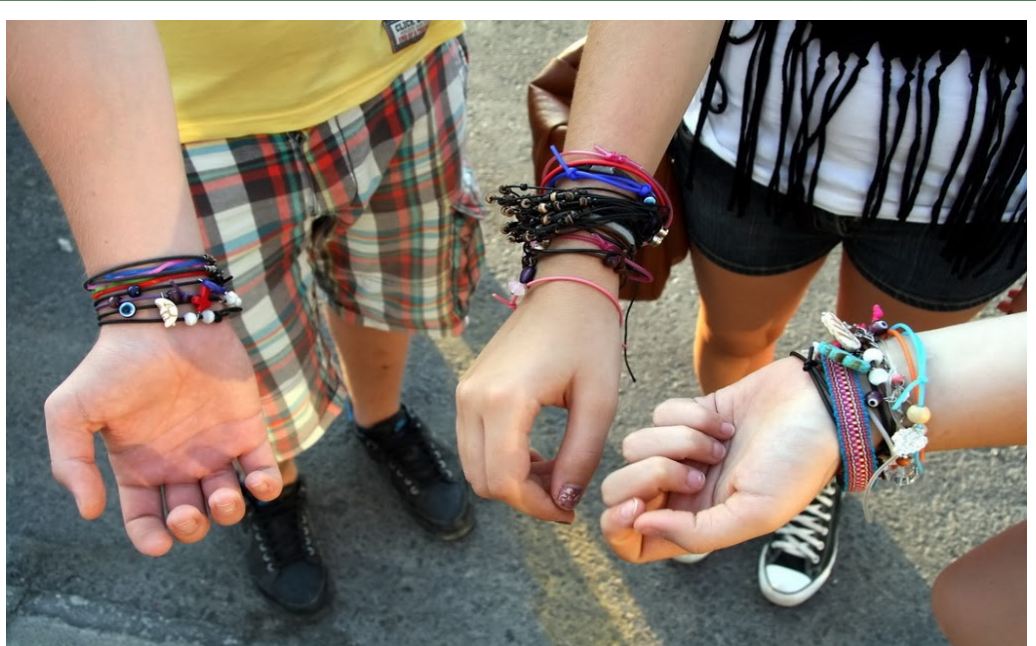
Birds of a feather flock together. (English proverb)

Never has a proverb been more true than with our Comenius Euro School Links project. Although from different countries, cultures, backgrounds and more we still share that common goal to reach out outwardly and find a friendly hand waiting in hello.

In Crete we found many friends with their hands extended our way. You could feel the warmth of the people and it was not the scorching heat, I assure you! And it showed with the children who spent all the time together. Even after school and afternoon activities, when it was time to relax and be with their host families everybody got together and stayed there until night fall. The host families came together and visited one another with their friends so it was almost impossible to get a good night's rest. Luckily the school did not start as early as it does in Slovenia, so we somehow managed.

“Don't walk in front of me and be my leader, don't walk behind me and be my follower, but walk beside me and be my Brother.”

– Greek proverb



Romeo and Juliet

“Parting is such sweet sorrow...” (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*)

We knew this day would come but we did not want it to come. We have had such a wonderful time in Crete we wished we could stay longer, perhaps just a day or two. We will never be able to repay the many kindness, the overwhelming hospitality and generosity, nor will we be able to forget the times shared in Crete. Yes, there were tears and sadness when we had to go, but we would not have changed anything for the world. We will cherish our memories forever as we hope to stay good friends for years and years to come. Thank you, our dear Cretan friends, for having welcomed us into your loving embrace so warmly! How fitting that we concluded our visit with a brilliant adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* performed exclusively by teachers.

The Slovenian team:

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